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Ferrari, Michael R. - Speech at Fall Reception September 27, 2005

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**Remarks to
BGSU Administrative Staff Assembly and Presentation of
the 2005 Michael R. Ferrari Award**

September 27, 2005

**Michael R. Ferrari
Chancellor Emeritus, Texas Christian University**

What a delight it is to return to campus today and to participate in this administrative staff assembly which marks and celebrates the beginning of another academic year in the life of Bowling Green State University. This is also a special occasion to recognize and applaud contributions by staff members to the continuing progress of BGSU and to express appreciation and commendation to one colleague for noteworthy service to others. To be sure, it is a genuine privilege and honor for me to be invited to share in and give brief remarks at this event.

While this is the first opportunity I have had to attend this annual program since leaving the University in 1983, I have been back to campus on several occasions since retiring as Chancellor of Texas Christian University two years ago. I also had the great pleasure of joining Dick Edwards in attending the Bowling Green - University of Wisconsin football game in Madison a few weeks again, and enjoyed

seeing so many alumni and other friends at the exciting game. All these occurrences have brought back happy memories of the uncommon spirit and vitality that have long distinguished Bowling Green State University.

Staff members at all levels and in all divisions of any university play an important and indeed essential role in shaping, fulfilling and advancing an institution's mission and vision, and there is ample evidence that your dedication and commitment to students and your devotion to the ideals of this academic community have contributed greatly to the record-level enrollments of this fall and to the University BGSU has become and is becoming.

In Dean Emeritus James Robert Overman's wonderful volume on the first half-century of BGSU's development, a thoughtful historical account which was extended by Professor Stuart Givens a few decades later, one is mindful of the care, energy and pride that were present among community leaders who had, from the beginning, the foresight to imagine, attract and locate a normal school for training teachers in northwestern Ohio. One is also mindful of the foundation that was

established at the turn of the 20th century for a university that has become, nearly a century later, one of the more highly respected public universities in the nation and beyond.

My family and I have been on a remarkable journey since the first day we set foot on this campus in the summer of 1971, and none of us has forgotten our years at this University and in this community for they remain among the richest and most energizing periods of our lives. When our children speak of Bowling Green State University and what it was like growing up in Bowling Green, they still refer to our twelve years here as “the Golden years.” And so they were!

This is a community which has always fostered a commitment to excellence, collegiality and civility. It is a learning environment that prizes the exploration of values and preparing “graduates to go out into the world as critical thinkers, skilled communicators and ethical leaders” in all areas of study. With the sustained atmosphere of a small college and the opportunities of a major doctoral university, BGSU has encouraged students, faculty and staff to dream big dreams and it has instilled confidence in individuals to make those dreams a reality. This

has been and remains a university in which everyone can take pride in its past, its present and its future.

One of my favorite writers, John Masefield, wrote in his tribute to the academy that “There are few earthly things more beautiful than a university,” and surely that remains an accurate description of the heritage, core values and enduring promise of Bowling Green State University. Masefield admired the university not simply for its impressive buildings, its campus greens or its athletic programs, all of which are present here, but because it is “a place where those who hate ignorance may strive to know, where those who perceive truth may strive to make others see.”

As staff members representing all aspects of university life, as individuals who are often the front door and face of BGSU to countless individuals and groups, as persons who day-in and day-out care for and enrich the lives of students and the quality of campus life, as persons whose responsibilities embrace the protection of property and the safety of all who study, work or visit here, and as mentors, counselors, and

leaders in your various positions, your contributions have made BGSU a truly beautiful university.

I am honored to be here today, among friends and colleagues, old and new, to help celebrate your exemplary achievement and service.

The beginning of a new academic year is, as we all know, an exciting and important time for any college or university. It's a time when college and university presidents and chancellors identify challenges and opportunities for the coming year, as President Ribeau has done. It also is a time to convey optimism and confidence in the state of the institution and its ongoing advancement. And so it should be. American higher education remains the envy of the world, and at Bowling Green State University, there is much to be grateful for as we think about the fundamental purposes of the University and the sustained support received from the public, alumni and other friends.

And yet, against such a backdrop, there seems to be something troubling in our society and world these days. Two years ago when I spoke to the BGSU Retirees Association, I commented on some of the

challenges facing the nation and American higher education and suggested that we seemed headed for an increasingly difficult period, a period that could profoundly impact the academy and society for years to come. Momentous and catastrophic events at home and abroad in recent days, months and years confirm that even in the midst of an abundance of good news, this first decade of a new century presents enormous challenges to leaders in all walks of life to confront and deal effectively with complex issues in a rapidly changing and increasingly dangerous world.

Just think of what has occurred in the short span of time since this year's senior class began their university education at BGSU. Few in the summer of 2001 could have predicted the dramatic changes in our society and the world that would occur over the next four years. Most of this year's seniors entered BGSU during a period of relative calm at home and abroad and were looking at a healthy job market. How quickly that picture and outlook have changed!

During the past few years, we have experienced the terrorist attacks in New York City, Washington D.C. and over the skies of

Pennsylvania; we have seen U.S. military action in Afghanistan and Iraq, and we have been moved and shaken by the natural catastrophic disasters caused by the hurricanes along the Gulf Coast. Today's college and university students do indeed face a different world from the one that they *and all of us* could hardly imagine or visualize only a few years ago. It has been said by others that today's college students completed high school in one century; they are clearly and irreversibly in another.

Today's students continue to face increasing tuition and continuing worries about how they will pay for their education, although it must be said ^{that} ~~they~~ BGSU has done as much as perhaps any institution to hold down cost increases while still ensuring high quality education. Still, today's students across the country and their parents worry about the kind of job market that will greet them upon graduation. They face new challenges and obstacles to realize their dreams in a world that seems to be fraught with heightened peril and uncertainty.

What does all this portend for the future? Making predictions is always a precarious act. Every time I am asked to do so, I remember the famous words of Casey Stengel, the former manager of the New York Yankees, who said: “I never make predictions—at least not about the future.” Nonetheless, I think we are on safe ground today to predict that society has never been more in need of ethical leaders and responsible citizens who are committed to being active participants in shaping and strengthening the future of our democracy, our communities and the world. This means that the burden and responsibilities placed on today’s faculty and staff members to prepare students for leadership in a new era are as great as they have ever been.

John Quincy Adams once said “great necessities call out great virtues” and perhaps that can be said of this time for those of us in the academy today. The needs of our society and world community are great, and we have a special opportunity, a special obligation to seize this time to educate leaders and revitalize and renew organizations in a society that enriches human knowledge and understanding and enhances the quality of life for all citizens for generations to come.

At the Retirees Association luncheon in 2003, I suggested that several themes could be expected to dominate the higher education scene over the next few years. At that time, I commented on the impact of the rising costs of higher education, the competition for private funds for both public and private colleges and universities, and the changing demographics of the nation. Certainly these themes continue to confront higher education, especially our responses to the changing face of the nation.

The demographic wave of 18-year olds that is breaking across the country continue to impact everything in its path. At the same time, over 15 million older, nontraditional students are seeking access to higher education, and most forecasters expect there to be a 21% increase in the number of 18-year olds by 2015. A majority of institutions can indeed look forward to getting a fair share of these students, but I wonder if we are really planning and preparing for these new students. As I hope you know, eighty percent of the new students will be African-American, Hispanic/Latino, and Asian American, and at least half of them will be below the poverty level. Increasingly they will come from families where English is not the language spoken in the

home. They will come from single heads of households and many will be first-time college students. While it may be true that institutions located in the South, Southwest and West Coast will experience the greatest immediate impact, as I experienced at TCU in Fort Worth, Texas, the fact is that no institution will be exempt from the formidable and fundamental changes in demography in America. It would surely be a serious strategic error for any institution not to take steps today to get ready for this influx of new students over the next ten years, including taking step to ensure that these students are successful in their academic pursuits. And I am so proud of Bowling Green State University in your genuine commitment to diversity, demonstrated by the fact that the university this fall is more ethnically diverse than at any time in its history with major increases this fall in the enrollment of students of color.

These topics do not exhaust the pressures on and issues confronting higher education today and tomorrow. The winds of change continue to blow and blow hard in our world. But with all this change, it's important for us to recall that American higher education remains one of the fundamental bedrocks of and for our society. It

remains the avenue for upward mobility and the fulfillment of human potential. Educating leaders in the arts and humanities, the sciences, and the various professions remains at the heart of our profession, of our calling, in service to the world.

Tom Brokaw, in his celebrated book, The Greatest Generation, extolled the values and virtues of the generation of Americans some fifty years ago who sacrificed considerably and gave selflessly during World War II to make the world a safer place for us all in the last half of the 20th century. There is reason to believe that the central challenge for higher education today is educating the *next* Greatest Generation . . . those students who are now studying at Bowling Green State University and at colleges and universities across the land . . . those men and women who will be called upon for extraordinary contributions, passion, sacrifices, service and ethical and principled leadership in the first half of the 21st century.

Alexis de Tocqueville observed long ago that our society needs educated people who are civically engaged, public-spirited people, citizen-leaders. As current events make clear, we need people who as

Derek Bok has said have not only the “capacity to perceive moral issues and to think about them clearly but resolve to act on their beliefs as well.” We need engaged citizens who are knowledgeable about how public life works and about the democratic values of justice, concern for the needy, the dignity of the individual and the importance of diversity. Are these not the qualities inherent within the mission and philosophy of education at BGSU? I believe they are.

And so, as staff members who have made a difference in the lives of others, you can and should take satisfaction in your contributions to making this University a better place. You have the opportunity and obligation today to carry on the noble work that has been passed on and entrusted to you, recognizing the major challenges our society faces. I have no doubt whatever that you will do just that.

Thank you again for inviting me back to this wonderful institution.