Federal Building Announcement
Ferris State University
David L. Eisler, President
September 13, 2010

It is a pleasure to welcome you to this celebration of what is possible through shared efforts, vision and commitment. Today is a great day for Ferris State University, a great day for the Kendall College of Art and Design, and a great day for Grand Rapids.

The partnership between the Kendall College of Art and Design and Ferris State University has become one of the great success stories in modern American higher education. From 600 students before the merger in 2000, Kendall now enrolls over 1400 aspiring artists and designers. Today it is a financially solid institution with a budget that has grown from $5 million to over $15 million. Building on its traditional strengths, Kendall has become an acknowledged leader in the field of art and design with a growing international presence.

Although its current facilities were created just a decade ago, with this unprecedented growth Kendall is now bursting at the seams. Today we are proud and excited to share with you our plans to restore this historic Federal Building to meet the needs of Kendall and of Grand Rapids’ in their leadership positions in the design world and their burgeoning national recognition in the arts.

Underlining our story today are important themes - art, design, preserving the past, creating an economic catalyst for the future, and most importantly of talented faculty dedicated to help developing artists and designers grow, mature, and succeed. Today we demonstrate how it is possible through combined efforts to create a future of opportunity, overcoming seemingly insurmountable obstacles in the process.

The Federal Building project is a marvelous public-private partnership and represents a truly creative solution to funding, restoring and maintaining historic jewels of construction in today’s challenging economic climate. We believe the efforts we celebrate today will serve as a model for others to reinvest in Grand Rapids. From experience we know this requires extraordinary partners. We would not stand at this celebration today without the combined efforts and support of the City of Grand Rapids, the State of Michigan, the Christman Company, our University and many, many others.
Indeed this story of success stretches far beyond those assembled on our stage. While many are deserving, time will permit me to only acknowledge a few -

- Sandy Davidson-Wilson
- Eric DeLong
- Bruce Parsons
- Major John Logie
- Rep. Roy Schmidt

Since 2002 our Trustees have sustained a vision of what this Federal Building could become. Tom Cook is now serving in his 16th year as a trustee at Ferris State University and has watched this dream for Kendall and for the Federal Building grow and flourish. A Ferris pharmacy graduate, Tom has dedicated many years of his life to advancing the University he truly loves. He currently serves as the Chair of our Board of Trustees. Mr. R. Thomas Cook.

The Federal Building has had no greater champion than the Mayor of Grand Rapids. While there are many, I'll share one important example of the critical difference he has made for this project. This past January it appeared that one of the tax credits, in excess of $4 million, was in serious jeopardy. Before I had even talked to the Mayor and asked for his help, he understood the problem and had already called the Governor, not just speaking with her, but more importantly securing her promise of support. Throughout he has encouraged us, opening doors, breaking down barriers, and finding solutions. It is pleasure to introduce to you the Mayor of Grand Rapids, the Honorable George Heartwell.

One constant throughout this period of growth and development for the Kendall College of Art and Design has been its president. With a depth of understanding for art and design, education, and the future, he has ably guided Kendall through an unprecedented period of growth, not only in enrollment and finances, but also in the breadth of its academic programs, the strength of its faculty and the quality of education students receive. Oliver’s vision for Kendall has been a critical component of this project and I have learned to depend upon both his sage advice and wise counsel. The President of the Kendall College of Art and Design, Oliver Evans.

Thank you, Jim [Cash]. The possibilities and the power of this project have always been clear. Located squarely between the current Kendall Building and the 5 Lyon Apartments housing our students, the Federal Building creates a living, learning educational community dedicated to art and design on three contiguous blocks in downtown Grand Rapids. However it took the considerable insight of you and your team at Christman to help make this vision a reality. You are a true partner and we could not have done this without you.

The Federal Building we stand before has a proud and storied tradition. Perhaps some in our crowd today remember when the Federal Building reopened as the Grand Rapids Art Museum and featured a wonderful exhibit of the Grand Rapids painting tradition. A few may think back to when they argued legal cases before the court in this very building. Others may recall that long before he became President of the U.S., Gerald R. Ford had his office in the building.
None of us remember when this building was constructed back in 1910. But it is easy to imagine what a marvel its construction and opening must have been at that time. I'm confident that our founder Woodbridge Ferris knew this building well. Besides being an educational visionary, Mr. Ferris was elected Governor of Michigan in 1912 and 1914, and then elected to the United States Senate in 1922. In 1928 Mr. Ferris would pass away while serving in the Senate. However the connections there are not an ending, but rather a beginning. The man who replaced Mr. Ferris in the Senate? None other than another great American, Grand Rapids very own Sen. Arthur Vandenberg.

Mr. Ferris’ vision was to provide educational opportunity. In his own words, "Education for all of the people all of the time . . . " At Ferris State University we have breathed new life into these words through statewide partnerships that offer people the education they need when and where they need it, in this case through a repurposed signature building. As it enters its second century of enlightened service the Federal Building is a vibrant symbol of this commitment to the revitalized future of West Michigan, Grand Rapids, and to Kendall.

Mr. Ferris would often say that the mission of the Ferris Institute is to “Make the World a Better Place.” Today, we can affirm that through our combined efforts “We Have Made Grand Rapids a Better Place.” Thank you so very much.