Good evening. I am pleased to add my welcome to our new faculty and staff who have joined the University community. It is a special honor to welcome back all of our retirees and their spouses and guests. This is a first for us to invite everyone to attend the fall convocation followed immediately by the garden supper. We are so very excited to have you join us for both.

Congratulations and thank you to our students, Chelsea Winegardner, Emily Murphy, and Sonya Grosch, for their outstanding music performance. Let’s again show our appreciation with our applause.

I must admit that chills still run though me when I hear the sounds that emanate from the glide of a bow across string instruments. These gifted musicians make it look sooooo easy, but let me assure you it takes dedication and hours upon hours of effort to create the blended melodies of multiple talents working in harmony.

How do I know this? Well, you see there was a time in my life…from elementary through high school…..where my days were consumed with the sounds of Mozart, Brahms and Vivaldi. Indeed, having been selected to play in the Pittsburgh All City School Orchestras, I had seriously considered a career as a professional violinist. My passion for music was continually ignited by the joy of playing with a throng of young, gifted musicians under the direction of a conductor whose love of young people was equal to his love of music. He had this amazing ability to blend the talents of so many into a harmonious mosaic – a shared commitment to excellence in our performances.

As I begin my sixth year as president of this phenomenal institution, I have taken some time for reflection on our university’s past and vision for the future. Underneath all that we have done and what we shall yet accomplish together is the unison chord of a shared commitment to excellence. Not excellence for its own sake, but excellence in delivering the University’s promise to our students.

Two years ago, at this occasion, we announced the University’s new institutional direction emphasizing our University promise. That promise is that if our students seize the range of opportunities available at Millersville University, they will have an educational experience that is second to none.

That promise is more than a tag line or slogan which changes every two or three years. That promise is about our future direction and how we will be known, either as a successful institution that fulfills our commitments to our students, or one that is “run of the mill.”

I recall how my personal passion for music taught me many critical lessons. I suspect that any of you who have tooted a trumpet, swayed with a sax, coaxed a clarinet, tickled the ivory on a
piano or embraced any of a host of other instruments, know what I mean. Those lessons included a commitment to fundamentals, results seen from devotion to practice, celebrating and sharing success, and the need to persevere. Those same lessons ring true in our efforts to deliver the promise of excellence to our students. The concepts of commitment to fundamentals, results, celebrating and sharing success, and perseverance are the key themes of my remarks this evening.

COMMITTMENT TO FUNDAMENTALS

Accomplished musicians are well-grounded in the fundamentals, and so are we at Millersville. The promise of excellence we make comes from four foundational qualities:

- A great reputation
- A commitment to deep academic resources
- A commitment to awakening the intellect in our students, and
- A supportive and enriching community

The hallmarks of institutional quality noted in these four key messages are manifested in the University’s mission and vision statements. The mission statement was updated by our University Planning Council, established in 2005, based on input from all campus constituencies and stakeholder groups and endorsed by our Council of Trustees in June 2008.

The mission statement begins as follows: “Millersville University recognizes excellence in teaching and learning as its reason for being and is committed to offering students a high quality, comprehensive university experience of exceptional value. Dedicated to providing nationally recognized programs that embrace the liberal arts, the University provides academic opportunities which are supported by outstanding faculty who are also accomplished scholars, artists and practitioners and are supported by a talented and dedicated professional staff.”

Our vision statement is a succinct declaration of aspiration that asserts the University’s commitment to be a premier comprehensive public university; a university where students’ educational experiences empower them to make a significant difference in the communities where they will live and work. The pathway to excellence and to the University vision is based on six integrated strategic directions that connect institutional planning across all University divisions in the intentional effort to:

- Create academic programs of national distinction that serve the region and the nation
- Nurture a passion for learning among all members of the University community – students, faculty and staff
- Foster an appreciation of the liberal arts as the key learning foundation and a prerequisite for lifelong learning and productivity
- Cultivate a community of diverse people, thoughts and perspectives – to embrace civil discourse and human diversity
- Develop life and leadership skills that promote the greater public good through civic engagement, internships and volunteerism, and
- Act as responsible stewards in growing and managing institutional resources
Thus, our mission and vision statements, the four foundational qualities and six strategic directions, have become as fundamental to this community as are the chords and scales to a musician. I take this opportunity to publically commend the members of the University Planning Council for undertaking such ambitious and important tasks in crystallizing these documents. Will those members present please stand and be recognized with our applause.

RESULTS FROM DEDICATION

Well-girded by our foundation and direction, Millersville has earned much distinction. Time won’t permit me to cover all the wonderful works undertaken and quality results produced, but let me share with you a few additional points to emphasize what our provost has stressed.

• First, I join Dr. Prabhu in acknowledging and thanking the many faculty who worked this summer on the plan to address Chapter 49-2 requirements.
• The opportunity for faculty/undergraduate student research collaboration is a signature feature of a Millersville educational experience. Last year, our faculty supervised more than 240 undergraduate and graduate research projects.
• The Student Research and Visual and Performing Arts Conference is an annual spring event that began in 1988 as a Deans Council initiative to stimulate, support, and recognize undergraduate student research and artistic expression. 2008 marked the 20th anniversary of the conference. This year a total of 50 students representing all three schools presented their research as formal or poster presentations or performances. A total of 30 faculty members mentored and inspired these students throughout their research experiences.
• The School of Science and Mathematics continues as one of the leading PASSHE universities in the graduation of STEM majors in biology, chemistry, earth sciences, physics, mathematics, computer science and technology. In alignment with System priorities, enrollment in our STEM departments continues to grow.
• Last year, the American Meteorological Society Student Chapter received the national AMS award as Chapter of the Year. In addition, the meteorology undergraduates won first place at the AMS national conference in the poster presentation, beating undergraduates and graduates from such institutions as MIT, University of Wyoming, University of Alabama and Penn State.
• The American Chemical Society Student Affiliate Chapter received an Outstanding Service Award at the ACS National meeting.
• NSF just announced that the School of Science and Mathematics is the recipient of a $585,000 S-STEM scholarship grant that will supply scholarships for low income and underrepresented students in the sciences, computer science, and mathematics.
• Students in the Industry and Technology department participated in regional and national academic competitions. Under the expert direction of our faculty, these students won 8th, 9th & 12th place at the 15th Annual International Fire Fighting Robot contest, competing against such schools as MIT, Purdue and Penn State University.
• Thirty-two Tech-Education majors participated in the Technology Challenge Quiz Bowl at the 2008 regional Technology Education Collegiate Association (TECA) conference, earning 1st place and securing our place of excellence in this discipline.
• Millersville is one of the founding members of the Marine Science Consortium based at Wallops Island, Va., and we consistently send the largest number of students to these summer college programs and simultaneously assure that three faculty members are available to teach the summer MSC courses. One of the most exciting MSC developments is the expanding collaboration with the adjacent NASA Wallops Flight Facility. Our marine biology, meteorology, and oceanography faculty members are already contributing their expertise on NASA projects. NASA’s Wallops Flight Facility recently beat out Florida in the race to be the preferred site for launches that will supply the international space station. That contract will greatly expand the research activity at the facility and the opportunity to place consortium university students at NASA. NASA’s projects are wide-reaching so beyond the marine sciences there are also research opportunities for our faculty as well as internship opportunities in areas such as business, communication, meteorology, computer science, biological sciences, physics and technology. I encourage our faculty to take advantage of these opportunities.

SHARING and CELEBRATING SUCCESS

When I practiced my violin, my parents put up with a lot. Indeed, I would bet that they heard “Twinkle, Twinkle Little Star” in their dreams for years. As do all parents, they yearned for a sound-proof room to contain shrill squeaks, mournful wails, and sour notes that accompanied their budding musician. Yet, they also realized that music ultimately was not to be relegated to the basement, attic or garage, but to be shared. I was in the third grade when I developed an interest in the violin. I was in awe of my music teacher, Miss Mueller, who could play every instrument; however, she had a special talent with the violin and often entertained my third grade class with her jazzy improvisations of music. As she played, I became inspired and subsequently begged and pleaded with my parents for lessons so that I, too, could bring joy and build bridges to others just as Miss Mueller did.

We, at Millersville, have learned the valuable lesson in building bridges to the local and global community. Our song of excellence is meant to be shared beyond our campus boundaries so that others may know of our excellence. The motivation is not to boast but to share----and as we share, we create powerful and lasting relationships that enrich the lives of all.

As I travel around the state and the country meeting and interacting with alumni, business and foundation leaders, legislators and parents, I am most proud to hear the comments such as, “My son, daughter, brother, wife, etc., had a wonderful educational experience at Millersville.” Other comments include, “I learned so much when I studied abroad in South Africa,” “My internship with Lancaster Labs was the beginning of a great career,” “What a great experience to meet August Wilson or Richard Dreyfuss.”

We can all be particularly proud of the creation of the Civic and Community Engagement and Research Project (CCERP). This initiative marks the culmination of many decades of substantial and continuing community outreach by Millersville University faculty, staff, and students. CCERP is the University’s umbrella entity that fosters, focuses, and coordinates civic and community engagement and research. The project, in its second year, is off to a running
This past year a spring convocation and a winter conference were co-hosted with the Provost’s office, where more than 100 faculty members attended a service-learning workshop entitled, “Civic Engagement – How to Make a Difference.” Also, this past April the inaugural Distinguished Civic Leadership Awards was hosted, and the evening ended with a provocative speech by Richard Dreyfuss to an audience of more than 700. More than $1 million in outside funding has been raised to date toward the Soar to Greatness Capital Campaign civic engagement goal.

Through CCERP and other venues, Millersville has adopted the goal of infusing student education with civic engagement and service learning. This goal is anchored in the belief that it is essential to reverse the trend of disaffection from civic involvement and civic responsibility among America’s college students and future leaders.

In 2007-08, approximately 3,300 students performed 144,000 hours of service to community agencies, a 17% increase in hours from the previous year. The dollar value of this service to the community is estimated to be approximately $2.7 million. As you can plainly see, Millersville students are committed to improving the quality of life in their communities. Of equal importance is that the faculty are empowering students to connect the dots with regard to what our students are learning in the classroom with what they are experiencing outside the classroom.

When I think about my musical background, I remember that it can be a real rush for musicians when they are selected to play a solo. In senior high, my instructor worked with me on one of Vivaldi’s concertos, which I ultimately played as a solo during one of my high school assemblies. Elated as I was, I took greater comfort when the string instruments, along with the diverse tones of brass, winds and percussions, joined in.

We at Millersville celebrate that same diversity and recognize the richness that multiple perspectives, talents, cultures and disciplines bring to a community. Millersville is ripe in intellectual diversity offering 51 undergraduate programs with a strong emphasis on the liberal arts. The University also offers 24 graduate programs and an array of post-baccalaureate certificates in areas of institutional strength and regional need.

We have established high, yet realistic, admission goals for both regular and special-admit students of color. In fall 2007, the University reached record diversity levels of African-American (6.5%) and Hispanic (3.5%) students. Of Millersville’s eight thousand students enrolled last fall, 10% were from historically under-represented populations.

At the beginning of the 2007 fall semester, the Office of Social Equity and Diversity, in partnership with Student Affairs, provided a four-hour diversity education program to more than 1,000 students as part of the new student orientation program. More than 40 faculty, staff, and students collaborated to facilitate the sessions, which required participation in a train-the-trainer program. Student evaluations indicate the program was well received.

PERSEVERENCE
Realistically, musical skill doesn’t come without financial cost. We are all too familiar with the national statistics that repeatedly show federal funding cuts for the arts and local school districts trimming, to bare bone, precious resources for music, art and drama. But I was fortunate. My parents made significant sacrifices to ensure that I received private lessons, enabling me to develop my talent.

Just as the arts require substantial resources, a quality education also comes with a price tag and high expectations for focused and diligent work. And just as the arts are the target for budget cuts, so too has public financial support waned for public higher education. To say that the situation will get better would be disingenuous. We are thus faced with two options: be bitter and forgo the opportunity to play, or work harder and with firm determination to see that our students have access to a truly quality experience. Guess which direction we are taking?

I am proud and thankful for all of those who have, are and will support Soar to Greatness, the capital campaign for Millersville University. To date this initiative has raised $37 million, more than half of the campaign’s $60-million goal in pledges, cash, and other commitments.

The campaign, still in its “quiet phase,” is structured around a three-part strategy: build the endowments; secure funds for academic-based scholarships, faculty development, instructional equipment, health and wellness, scholarships for research, civic engagement and global education; and provide for facility enhancements especially to renovate Ganser Library and to build the Visual and Performing Arts Center. This work isn’t easy and it is incumbent upon all of us to help.

Let me offer special thanks to those 206 employees (faculty and staff), 25% of the 800 employees, who have pledged nearly $200,000 to this very important campaign. It is gratifying and impressive to those outside the University to know that those who know the University best are willing to reinvest in it. Standing here today, with absolute confidence I can say that together…….”Yes We Can and Yes We Will”……meet this critical goal.

No positive change was ever achieved without taking some amount of risk. Musicians know this all too well as they take on more challenging and difficult pieces of music to perform. They are bound to miss a note or two and inevitably draw attention to themselves. No one revels in a negative spotlight, and I learned a very valuable lesson on how to deal with such situations from my orchestra conductor, Stanley Levin. When one of us would play the wrong note—sending a peal of disharmony into the ensemble -- Mr. Levin would stop the rehearsal and talk to that student who hit the incorrect note in a firm, but supportive, voice – “Stand up, take a bow; now sit back down and let’s move on with the piece.”

In all that is good at Millersville, there have been -- and will be -- some sour notes that hit our ears. Assaults threatened or perpetrated against members of our community, passions on political positions flaring between well-meaning but opposing groups, a student suicide, and a federal lawsuit -- these all test our resolve. But our university has real heroes. Faculty and staff -- particularly those directly involved in these various situations -- stood by the principles of maintaining and ensuring a safer environment, stronger academic standards and certification requirements and guaranteeing the integrity of our degree programs. They, and all those
members of our campus community who on a daily basis chose life over death, peace over violence, restorative over retributive justice, and principle and standards over popularity, remind us of the courage it takes to stand, bow, and move forward. And move forward we shall.

FUTURE OPPORTUNITIES AND CHALLENGES

As each year of orchestra came to a close, there would always be a buzz about what selections would be made by the conductor for the coming year. What challenges, what opportunities, what fun lay ahead.

Without question, our shared future at Millersville brings with it a wide range of possibilities. As most of you know, Dr. John Cavanaugh joined the State System as our new chancellor on July 1. He brings with him the background of a teaching faculty member, a department chair, a university president and system-wide administrator. I am committed to take every available opportunity to share with him the Millersville story. He has made a commitment to visit each university. Stay tuned for the announcement of his visit, as he will want to meet with faculty, staff and students as well as key external stakeholders.

We will hold fast to our pledge to provide a safe and secure environment for all members of the Millersville community and our invited guests and visitors. In light of the tragedy at Virginia Tech University, Millersville University has been reviewing security issues and the scope of this review has widened. The administration has committed more than $600,000 of its 2007-08 operating budget to support additional safety and security measures. We have also established a University threat assessment team to assist in addressing situations where students, faculty, staff or visitors display disruptive or threatening behaviors that potentially impede their own or others’ ability to function safely. We also plan a series of training sessions so that the University community is better prepared to handle emergencies.

Today, Americans face a myriad of challenges which simultaneously threaten the quality of higher education in general and Millersville University in particular. Issues of environmental protection and energy utilization require that we seriously examine our societal responsibility and the impact on our fiscal bottom line. For that reason, I have established a sustainability task force whose immediate responsibility is to identify the actions that we are already taking to be more responsive to our environment. In addition, this task force will make recommendations on behaviors and actions that are more cost effective and simultaneously work to protect our institution’s future and our environment.

We must be more cognizant of the ever-decreasing financial support of public higher education and the simultaneously increasing costs for our students. The continual reduction in state support for higher education challenges our ability to invest in our faculty and staff professional development, thereby affecting our pursuit of excellence.

The years ahead also require a need to change and respond to an evolving new world. This involves recognizing that students interact with information, teaching and learning in a fundamentally different way than most of us in the faculty, staff and administration. These
differences demand that we understand, respect and respond to the multiple learning styles and delivery options available in order to comprehend how we must address the needs of newer generations of students.

This embrace of the new cannot -- and will not -- come at the cost of losing our identity as an institution. However, such initiatives as expanding distance education opportunities across the curriculum and incorporating new technologies in our pedagogy are reasoned responses to the widening intellectual and financial realities of our students.

Well, it should be no surprise to any of you that my decade-long infatuation with the violin did not lead to a musical career path. While in college I heard another call, but the passion and lessons that were part of my time with the violin certainly influenced and shaped the person I am today.

In many ways I feel these past years have cast me in the role of a conductor. Margaret Wheatley, author of *Leadership and the New Science*, tells us that “as leaders, we play a critical role in selecting the melody, setting a tempo, establishing the key and inviting the players. But...the music comes from something we cannot direct, [it comes] from a unified whole created among the players. In the end, when it works, we sit back amazed and grateful.”

I fully concur with these two adjectives--amazed and grateful--and yet I would add one more as I think of the time we have spent together and what time we will still share -- that is, honored. I am amazed, grateful and honored by the selfless acts of support so many of you give to this place we love.

Many of you will recall that last year’s convocation address included my challenge to the University community to be wary of the complacency that can drag down even the highest quality business or institution. I noted that all faculty and staff are accountable to live up to a practice of hospitality and community building, and that it is everyone’s responsibility to focus on delivering outstanding customer service.

It is with this spirit that more than 120 faculty, staff and student have accepted the request to serve in some capacity on a Middle States chapter and/or the steering committees. These individuals volunteered their time and talents during the spring semester to develop the self-study chapter questions and will continue this academic year to research the questions and write the chapter reports. We are both pleased and proud that the Commission on Middle States has approved our self-study design. I ask those who are with us today who are part of this team to please stand so that we may publically recognize this outstanding contribution you have made on behalf of all of us.

As I guide the University senior leadership to move Millersville forward in our quest for excellence, I am cognizant that our success is predicated upon the commitment, dedication, and diligent efforts of our entire campus community and to a thoughtfully engaged Council of Trustees. The accomplishments of our students, faculty, and staff in advancing the goals and objectives of the University reflect an unwavering collective commitment to shared
governance, academic excellence, and fulfilling the mission and purposes of a premier, regional, public comprehensive university.

The work we do every day in the classroom, in the residence halls, with student organizations, in cleaning and renovating our facilities, sidewalks and roadways, in maintaining the beauty of our campus, cheering and coaching our intramural and intercollegiate athletes, is indeed the Millersville University experience that is told over and over again by our students and alumni to neighbors, legislators, business leaders, prospective students and their parents, and future employees.

I urge you to remember that this is an institution that does indeed have programs of national distinction, and I look forward to a spirited campus conversation on how best to identify and advance these programs. This is an important and necessary conversation because our signature programs will be critical in distinguishing us from not only our sister institutions in the Commonwealth, but also from others whom we aspire to emulate.

So we must all be prepared to tell this fantastic Millersville story. You have the right and the authority to say with conviction that this is an institution that nurtures a passion for learning through faculty-student research and students attending professional conferences. This is an institution that fosters the liberal arts in many ways, but especially through our general education program. This is an institution that cultivates a community of diverse people and thought through our curriculum and global education, and our admission and employment practices.

This is an institution that develops leadership and life-long skills through our Civic and Community Engagement and Research Project including internship, co-op and service learning opportunities and through our health and wellness efforts.

This is an institution where we celebrate the scholarship and artistic talents of our faculty, for these efforts in professional development effectively awaken the intellect of our students.

This is a University committed to delivering its promise to our students – that if they come to Millersville University and seize the multitude of opportunities that are available to them, they will indeed have an educational experience, one that is without question second to none.

I wish for each of you a fantastic and safe academic year. I also urge each of you to keep the promise to our students in the forefront of your work. Millersville University must provide an educational opportunity that is second to none, and every day we have a responsibility to seize the opportunity to do so.