It is a great honor to have Ferris State University selected to receive the Uncommon Greatness Award. Thanks so much to the Grand Rapids Area Chamber of Commerce and its Center for Community Leadership for choosing Ferris for this recognition.

There are so many efforts that Ferris and Kendall are engaged in underway here in Grand Rapids and in west Michigan, in education, in the arts, in economic development, in healthcare, in helping those in need, in partnering with business and industry and in encouraging all to pursue their education. I won’t attempt to name them all, but do want to focus on our efforts to connect with populations who may not have traditionally attended college and to help them do so.

Our approach is simple and straightforward, but at the same time we believe it is meaningful and profound. In our work, we seek first to listen and understand. The question is not what we can do, but rather what is it that you need? In doing so we look to our partners who can help, guide and work with us. Working together we accomplish what we could not do alone.

In this award I recognize the work of Tony Baker, Jessica Cruz, and David Pilgrim, but know that it includes the work of so many others. In accepting this award on their behalf I acknowledge that it is their hopes, their dreams, and their accomplishments that we celebrate tonight. It is what is good and best about all of us.

This award brings together our values, our vision and our traditions. I remember well in 2007 when our University came together to place in writing the values that so many of us felt about our university – collaboration, diversity, ethical community, excellence, learning, and yes, opportunity. I believe each of these is wrapped up into this award. It is one of the tenets of our vision that our desire is to be the premiere educational partner.

Finally as we so frequently do, we look back to the inspiration of our founder, Woodbridge Ferris, who when he talked about the school he created said, “The purpose of the Ferris institute is to make the world a better place.”

Thank you for working with us to help make Grand Rapids, west Michigan, and yes, our world a better place.