

2010 Fall Convocation
August 9, 2010

Patrick J. Schloss

Welcome to the Fall 2010 Convocation of Valdosta State University. We look forward with great anticipation and back with great pride. Valdosta State's faculty, staff, and students have risen above a bleak fiscal reality and experienced one of the greatest periods of development in our 104 year history.

Your spirit is captured by a story that my dad would tell of his dad who he referred to as "A Hard Headed

Dutchman." My dad was prone to 'story telling' so I will not vouch for the veracity of this tale.

The family had dug a very large well in the early twenties, when the water table was high. As more and more farmers dug wells, the water table dropped. Grandpa's well eventually went dry and was abandoned.

Unfortunately, the hole was not covered. One day Oley, the family mule, got a bit close and fell in. As you know, a mule can weigh a thousand pounds. Lifting Oley from the hole would be a challenge. Since Oley had reached the end of his useful life, Grandpa decided to bury him in place.

It was a simple matter. Grandpa threw shovel after shovel of dirt into the pit. With each toss came the unmistakable braying sound as rocks hit Oley on the head and back.

But after braying and shaking off the pain, Oley stepped up on the newly deposited dirt. Shovel after shovel, this process was repeated until Oley had climbed from the hole on a pile of dirt and a pile of pain.

We have fallen into a hole of declining resources. On each successive financial report, each more frustrating than the previous, we have rallied to a position of relative strength. I would like to describe several indications of this strength.

We measure our success by the number of lives we touch. Last year, we added 900 students, the largest percentage increase in 16 years. This year will include a comparable increase. The two-year percentage gain may be the largest in the post Viet Nam era. By the way, this growth has come without diminishing our admissions standards. Today's students are every bit as capable as those of a decade ago.

The Strategic Focus planning and budget process, now in its second year, has provided more than 3 million dollars to help ignite this growth. Using Strategic Focus 2010 funds, you have developed new online degree and certificate programs, enhanced student services, grown

our marching and pep bands, and added competitive athletic opportunities for women. We have built more classrooms and offices, and have improved extracurricular programs. Many of these initiatives broaden our appeal for the young people of Georgia. Others extend our reach to nontraditional students.

We are on schedule to add more than 100 new tenure track faculty by 2012. For the first time, any faculty member can obtain a course release to engage in research and creative activity. We have also added over a hundred graduate assistantships-- a winning proposition for the student and scholar.

We are adding staff to our counseling center, student health center, our police force, and academic support centers. For the first time, we have employed an admission professional in the Atlanta area. We will be adding another recruiter to encourage transfers from two year colleges and technical schools.

We have created “funding pools” that allow faculty and staff to purchase equipment and develop programs not available through department budgets. The pools are managed by advisory groups comprised of the faculty and staff. The funding pools have been used to acquire scientific equipment, renovate classrooms, purchase

state-of-the-art instructional equipment, acquire special library materials, and enhance our focus on the arts.

An example of the success of our funding pools was demonstrated with the opening of our new Advanced Spectroscopy and Biotechnical Facility. The facility contains more than half a million dollars in cutting edge equipment.

Our reaffirmation by SACS occurred with no recommendations for corrective action. This outcome is nearly unheard of and exemplifies our position as a regional provider with a national reputation. This achievement leads me to challenge you to view Valdosta

State as a regional University who's reach is not South Georgia, but the states that comprise the Southern Association of Colleges and Schools-- our regional accrediting association.

To paraphrase Winston Churchill, and highlight the perspective of our faculty and staff, “excellence—at all costs; excellence—in spite of all obstacles; and excellence—however long and hard the road may be.”

Looking forward, this year’s budget offers little comfort over last year's. We were informed that we must prepare for an additional double digit cut in state appropriations. Five percent has already been reduced from this year’s

budget. The worst case scenario is a reduction of just under 19 million dollars since my arrival. Best case is a reduction of over 16 million by year's end.

We were very wise to have strategically reengineered our operations in light of the emerging fiscal challenge. The plan we introduced last summer served us well this past year and will serve us well in coming years.

The plan allows me to make five major guarantees:

- Guarantee 1: VSU will not have a reduction in force.

Left to our discretion, we will not reduce salaries through furloughs or diminished benefits.

- **Guarantee 2:** The safety of our students and this campus will not be compromised as we add police officers, health care providers, and counselors. I am pleased to report that we have grown our police force by two officers over the time of my arrival. We have added a position to our counseling center. And, we have added a second physician, Dr. Bill Grow, to the Student Health Center. We will schedule weekend appointments in the health center for the first time in our history.
- **Guarantee 3:** Students will continue to select from a rich array of academic offerings. The number of available seats across the curriculum will continue to grow on a per student basis.

- Guarantee 4: Additional budget reductions will be made by the Planning and Budget Committee in an open, deliberative, and equitable manner.
- Guarantee 5: We will continue to fund initiatives that support your work and insure the emergence of Valdosta State as a leader among its peers.

This academic year will include many reasons to celebrate:

- Jerry and Kay Jennett Hall— a 15,700 square-foot academic building with two auditorium-style classrooms will be completed in the spring.

- Construction will begin on the new Psychology and Counseling Building. The three-story building will include classrooms and clinical space for the Department of Psychology and Counseling, as well as administrative offices for the Graduate School and Sponsored Programs and Research.
- Ground breaking for a new Health Sciences Center on North Campus will occur in the next year to year and an half.
- We are working on plans for additional campus housing — with a goal to provide 500-600 beds by fall 2012.
- We will continue to increase the percentage of faculty that hold a terminal degree.

- I am advised by Provost Gunter that a special committee of faculty, Chairs, and Deans will present the Faculty Senate a document that establishes campus-wide standards for promotion and tenure.
- We have established "living and learning communities" that connect residence life to academic life.
- And, we will increase support for nontraditional students with a specific focus on relationships with two-year technical schools and community colleges.

We are proud of our close relationship with the city and county. This relationship was never more evident than at this year's "Blazin' Hot Night" dinner and auction. The

second annual event, held in our new Student Union, has quickly become a premier social event. Hundreds of community members and businesses leaders gave generously of their time and resources. More than \$100,000 was raised to support of our mission. I know that many of you shared your talents in making the night a success.

Valdosta and Lowndes County have reason to be our best friends and partners. The average VSU student contributes approximately \$18,000 in value to the local economy. With more than \$80 million in construction completed in FY2009, VSU's economic impact to this region was more than \$537 million dollars. That can be

measured as employment for over 5,000 residents of our region.

In closing, your spirit brings to mind of one of the most visible icons in the Valdosta State tradition-- the terra cotta tiles that adorn our buildings. Separated, they are just pieces of fired clay and of little value. Together, they form a bond, shielding those we care about from adversity. I deeply appreciate that you have joined together in these challenging times. While personnel at many universities are beginning this year by measuring losses, you are measuring achievements. Because of you, Valdosta State is a community of scholars steeped in a culture of excellence!

Now we will recognize some of extraordinary faculty and staff who have excelled in their professional endeavors.

Dr. Phil Gunter, interim provost and vice president for Academic Affairs, will come forward and announce the 2010 Faculty and Staff Awards.

[President joins Phil for presentation, photos]