

**UNIVERSITY OF NEBRASKA AT OMAHA  
2007 INSTALLATION REMARKS  
CHANCELLOR JOHN E. CHRISTENSEN**

**“LIVING IN THE FUTURE, UNDERSTANDING THE PAST”  
OCTOBER 9, 2007**

Thank you, President Mil2THE PAST”

metropolitan university with strong ties regionally, nationally and internationally set us on the path to our future. Ron, thank you for honoring me with your presence today.

My sincere appreciation to Chancellor Emeritus Del Weber, who was the architect of today's UNO. Under his leadership, UNO experienced dramatic physical and programmatic transformations. Del is currently out of the country, but he and Ron have been of enormous help to me throughout my career, and particularly over the past 13 months, with their willingness to offer advice and counsel. I am indebted to them both.

This day is made all the more special by the presence and support of my family. My wife Jan, partner of 35 years; our sons Anders, Erik, and Dana, our daughter in-law, Colleen, and our extended family and friends. You have always been an important part of my personal and professional journeys, and that was never more evident than during the past several months.

I simply want to say "thank you" for always being there, and I love you all.

Also with us today in spirit, I believe, are those whose impact on my life was profound, and by whose example I continue to measure any success I may enjoy.

As the grandson of Scandinavian immigrants, who made their way to Omaha Nebraska, to begin a new life, leaving behind the security of family and country for this new land full of opportunities and unknowns. They instilled in my parents, Ann and Axel, and me, the belief that education held the road map to the future.

Although my parents didn't have the opportunity to experience education beyond high school, they insured the opportunity was available to me, and I am forever grateful for their wisdom.

As you can tell, I am proud of my Scandinavian heritage, and it is therefore somewhat fitting that the great Danish philosopher Soren Kierkegaard provide a context for my reflections today. Fitting also, because Kierkegaard captured what I believe to be the essence of UNO's strength, and its character, when he wrote "Life can only be understood backwards; but it must be lived forwards."

UNO, has always been an institution which prides itself on "living forward," pursuing its destiny with a sense of purpose, anticipation, vigor, and fearlessness. From its earliest days as Omaha University, its founders sought to "establish, endow, and maintain a university for the promotion of sound learning and education." That same vision was evident in 1968, when the Municipal University of Omaha became a partner in the University of Nebraska system, forging what one merger committee member called "the greatest educational gain in this city's history."

These achievements were, however, not without setbacks, as financial constraints and growing pains many times threatened the viability of this young university. Yet, with determination, the support of community leaders, and the generosity of countless benefactors, Omaha's university grew and prospered, providing opportunity for generations of students, in this community and beyond.

Today, as we look back to those early founders, as Kierkegaard believed, we understand and appreciate the enormity of the obstacles they faced as well as the significance of what they accomplished. Our challenge, as stewards of today's UNO, is to keep their dream alive, and, more importantly, dare to dream large ourselves.

Over the past 13 months, I have had the opportunity to talk to literally hundreds of individuals about the future of UNO. From students to faculty/staff, from alumni to benefactors to civic and corporate leaders, without exception, these conversations were infused with a spirit of optimism, and sense of urgency to get on with the tasks ahead.

To many, UNO represents the single best opportunity for students and families to achieve a brighter future, for our city to become increasingly competitive and thrive economically, and for meaningful collaboration within the metropolitan area. Higher education, and particularly the metropolitan university, has the capacity and the responsibility to bring parties together and expertise to bear on the critical issues facing our society. I'm proud to say, that UNO is particularly well-suited to this task and can point to many successful collaborations, with many more to come as the College of Public Affairs and Community Service's Collaborative Commons opens next spring, and as the Institute for Collaboration Sciences evolves.



landscape. Taken together, these stories of creative and forward-thinking reflect a UNO on the threshold of transformation. We are a place of opportunity, a source of solutions and our stewardship is making a difference.

Yet, in the near future, UNO's ability to live forward successfully will require our attention to five critical areas:

First, we must commit our energies to create a genuine calendar year operation, breaking away from the old agrarian-based nine month academic calendar, as befits a modern and responsive metropolitan university. To aid in this endeavor, a task force has been convened to review issues of capacity, efficiency, continuous curricular offerings and better ways to interface with the community. If we are to continue to serve our student population well, then we must accept the reality that an academic year, based on the calendar year, provides untapped potential for continuous learning, improves progress toward degree, and better "fits" with today's multitasking student lifestyle while at the same time maximizing available resources.

Second, we must actively seek out opportunities to develop public private partnerships and collaborative relationships that define us as a metropolitan university. Moreover, we must be engaged in the business of broadening those currently in place. Nearly a decade ago, a business/industry, state and university partnership made the Peter Kiewit Institute a reality. Today, PKI stands as a model of best practices for such collaborations. New opportunities are on the horizon with the opening of Ak-Sar-Ben Village, and continued development of the Pacific and Center Street campuses. The future is bright, a generous community wants involvement, and we are limited only by our capacity to reach out, innovate, and make incredible things happen for the community and university. The key will be strategic planning and implementation based on mutual benefits while maintaining our core values.

Third, we must deepen our relationship with PK-12 partners, so that the road from elementary to middle school, middle to high school and on to college is paved with initiatives that address these transitions, the achievement gap, poverty, health, assistance to families, and issues of access. I am proud of UNO's strong presence within Omaha's Building Bright Futures and other educational initiatives. Through innovative thinking, systemic change, university/community commitment, and increased resource availability, I believe generations of Omaha students will have the encouragement, incentive and support they need to graduate, and successfully transition to college or career. UNO and its formal partnership, the Metropolitan Omaha Educational Consortium, including Douglas/Sarpy County school districts and Educational Service Units, will play a vital role for both the short and long term. These are our future students and they represent the future of our campus and community as well.

Fourth, we seek to expand the horizons for traditional age students, while putting programs in place that ensure the success of other populations we serve, such as

minority, transfer, international, non-traditional and first generation students. As a metropolitan university, the campus environment must be safe, responsive, caring and welcoming to this vast array of learners and their personal and educational goals.

In other words, we must make an absolute commitment to being an inclusive campus which embraces, but reaches beyond demographic difference, and is sensitive to diversity of experience and values. As realized, our students will be personally and academically successful and graduate so they too can live forward.

Finally, we must remain vigilant and aggressive, pursuing continuous academic improvement, maintaining a high quality faculty/staff and creating and maintaining state-

