

Investiture speech - East Georgia State College
September 27, 2013, 11am
Goal length: 15 minutes

Good morning

Our East Georgia State College musicians and singers are so talented. Thank you John Neighbors, Lacy Bishop, Gilbert Westberry and Marque Johnson and the College Choir!

I teach a small class which typically begins at 8am. One student, at the beginning of a recent semester, arrived tentatively each day just moments before the classroom door closed ---- or, on some days, maybe a couple of minutes late. Let's call this student, just for today, Anne. Anne struggled to stay awake. I assumed for a few weeks that this was due to my somewhat limited oratorical skills. Talking with Anne, however, I learned that she worked the night shift at a demanding production job about 45 minutes from campus in order to put herself through college. Anne persevered, came to class confidently and on time and eventually excelled. I know her future is bright. Anne and so many others with their own stories are why we are here today. The work we do together has the power to change lives like Anne's. The knowledge she and so many other students gain from this educational process, my class excepted, perhaps, has the power to transform the social and economic fiber of our region.

Chancellor Huckaby, thank you for entrusting me with stewardship of this special place and for your leadership at this critical juncture. It is making a real difference for Anne and so many other students.

Professor Shedd and Margie Shedd, thanks for your mentorship and friendship over almost a quarter century.

Regent Durden, your leadership is deeply appreciated. Please convey to your colleagues on the Board of Regents my appreciation for their support of the students like Anne who are getting a chance for a better life because of that support.

President Adams, your leadership of the University of Georgia inspired me, the opportunities which you gave me will never be forgotten, and your presence along with Mrs. Adams today is so important to Joyce and me.

Dr. Belle Wheelan. We salute the importance and effectiveness of your tireless work in leading the Southern Association of Colleges and Schools Commission on Colleges as it preserves the principles of quality in higher education and peer evaluation

Fellow presidents. Your willingness to help me as I have made this transition and your presence here today warms my heart.

Founding Faculty of East Georgia State College and former presidents of the College, you laid the foundation that supports the College's bright future. We are in your debt.

Susan Gray, Angie Russell and the other members of the planning committee, you have outdone yourselves. We appreciate the warm tone you have set --- one which focuses on what is truly important, the future of this special college.

To my wife, Joyce, and our daughters, Megan and Beth: Almost 25 years ago, you supported me as I left my law practice in Oregon and headed east for an uncertain future in Athens, Georgia. You are my inspiration. Thank you for sharing the journey as I have followed my dream --- I love you deeply.

Family members, friends from the great Pacific Northwest, elected officials of this great region, delegates from the many outstanding institutions of higher education, foundation trustees, community members, friends and colleagues from Athens, UGA and the University System of Georgia, Five Points Runners, faculty and staff of the College, and East Georgia's remarkable students, thank you for celebrating with us today.

And, of course, to East Georgia State College: Happy 40th. You are looking simply marvelous on your birthday!

All of you present for this celebration of higher education inspire me! You are taking your valuable time to listen to an old, white-haired guy wearing a robe and a tie because, like that guy, you believe in the transformative power of education. It changes individual lives like Anne's every day and it transforms the economy and social well-being of entire communities.

This transformation for Anne and others takes place because of a process repeated in scores of classes every day, every semester. Students choose college, faculty diligently prepare, students are inspired, learn, graduate and give back to their community and the cycle continues.

These individual student success stories like Anne's do not occur primarily because of new buildings, refined policies or improved technology. They occur because faculty and staff advise, tutor, mentor, cajole students and facilitate their learning. It is their passion. Faculty and staff, please know how deeply I appreciate what you do every day to change student lives.

This potential for education to change lives brought my family to Georgia. Joyce, Megan, Beth and I, an overly-caffeinated native Oregonian family, were given the chance of a lifetime almost 25 years ago to become part of the University of Georgia community. Today we are given the opportunity to become part of the East Georgia State College community. We are deeply grateful. We understand the responsibility inherent in this role and eagerly accept it.

We are particularly grateful because this opportunity comes at a time when higher education is at a crossroads. The pace of change will be dizzying. How will higher education retain its core element - - the mentoring relationship between skilled teachers and individual students -- while meeting needs presented by new learning styles, using new learning tools and helping students solve problems we could not have even imagined even five years ago. At East Georgia we could choose to cling to the past and fear this challenging future. We choose, instead, to remain vibrant --- to build on our past and embrace future possibilities.

Students, I do know how often I refer to the past of the college. I do that because understanding this college's unique relationship with this special community is key to knowing how to embrace our bright future. Consider the land this very building is built upon. It was donated by Luck Flanders Gambrell. Luck, her husband, Senator David Gambrell, and their son, Henry, are present today. Think about the fact that the college's original buildings were paid for by a bond repaid by local residents. Many present today were also present when that bond was joyously burned. Try to imagine our intellectual community without the Vision Series ---- the signature East Georgia activity which has brought individuals like Maya Angelou to our campus in the past and which will bring Olympic gold medal winner Billy Mills here this year. That series is made possible by the vision and generosity of Jean Morgan. Jean and her husband, centenarian Jimmy Morgan, are present today. Did you enjoy the beautiful Sudie A. Fulford Community Center as you entered campus today? It makes me smile each morning as I think about all the grade and high school students who will play chess or learn inside the planetarium that day. The Center was made possible by Ada Lee Correll. Ada Lee and her husband, Pete Correl, are present today. Students, as you study or just hang out with friends in the Bobcat Villas Clubhouse, remember that it was made possible by Shot Strange, who made the gift in honor of his beloved wife, Jean. Shot and his daughter are present today and his wife is present in spirit.

As they say, you must be present to win. This community always shows up.

East Georgia will remain special and will have the capacity to embrace future possibilities by always assuring that it **remains the campus of the community** as all of these individuals, and so many others like them, intended. From the time of kindergarten, local students should know that this is an exciting place where they can come to enjoy science experiments, run on a cross country trail, or attend a lecture by an Olympic athlete. Many of those same young people will then choose to attend college here and fuel the economic impact of the college on the region. Many will then graduate and give back the community they have learned to love. This is our bright future.

This future can, perhaps best be envisioned by imagining a high school graduation you have attended and remembering the hope and excitement you witnessed –then think about the summer following graduation when some of those bright, hopeful faces realized that financial realities might well be a roadblock along the path to their dreams –consider the adult working at your business, who started but never finished college, and now dreams each day about what they could achieve if only given the chance a college degree would provide – remember the talented young neighbor who went away to college, encountered difficulties, dropped out and returned home without a degree – contemplate a friend who returned to the states after serving their county in a foreign land and now struggles to adjust to civilian life - these are all bright, talented, motivated students with great potential to contribute - **East Georgia State College is a place where the hope and dreams of these students connect with their future - simply put, this is a great place to start.**

As we embrace this bright future, we do so in partnership with the other educational institutions in our region. Our missions are distinct, yet complementary. We stand together in our belief in the power of education. Our challenge is to find even more creative ways to combine resources

to assure that every student in our region has a seamless path from kindergarten to a college meeting the unique needs of that student.

That is why it is so rewarding to me to see superintendents of local school districts in attendance today along with leaders of technical colleges and research universities in this region. East Georgia State College is committed to working with each of your institutions to find ways to remove barriers and increase opportunities for student success.

East Georgia State College community, my challenge to you today is to seize this bright future. **We have the plan, the people, and the passion. Let's get this thing done together.** Let's create the capacity for more and more students to live in this community. Let's find creative ways to enhance the expectations of our grade and high school students about attending college and preparing them to succeed. Let's sit down, roll up our sleeves and find new degree programs uniquely meeting the economic and social needs of the region. Let's identify community service projects which East Georgia students can complete and then award them a service seal of distinction. Perhaps most importantly, we must find a way to assure that a much higher percentage of our students graduate or transfer successfully. Let's dramatically increase the \$70,000,000 economic impact of the college on this region. You envisioned this college, you built this college, you burned the original bond. Let's continue this job together. **I've got your back. I know you have mine.**

As we strive to meet these challenges and seize these opportunities, it is worth a moment to reflect on integrity as one of our college's core values. Meeting challenges and seizing opportunities will mean making difficult choices. Choices are inevitably accompanied by chances to abandon principle. Just as we are committed to reaching those goals, we are committed to reaching them with our integrity intact.

Please allow me to finish with a short story. Our men's basketball team in only its fourth year of competition reached the National Junior College Athletic Association national tournament last year--- a feat, by the way, which I anticipate will be replicated by this year's team. A great win in the first round was followed by a disappointing loss in round two. The team, crestfallen, went to the locker room. Emerging from the locker room a bit later, the team was met by an enthusiastic crowd of young fans from the local area --- who were not the least bit discouraged by the loss. As the team signed autographs, you could almost watch their growth and maturation as they seemingly realized the importance of serving as role models. A young fan, suddenly and loudly announced "it's my birthday." Momentarily, but only momentarily, the players froze --- not knowing how to respond. Quickly, one player took a very large shoe from his bag, autographed it and handed it to the young man. It was as if Michael Jordan has just autographed an Air Nike. The young fan was visibly shaking with delight.

Isn't this what the educational experience- whether in the classroom or lab, on the court or field, or in the community, should accomplish -- teach our students about the responsibilities inherent in an educational opportunity? I believe so and I suspect that is one reason many of you are here today as well.

Students, please talk with our guests today. You will learn that they share my immense pride in you and my confidence in your bright future. We believe in you. We are so very optimistic about the future because of that belief.

It is an honor to be a steward of this special place called East Georgia State College and to be able to play a small role in the lives of Anne and students like her.

Thank you.