



## *Notes From The President*

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As another academic semester comes to a close, I would like to reflect on the highlights and accomplishments of this outstanding university.

You may notice the format, Notes from the President Vol. 1, No. 1. Notes should go out every month. They will highlight initiatives and accomplishments central to the Office of the President and general academic community. To some extent, the Notes will frame our aspirations as a community of scholars. More important, they will provide evidence of our culture of excellence. Emphasized will be those activities and events that define Valdosta State University as a premier residential university characterized by outstanding instruction, exceptional quality of student life, and unparalleled connection to the region.

The measure of a great institution. They say that anyone can fly a plane in typical conditions—simply turn on the automatic pilot and let the mechanics/avionics do the work. The challenge comes from flying in those infrequent moments of ‘sheer terror.’ To a new president, that moment of sheer terror is when the state advises of a 15% or \$6-7 million budget cut. My terror was made worse by not having a longstanding relationship with the folks that are called upon to alter work plans or sacrifice resources.

You designed and participated in a budget reduction plan, unparalleled in our history. Though your expert eyes can see the effects of the reduction, the critical operations of campus have not suffered. You have created more class seats, more residence hall rooms, more social opportunities, and a stronger campus climate than ever before in our history. You have done this at a time when other schools have eliminated programs, restricted enrollments and reduced the size of their faculty. Following his recent visit, Chancellor Davis noted that Valdosta State was well ahead of the curve in fiscal management and mission focus. Well done!

The Policy on Policies. A friend once said that the fastest path to insolvency is for the individuals closest to the mission of the institution to have little knowledge or control over the resources and policies that drive the mission. I am grateful for the efforts of Kristina Cragg and all members of the faculty and staff who designed a process for proposing, reviewing, approving, and organizing university policies. This process strongly enhances our standards of shared governance. Under their design, anyone can propose new policies or amend existing policies. There is a uniform process, involving all major campus constituents, in vetting and approving policies. Valdosta State University is a ‘caldron of ideas’ and the Policy on Policies will insure that the best ideas, advanced by those closest to the mission, guide our efforts. A final note of thanks to Jeanne Severns and her staff for editing existing policies into the Policy on Policies format.

New traditions. Spring commencement ceremonies are scheduled for Saturday, May 9, and I am excited to announce two new traditions, Order of the Red and Black and President's Medallion will become a part of this important ceremony for many years to come.

The Order of the Red and Black honors graduates from the past 50 or more years and bridges these alumni with today's graduates. John Trombetta, Sandra Fletcher, and colleagues are connecting the Valdosta State University today with the college of the past century. Members of the Order of the Red and Black will be recognized at the 10 a.m. ceremony.

The President's Medallion publically demonstrates Valdosta State University's appreciation for those individuals who have demonstrated remarkable generosity of time and personal resources. The inaugural recipients of the President's Medallion will be announced at the 4 p.m. ceremony.

Enrollment. Attendance in the spring semester 2009 soared above 11,000—the largest spring semester enrollment in the university's history. A significant contributor to this increase is the result of a larger percentage of students returning from the fall semester. Both undergraduate (3.0%) and graduate (11.4%) enrollments increased from spring 2008 for a total increase of 4.3%.

We are not content with the historic rate of growth and, thanks to Walter Peacock and his staff we are redoubling our efforts to attract the most capable high school graduates to Valdosta State. In the past half year, the admissions area has increased the number of admissions recruiters/counselors, expanded their focus to include Florida, and begun hosting exclusive admissions events in some of our more productive communities. In Atlanta alone, Walter and his staff met with more than 100 prospective students at VSU exclusive events. Having attended each of these events, I am in awe of the enthusiasm these prospective students have for this great institution!

Connection to faculty, students and friends. During the first year of this administration, Maureen and I have hosted more than 100 dinners in our home. These dinners helped us connect with Valdosta State's students, faculty, staff, alumni and friends, and began the process of cultivating personal relationships that are critical to the university's success.

In March, I began traveling the highways to meet alumni and prospective students throughout South Georgia and selected areas within metro Atlanta. The 12-city VSU Connections tour included Tifton, Thomasville, Waycross, Douglas, Moultrie, Albany, Savannah, Brunswick and four counties in metro-Atlanta.

More than 33,000 alumni live in Georgia, representing 67% of Valdosta State's total alumni base. Each visit provided an opportunity for me, members of the alumni board, faculty and coaches to forge a stronger relationship with our alumni, friends and future students.

Many more visits are planned, as we continue to capture the imaginations of our alumni and friends, while cultivating an understanding that Valdosta State is a premier comprehensive university

On March 13, the inaugural "A Blazin' Hot Night" dinner and auction gala was held in the University Center. This year's international theme featured more than 80 live and silent auction items, which raised approximately \$60,000 to benefit the VSU Foundation, Inc. Planning for the 2010 gala has started and we are excited that it will be the first premier event held in the new Student Union ballroom.

Mr. Bill Muntz has been instrumental in developing the "More" television show. He produced over 16 episodes that showcased the best features of Valdosta life. Whether showcasing campus life, academic excellence, or community relations, the show provided a great look into the programs for which we are so proud.

On April 17, Valdosta State hosted members of the Joint State House Senate Higher Education Committee and Higher Education Sub-Committee on campus. Organized by State Representative Amy Carter, the tour highlighted the campus (for some it was their first visit) and provided a forum to discuss Valdosta State's challenges and opportunities.

Strategic Focus 2010. I am thrilled to announce the development of Strategic Focus 2010, Valdosta State's new strategic planning and budget model. Strategic Focus 2010 will establish a limited set of standards that will advance the university's standing against similar institutions.

A fundamental aspiration of Strategic Focus 2010 is to move Valdosta State from a premier regional comprehensive master's institution to a nationally recognized university with an increasing number of advanced degree programs.

Three open sessions are scheduled for this week to discuss Strategic Focus 2010 and the new budget model:

- May 5, 3 p.m., University Center Cypress Room
- May 6, 4 p.m., University Center Cypress Room
- May 7, 2 p.m., University Center Rose Room

Additional sessions will take place in the new academic year. Faculty, staff and students are encouraged to attend the sessions and learn more about the new strategic planning and budget model.

Climate commitment. On April 24, Valdosta State joined more than 600 higher education institutions across the county striving to become climate neutral. I was honored to sign the American College and University President Climate Commitment and formally commit the university to develop a plan that eliminates greenhouse gas emission over time and helps move the campus towards climate neutrality. Representing the faculty, Dr. Brad Bergstrom noted that he was an unashamed protector of our natural resources. Ray Sable emphasized that the organization of the physical plant is up to the challenge. Our students were beaming with pride for a process that their advocacy triggered. I am very proud to join with these outstanding leaders.

Student achievements. What a great group of talented students we have at Valdosta State, I have enjoyed meeting so many of them this past academic year. I want to mention a couple of recent student accomplishments that have brought national attention to Valdosta State.

The Model United Nations team was named a Distinguished Delegation at the National Model UN competition for the third consecutive year. Dr. Carol Glen, faculty sponsor, has done a remarkable job with this group and we are very proud of their accomplishments.

Students in Free Enterprise (SIFE) is another student organization with a remarkable national record. Under the direction of Dr. Wayne Plumly, the 2009 team won its 15<sup>th</sup> consecutive regional title and will travel next week to compete nationally. Founded in 1994, Valdosta State's SIFE team has four top 20 finishes, three top 10 finishes, three final four appearances and a first runner-up distinction at national competition. Good luck and bring home another national championship for VSU!

The Red Hots, Valdosta State's dance team, earned a second national championship and the co-ed cheer team brought home their first national title at the NCAA tournament in April. We are so proud of both teams and appreciate their dedication and long hours of practice.

The changing face of Valdosta State. Construction continues with the renovation of the north side of Nevins Hall and completion is scheduled for March 2010. The renovations maximize existing space to accommodate more classrooms and faculty offices. Thanks to the frugal management of resources by Traycee Martin, interim vice president for Finance and Administration, available funds will be sufficient to support additional furnishings, landscaping and cabinetry. Pedestrian walkways throughout that section of campus will be renovated to the level of our best areas.

The Student Union has passed the 50% completion point and is on schedule to open January 2010. Construction on Georgia Hall and renovation of Reade Hall continue. The new Georgia Hall will provide nearly 300 additional beds, which will greatly enhance our recruitment and retention efforts. The newly renovated Reade Hall will become the university's first residence hall for honor students and opens fall semester.

We recently opened the new Student Health Center. The center is among the finest facilities of its type and staffed by highly focused and diligent health care professionals. I am pleased to announce the appointment of Dr. Edwin Hiatt. The successful candidate came from an extensive pool of well qualified individuals. He is one of the most highly respected physicians in our region. I hope you will all join me in welcoming Dr. Hiatt to Valdosta State University. My appreciation goes out to the health center staff for conducting an effective search. You have showcased our institution and demonstrated our concern for student health.

How about them Blazers! We will have the honor of hosting two NCAA regional tournaments. Our fourth-ranked women's tennis team will play at 1 p.m., Friday at the PE Complex tennis courts. If they win they will advance to Saturday's championship match at 9 a.m. Our fifth-ranked softball team just won the Gulf South Conference Championship and will open play in their regional Friday evening at 6:30pm against Tampa. The softball regional continues on Saturday and Sunday. The softball team has a record of 54-6 and the 54 wins is a new school record. Our men's tennis team, ranked second nationally, is playing in the regional tournament at Lynn University on Friday and our nationally ranked golf team is currently playing in the NCAA golf regional tournament in Florence, Alabama.

In memory. As Valdosta State experienced many exciting accomplishments this past year, it is with reverence that we mention the loss of two exceptional members of the university family. Dr. Robert Hull, professor of communication sciences for more than 22 years died April 6 at his home. Greg Gordon, associate director of Physical Plant, died April 10 in a vehicle accident. Both men were stellar individuals who will be greatly missed. Our thoughts and prayers continue to go out to their families.

I hope you enjoyed this first issue of "Notes from the President" I plan to make it a monthly letter to Valdosta State community and our many friends. Enjoy a relaxing and safe summer!