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Foundation Remarks
May 9, 2012
Millennium Center

Thank you and good afternoon. It is my pleasure to be with you today as we celebrate the close of the academic year and the contributions of our alumni and friends whose dedication and spirit echoes daily across campus.

This past weekend we celebrated commencement on campus, graduating the largest class in the history of ETSU. In the academic world, spring is a time of reflection. I encourage you to take time in the days ahead to come to reflect upon the power and impact of ETSU. Reflect upon the accomplishments of faculty, staff, alumni, and our friends in the community whose philanthropic gifts have transformed ETSU. Their generosity signifies the commitment of leaders

across the region to our future. Countless lives have been touched, and all parts of the university are strengthened through their acts of grace. Their contribution of time, talents, and resources make this a better place.

In my conversations with alumni and friends, I am reminded daily of the contributions of the foundation, and your tireless dedication to support our faculty and staff, who are the engines that power the institution, which serves as a vehicle to transform our region. Both my wife and I, share your passion and are humbled by the opportunity to serve this great institution and the individuals who comprise its family.

Over the next few months, we will engage in a series of conversations of dreaming a new future for ETSU. These conversations embody hope for the community. We have no

bounds on our potential. Our dedication to the region establishes a promise of hope, aspiration, and a commitment to ensure that the generations that follow us have a better future. Through the pursuit of the life of the mind, we create a community with greater meaning, purpose, prosperity, knowledge, and self-worth that comes from the pursuit of higher education. Such a future is borne of a collective vision emerging from the roots of ETSU.

By working together, we can overcome any obstacle. We have the drive to achieve and the independence as a community of scholars to accomplish greatness. When state and national civic forces conspired against us, we stood firm as a community and built a college of medicine and later a college of pharmacy. When we put our minds together as a

community, we can accomplish anything, and this tradition of creativity, ingenuity, and independence will allow us to reach new heights. We will build upon our strengths, sharpen our mission, and achieve the impossible.

Concurrently, we must reaffirm our values and deepen our partnerships with our alumni and friends both within the region and across the nation. We have more than 85,000 alumni, half of whom live within 100 miles of campus. We must do more to reach out to alumni, engaging them in the amazing activity that occurs across campus. Our students have unbridled dreams for their future, but we will not be able to realize those dreams without your help. Presently, we rank 730th in the nation for alumni giving, since less than 10% of our alumni have contributed to ETSU since 2004.

Imagine the pace of change on campus if we could reach the level of MTSU (ranked 43rd) where 64% of alumni are actively engaged and contribute to the Big Blue.

If we are going to achieve the goals and dreams that we all share for the region and ETSU, we must be willing to test and stretch ourselves. We may not reach all of the rings, but we cannot be complacent. There is no upward limit on the power of higher education.

What is at stake? Our children's future! We are in a competition for economic stability, one in which our future will be based upon intellect, creativity, and independence. To succeed, we must open our minds. Success requires stamina and the boldness to overcome adversity. It requires a relentless dedication of heart, mind, and soul to educational

excellence. We must have strong-willed stubbornness to succeed. The terrain before us is uncertain. We have all witnessed the decline of state and federal support for higher education. However, rather than lamenting this condition, we must return to the independent willpower that created the Colleges of Medicine and Pharmacy and drive a new future for ETSU.

This spring we have met with faculty and staff from across our eleven colleges and forty-eight academic units. This effort has been geared at listening and beginning a conversation about the future of ETSU. Today, I am pleased to announce the formation of the Committee for 125 that will create a blueprint for ETSU at our 125th anniversary. This committee will be chaired by Louis Gump and is comprised

of local, state, and national leaders. This group includes individuals such as Paul Stanton, Roy Nicks, Scott Neiswonger, Dorothy Grisham, Ron Carrier, and others. Over the course of the remainder of this year, this group will convene a series of taskforces that will examine the nature, function, and structure of our athletic department, new academic programs and facilities, fundraising and community engagement, as well as student life across the campus. This process will be open, inclusive, and transparent. I welcome and encourage your input and participation. Across this room are the individuals who have driven the path of progress at ETSU and I believe that together we can accomplish what many view as the impossible.

I firmly believe that we are making a difference in the region, but we must do a better job of measuring and celebrating our impact. That is a challenge that we must both embrace and quantify. We have the power to transform the region. That is the power of ETSU, and, in time, this will allow everyone in the region to feel the pride for ETSU that you exemplify on a daily basis. I look forward to the day when the region is painted blue and gold rather than black, yellow, green, or orange.

As in the past, if we are going to continue to raise the “Margin of Excellence” for ETSU, it is going to be a team effort. We have amazing people sitting in this room right now. We have a convergence of business persons, doctors, scientists, architects, engineers, educators, administrators,

alumni, and many other unique individuals that have a common goal of making ETSU excellent. When you consider the level of success that the people in this room have attained, the variety of fields represented, and the desire for betterment, it is obvious that extraordinary things are possible.

There is no question that the group assembled here today is committed. However, as your President, as a staff, as an institution, we owe it to you, the stakeholders, to make sure that we are doing all that we can to serve you in these challenging times.

Lou Holtz said the following about commitment:

“If you don’t make a total commitment to whatever you’re doing, then you start looking to bail out the first time the boat starts leaking. It’s tough enough getting that boat to shore with everybody rowing, let alone when a guy stands up and starts putting his jacket on.”

In many ways the boat started leaking years ago when state funding began dropping to what is today around 28% of our budget. Despite this leak or change in funding, we still have you in the room and you have not jumped out of the boat. What I want to make absolutely certain of is - - - - Are we as an institution, doing all that we can to “Raise the Margin of Excellence”? Are we adopting best practices and pushing ourselves to achieve our goals.

In regards to development and alumni, we are going to take an in-depth look at our practices, analyze our successes, and look for areas of improvement. It is absolutely imperative that our development personnel, deans, department heads, and many other faculty and staff leaders are on the boat and rowing in sync with you. The challenges ahead are great, and the success of our students and those that we serve in this region is on our shoulders.

I would like to conclude with a simple THANK YOU! In the few months that I have been at ETSU, I can see the impact of your work in numerous places. I played basketball with a wonderful young man on Tuesday night that is benefiting from a Roan Scholars scholarship and his story is amazing. I visited the new study center at the College of

Medicine the other day that many of you helped to build. I watched the Bucs beat an orange team from Knoxville at Thomas Stadium, and I have witnessed the success of our College of Pharmacy, something that exists only because of the 1200 people in this community supported the dream.

To show how much we need your involvement and how much we appreciate your involvement, we have prepared a short video. I would like to thank the Digital Media Department in our College of Business and Technology and specifically Professor Marty Fitzgerald, our students and other faculty and staff that worked hard to prepare the following presentation.

Please enjoy - - - - - [-Play Video](#)

Again, I would like to thank everyone involved in preparing that video. It is clear that we have amazing students and faculty. It is also abundantly clear that we have amazing individuals like you that are helping us to raise the bar. The message that we are trying to send to you is simple – We are appreciative for all that you do, and we need your continued involvement in numerous ways.

On a final note, I would like thank many of you that have reached out to Donna, Jackson and me. The kindness and warmth that you have extended is greatly appreciated. We are thrilled to be home, and we are honored to work alongside talented and committed individuals like you. Again, **THANK YOU, THANK YOU, THANK YOU!**