

**Dr. Mary A. Papazian**  
**President, San José State University**  
**Rotary District Conference**  
**Diaz Compean Student Union - San José State University**  
**June 2, 2018**  
**9:15 a.m.**

Thank you, Sam, for that kind introduction.

It is an honor to welcome all of you to San José State University.

In my time here as Spartan-in-Chief, I have tried to speak to as many individual Rotary clubs as possible. But by convening on our campus all together, you've spared me a commute this morning.

I know I don't need to tell this crowd that any time you can avoid climbing into a car—and avoid taking on the 101 or the 280 or the 880—is a blessing.

So I thank you. But I also want to tell you why I *do* like to hit the road to visit Rotary clubs ... bad traffic notwithstanding.

It is because I am attracted to Rotarian motto of “Service above Self.”

And, more importantly, it is because I believe in the tangible, ongoing efforts being made by the various Northern California chapters represented here this morning to live up to that motto.

I applaud you for both your compassion—and for your *action*.

To this native daughter of the Golden State, the principle of “service above self” harkens back to the commonwealth spirit that built California into a world-renowned beacon of hope and opportunity.

California did not become California because everyone was just looking out for themselves. It happened because people were willing to pull together, to work toward a greater purpose.

Perhaps nothing demonstrates the point better than the state's public higher education system.

The California State University system ... of which San José State was the founding campus ... as well as the University of California system, and the California Community College system ... these institutions came into prominence because long-ago citizens just like you understood that the entire state would benefit from an educated, enlightened society.

Back then, education was envisioned as a public good. It was not seen as a private privilege available only to those who could afford to pay for it themselves. And that vision, I would argue, has made all the difference.

Before I go on, let me tell you a little bit about this building where you find yourself today.

At San José State, we consider the campus to be the heart of what is the nation's 10<sup>th</sup> largest city. This, I would argue, is both geographically *and* metaphorically true.

Many of San José State's best traits—diversity in all forms ... creative thinking ... inclusion ... and a sense of civic responsibility that extends into neighborhoods and communities far beyond our campus borders—these traits, I have discovered, are also reflected in San José, and Silicon Valley, and Northern California ... when they are operating at their best.

And if San José State ... as Silicon Valley's only public university ... represents the *heart* of the region it serves, then this building represents the *beating heart* of the campus itself.

And this building has some stories to tell. These are stories that go directly to the theme of your conference: "Celebrate the past, Create the future."

I love that theme, by the way. I think it could serve as an unofficial mission statement for San José State.

This Student Union has a story to tell about the growing need for philanthropic support for California's public universities.

Maintenance of this newly expanded and renovated Ramiro and Lupe Diaz Compean Student Union stems in part from a \$15 million gift commitment made two years ago by Mrs. Compean.

She wanted to honor the wish she shared with her late husband ... an up-from-the bootstraps immigrant ... while she was still alive to see the wish come true.

That wish was to help San José State students achieve *their* dream of earning a college degree. She understood that would require more than just a beautiful building.

And so Mrs. Compean's gift *also* included scholarship endowments for emancipated foster youths ... the adolescents of the California Dream Act ... and high-performing students.

I should note that no state taxpayer dollars went into this Student Union. It is maintained by fees that the students levy upon themselves.

This is the new normal of funding for public higher education in California—and I want to return to that theme in a few moments.

But first, let me turn to another story this building has to tell.

It is about our students. As beautiful as this facility is—as bright, as open, and as inviting as it is—what makes it thrive so strongly ... and so *vibrantly* ... are the students who bring it to life almost every hour of every day.

We are on summer break right now. But if you were to drop by on a day when classes are in session ... and I hope you do ... you will find it *filled* with students tutoring one another—both through formal programs, and informal study groups.

This is where the military veterans we treasure as students come for counseling, and support, and companionship.

This is where our student success centers are situated ... and where students meet in an incubator-like setting to create and pursue innovative projects that will benefit our broader community.

This is where students drop by the Transportation Solutions office to book a zip car ... or to buy a bus or train ticket at discount ... or to rent an electric bike.

For a long time, San José State was considered a commuter school—a campus stitched together by lecture halls and parking lots.

One of the formative ideas behind the Student Union expansion was to move away from that perception.

The aim was to provide a better sense of place ... a place that felt more like *home* ... where students would come to gather, to meet, to linger, to rest between seminars, to interact with their friends and classmates.

A place to buy a slice at Bricks, or a smoothie at Jamba Juice.

A place to bowl, a popular form of recreation for students when finals have them on pins and needles.

[PAUSE FOR POSSIBLE LAUGH]

(I couldn't help myself.)

[PAUSE]

This building is *also* where we celebrate our past, with permanent displays honoring such distinguished alumni as author Amy Tan ... U.S. Senator Ben Nighthorse-Campbell ... and the late Bill Walsh.

As I said, in short order the Diaz Compean Student Union has developed into the university's beating heart. And we are so proud and happy to be able to share it with you today.

[PAUSE]

Now, you may be thinking—this is all very wonderful, President Papazian. But what does this have to do with us?

[PAUSE]

(Since there's no Q&A after my speech I have to ask this question for you.)

[PAUSE FOR POSSIBLE LAUGH]

I'll take a stab at an answer.

First, San José State is about people.

Not every member of the San José State community is as well-known as a Super Bowl coach, or an award-winning author.

But when it comes to people, the most significant San José State alumni are all around you.

There are more than a *quarter million* Spartan alumni.

Two-thirds of them live in the Bay Area *alone*.

You know them ... but you may not know their common link to San José State.

Maybe they run your neighborhood bank or credit union.

They might be the kindergarten teacher at your kid's elementary school, or serve as the high school principal.

They might be the chief nurse who ensures hospital patient safety, or the RN who supervises the night shift.

They work by the thousands at tech companies, driving what the world has come to know as Silicon Valley.

And I want to underscore this next point. The students who fill this building every day—and I do mean *fill* it—will be the nursing supervisors and educators and engineers and artists of tomorrow.

They will be the cohort that provides the human glue that helps *your* community prosper in every sense of that word.

Now, for many of them, their path will be a bit different from those who passed through the great California public universities in previous generations.

When I was doing my studies at UCLA, tuition wasn't even a part of the University of California vocabulary.

Today, with taxpayers and lawmakers unable to maintain full support, state universities must rely more and more on gifts from

people like Mrs. Compean. They must rely, unfortunately, on increased tuition levels.

But if students are going to pay more, then it falls on us administrators to provide not only robust scholarship support, but also the tools these students will need to graduate—on time, or even early.

That includes adding new faculty ... new course sections ... and more mentors and academic advisors.

Remember those student success centers I mentioned were in this building? They are a big part of this effort.

I was back east when the Great Recession hit in 2008. Even from that distance, I was as appalled as anyone at how quickly and deeply the budgets for public higher education were slashed in Sacramento.

But it also became clear to me that the old model was not coming back.

In this new era, students need *more* support, especially those who are the first in their families to attend a college.

It is a point of pride that San José State attracts more of these first generation college students than many other universities across the country. And it is a public trust obligation to give them the help they need to see their way through to graduation.

In this new era, efficiency is essential. Facilities must work harder ... and so we are more than happy to invite you Rotarians to convene here on an otherwise quiet Saturday in early June.

Also ... in this new era ... we must do more to keep ourselves connected to the communities that surround us, and to the state we serve.

And let me tell you—we are on the case.

We share our library with the city of San José. We work with the city of San José to operate the Hammer Theater, just a few blocks away.

Our students ... guided by faculty ... engage in all sorts of community service projects that give them opportunities to learn and serve in one swoop. It is institutionalized here—everything from organizing voter registration drives ... to tutoring elementary school students ... to helping plan municipal transportation facilities.

The days of professors in ivory towers on campuses surrounded by ivy-laced fences are done—at least here at San José State.

Just as a heart pumps blood to all parts of the body, we are pumping innovation and innovative thinking into Silicon Valley—and beyond.

And so, yes, I believe you picked extremely well in choosing where to hold your District conference this year.

If I have made nothing else clear, I want you to know that this university belongs to you and your neighbors. It belongs to California. It always has, and it always will.

Let me return to your theme: Celebrate the past ... and create the future.

And so before I close, I'd like to share with you a passage from an unsigned editorial that, in a sense, does both.

Quote:

“It is a slow process at first—looking to the future. It has small beginnings. Its benefits are not a monthly revenue of dollars. The good it does is gradual, diffused for society, the state and the world, as well as for individuals.

“And now in California there is too much of self-seeking, too much haste, too little stability, too much of the individual, too little of the social, too much of the present, too little of the future ...

“We hope for a better time; for a time when our people will call California by those good old words ‘our Commonwealth’— because they feel what those words signify; when California will cease to be run to, run over and run from ...

“When we have reached this condition, teachers will be welcomed, school-houses, academies and colleges will be built and filled, and the means of a varied and large education provided.”

End-quote.

I’d say that is pretty spot on.

By the way, the passage I quoted was from a long-gone periodical called the *Pacific*.

And the year it was published?

[PAUSE]

1851 ...

[PAUSE]

... right at the peak of the Gold Rush.

[PAUSE]

In speaking to an audience that rallies around the motto “service above self,” I know I am likely preaching to the choir.

But, together, let’s hope for ... and work even harder to make happen ... that time when all Californians will look beyond their differences ... will recommit to one another ... will recommit to the foundational premise of our state ... and, once again, call California by those good old words: “Our Commonwealth.”

[PAUSE]

Here is wishing you a successful conference. I hope you'll join one of the campus tours today so you can see our beautiful university for yourself. And remember: Our house is truly your house.

[PAUSE]

Thank you. And, Go Spartans!