Thank you for the opportunity to be with you today. For much of my career I have been an active Rotarian. I joined Rotary as the Polio Plus campaign was beginning, what an admirable goal - to rid the world of Polio and 7 childhood diseases. Your ideals of Service Above Self and the 4-Way Test are examples we all should follow.

It is interesting when one thinks of the metaphors for higher education - the ivory tower, the ivy league. The images are of institutions secluded behind ivy covered walls. The very pictures we use to describe college suggest its isolation and separation from our community.

At Ferris we imagine things differently. Just as in your ideals we find this throughout the core of what we believe in. (Hand out Mission, Values, Vision.) This document contains them -

- Our first value is collaboration – talking of contributions to society through partnerships with business and industry, government and the communities we serve
- Our mission ends with the words - serving our rapidly changing global economy and society
- One of the 4 objectives in our vision is to be the premiere partner with business and industry, government, and communities.

These are not just words, these are ideas embedded in our institution’s dna. As a result we are a very different university, one not looking inward to itself, isolated, but rather outward to build communities through partnerships that address their challenges. At Ferris our reach is statewide and nowhere is the evidence of our work to build a new different university, unique and distinctive, more striking than in Grand Rapids.

The success of our partnered efforts in Grand Rapids is a wonderful story and I am honored to share our progress with you today.

Grand Rapids Community College

A good place to begin is with our exemplary partnership with Grand Rapids Community College, perhaps the best partnership between two- and four-year education in the country. We were one of the original bond holders on the Applied Technology Center constructed on the GRCC campus in the early 90’s. Today we offer 3 associate, 17 bachelor degree, 7 master degrees, and 4 certificate programs on the GRCC campus.

Last year over 1,000 GRCC students continued their studies at Ferris. Students at GRCC do not have to leave the familiar confines of their campus to continue their education. Students
can take classes from both GRCC and FSU during the same semester and receive their financial aid through Ferris. I want you to meet some of our partners throughout Grand Rapids.

- The first of these is Dr. Steven Ender, the president of GRCC. Steve is someone I admire greatly an educational leader with great integrity who truly cares for students, someone I am honored to call friend. Steve, would you please stand.

Currently we are expanding our partnership so that GRCC students who transfer to Ferris can complete and be awarded their associate degree. This was Steve’s idea and I believe it is important to facilitate and recognize this milestone. Once we develop this we are committed to sharing it with all west Michigan universities. At the same time we want to set up a seamless process so students who apply to Ferris and are deferred can be enrolled at GRCC without additional application. In this way we can capture their educational interest and move them forward toward a college degree.

**Kendall College of Art and Design**

In 2001 the Kendall College of Art and Design merged with Ferris State University. Often we hear talk of synergy, this was truly the case. At the time Kendall enrolled over 500 students, had a $4 million budget, was in financial difficulty, and had both facility and technology challenges.

Our financial assistance, facility renovation, and extraordinary, skillful efforts by faculty, staff and administration have transformed Kendall. Fast forward a decade and the change is remarkable. Kendall has beautifully renovated facilities at Ionia and Fountain, has grown to over 1400 students, is financially solid with a $15 million budget, offers state of the art programs in art and design, and has become a laptop university, every Kendall student receives a Macbook. With us are people who helped made this partnership an extraordinary success –

- Oliver Evans, President, who along with many others helped engineer the merger, and who has provided thoughtful, visionary leadership for the school.
- Sandy Davison-Wilson – Vice President for Administration and Finance who has guided Kendall to financial stability and invested thousands of hours in the Federal Building project.
- Max Shangle, Dean of the Faculty, who for many years was lead faculty and program chair for the furniture design program.
- Brandon Satterlee, who is assisting Kendall with social media.
- Finally, a wonderful example of the success of Kendall alumni, Val Schmieder, principal with Via Design, and someone who has helped shape our vision on the Federal Building.
Underserved Youth

Woodbridge Ferris founded our university on his beliefs in opportunity and access. He wanted to serve people who did not have the opportunity to go to school. In 1884, in the midst of difficult economic times when the timber industry was dying in Michigan, he talked of building a school, for lumber jacks, miners, farmers’ sons and daughters, girls who worked in Michigan factories. Today we honor these commitments understanding that higher education creates the opportunity for success.

Over two years ago we began reaching out to underserved youth in Grand Rapids, hoping to find partners who would help build the dream of attending college for these young people. Many times the connection for these students is not only with schools, but also through athletics, church, and youth groups. Our joy has been in discovering the great work so many do in Grand Rapids, building and developing youth, and learning how open and willing they were to work with us. These relationships are developing and very encouraging. What we seek to do is to connect with children who might not go to college, engage them in our university’s activities and build bridges for them.

In late January we played our friends at Grand Valley in basketball at the Van Andel Arena. In the stands that evening were over 700 youth we had invited, in Ferris T-shirts, meeting our students, tasting college life, and hopefully developing the dream of attending college. I want to recognize some of our community partners who are here with us today -

- Gerado Aguilar, Site Coordinator, Hispanic Center of West Michigan
- Marshall Booker, leader of the MLK Leadership Academy & Messiah Missionary Baptist Church Youth Programs
- Chelsea Brehm, Middle School Athletics Coordinator, Grand Rapids Public Schools
- John Helmholdt, Director of Executive Operations, Grand Rapids Public Schools
- Marj Kuipers, Executive Director of Grandville Avenue Arts & Humanities (Hispanic Youth Focus)
- Francisco Parraguez, Counselor at Westwood Middle School
- Park Pondstein, the Principal, and Nate VanderStadt, Counselor, The Potter's House School
- Mike Remo, Director of the Youth Clubs, Boys & Girls Club at the Seidman Center
- Jeremy Mishler and John Willey, Ferris VP for Advancement and Marketing, whose vision and passion helped create these partnerships

Their work truly inspires us. This is something we believe in strongly, in our founder’s words -

My plea in Michigan and it will be plea to the last breath I draw, and the last word I speak – is education for all children, all men and all women of Michigan, all the people in all our states all the time.

Investing in Success, Grand Rapids Rotary
David L. Eisler, page 3
Those words are just as true today as they were in 1916.

**Federal Building**

Joining Ferris in 2003 I was excited by plans to acquire the historic Federal Building and renovate it at an estimated cost of $10 million. My heart sunk the first time I toured the facility. The fourth floor had blue tarps that funneled rain water coming through the roof to large barrels. The barrels were 2/3 full.

The building’s location next to Kendall was too good not to pursue and when the Grand Rapids Art Museum moved out, we pursued this seriously. I will never forget the day our architects met with us explaining their findings. Perhaps you have had one of these meetings yourself. About an hour and a quarter into the meeting they dropped the bombshell that the cost would be $31 million, this for a 94,000 sq ft building. I told them they could have saved a lot of time if they had begun with that information. The only viable approach was to pursue a public private partnership, but even those efforts did not create an affordable approach.

Every challenging project has a pivotal moment. For us that was August 2009. Our entire team – architects, developers, Mayor Heartwell and his team, and our Ferris team gathered in the 7th floor fireplace room at Kendall. My message was simple – Kendall needed the space, we couldn’t afford the project, and if we couldn’t find a solution I would ask our Board in November to step away from the project. One of the strengths of true partnerships is that solutions can be created that no one entity could do on their own. That was the case here. Magic happened. Without the efforts of each of our partners this would not have been possible.

Our private partners Christman Capital Development came to the table with a tax credit plan that would net $10 million for the project. One of these credits needed legislative approval which we received in record time. I do not believe a public university in Michigan has funded a building in this way and it results directly from the skill and ingenuity of our partners at Christman.

- Joe Hooker from Christman Capital is with us today. Joe has spent so many hours with us that although his paycheck comes from Christman, he truly is a part of the Ferris family.

Mayor Heartwell helped us every step of the way, showing patience, leadership, and encouragement often when we needed it most. We talked so many times throughout, most often with disappointing news. I remember when our MEDC Brownfield credits were in jeopardy. He called Gov. Granholm and had her support before I could him ask him to do this. Mayor Heartwell is in Kansas City today, but sends his best wishes.
Working with the downtown development agency the city commission helped us work through tax issues. City commissioners in Grand Rapids had faith in us and supported us throughout.

- One of our advocates on the city commission was Walt Gutowski, first ward commissioner, who is with us today, Walt please stand.

The city helped us by working with the County so we could receive public financing for this private project.

- She already introduced me today, but I want to recognize Sandi Parrish, 5<sup>th</sup> district commissioner for Kent County for her assistance at the county with financing.

My commitment was that we would fix the entire building, do it well, and in a fiscally responsible fashion. We have sharp pencils when it comes to construction projects and the cost topped out at slightly over $22 million. Perhaps you’ve seen the fence. What you haven’t seen is what’s happening inside – (slides showing progress on the restoration.)

One of things I’ve learned is how many wonderful memories you have about this building. We are restoring this for all of Grand Rapids and will finish in March 2012, close to the 100<sup>th</sup> year anniversary of the building. With the existing Kendall building, the Federal Building, and student housing at 5 Lyon, we will create three contiguous blocks of living learning education themed around the arts in downtown Grand Rapids. And we look forward to you enjoying this beautifully restored building with us.

Currently we are in the final phase of our project funding. Here also we are finding extraordinary partners. Grand Rapids has many people who care deeply about this city its history and future and who love this building.

- It has been my opportunity to work with Ellen Satterlee, the Executive Director of the Wege Foundation and I would ask she stand. Today I am pleased to announce a million dollar gift from the Wege Foundation. With this we will create the Wege Center for Sustainable Design on the fourth floor of the Federal Building. Thank you Ellen and Peter.

There is so much more to share as we have more partnered projects underway. We are your university looking for ways to make Grand Rapids a better place. But we are always looking for new ideas, challenges and opportunities and want to see how we can partner with you. If you have an idea or a need, share your business card with us so we can follow up with you.

Thank you for helping us become an integral part of a truly remarkable city, Grand Rapids. We look forward to continuing to build with you a greater Grand Rapids.