

REMARKS TO LOS ALTOS, CA ROTARY CLUB

June 22, 2017

President David, Rotarians and guests, thank you for inviting me to speak today!

Jack—thank you so much for that gracious introduction.

As the President of the oldest public university in the West, I have particular respect for other venerable institutions.

This club, formed almost 70 years ago, most certainly qualifies. Its legacy of community service—truly impactful service—is well-established.

Of course, San Jose State is pretty well-established, too. Our roots date back to 1857 as California's first teacher's college.

And this club has some of that Spartan DNA. Jack Kelly is a graduate of our business school and a former president of our alumni board. Ron Labetich (LAB-EH-TICH) played basketball at SJSU with Lindsay Carpenter's husband, Craig.

And Dick Henning is a Spartan—class of '58—who, as many of you know, went on to lead Foothill College and, perhaps as notably, the Foothill Celebrity Forum.

I am guessing there are other Spartans here today. In fact, how about a show of hands from anyone with a connection to SJSU, whether it is you or a family member?

There you go! Barry Shiller, our chief marketing officer, is with me today and he has lapel pins for you. We want to keep you engaged and we need you to be our ambassadors!

I am just finishing my first year leading San Jose State. Over the next few minutes, I'd like to share some impressions from this immersion year, and a bit of what I want to do to capitalize on the legacy I referenced a moment ago.

I was officially inaugurated last month—nearly a year after I arrived. That's just how it's done in the academy!

It was a fantastic celebration, but it neither was intended nor structured to solely be about *me*. It was about *community*.

And San Jose State is an uncommonly diverse community. We enroll close to 33,000 students. We're the **12th most** diverse public university in the U.S. Half or more of each incoming class arrives hoping to be the first in their families to earn a four-year degree.

We open doors of opportunity to students who otherwise might never have the chance to earn a bachelor's degree—

and for whom those doors otherwise would remain closed. That's our mission, and we're *very* proud of it.

I am a fourth-generation descendant of immigrant great-grandparents who settled in Southern California in the early 1900's. My parents met at UCLA. I followed them there, and left with my undergraduate and graduate degrees.

My academic career has taken me to Michigan, New Jersey, New York, Connecticut, and now, back home to California.

Beyond the opportunity to come home, I was attracted by San Jose State's legacy.

In addition to being the oldest public university in the west, we're the founding campus of the 23-campus California State University—the largest public comprehensive university in the world.

We've even been around longer than that private university just up the road, which was established in 1885. And I want to be clear—elite private institutions and urban public universities can and *should* collaborate.

I know this first-hand. My former institution, Southern Connecticut State University, shares the city of New Haven with a peer of Stanford's—its name rhymes with “whale.”

Urban public universities have a distinct mission. San Jose State anchors America's 10th largest city. We're a top supplier of talent in many disciplines: STEM, education, business and finance, health care, journalism, the arts, public and social service.

Our promise—to *power Silicon Valley*—isn't a marketing slogan. It's what we do.

And our legacy is matched by our promise.

Our students are remarkably resilient, resourceful, and determined. They know they have been blessed by a tremendous opportunity, and they are fiercely determined to succeed.

They also are uncommonly committed to the common good. In the decade since the founding of CommUniverCity—a public service collaboration involving the university, City of San Jose and community partners—our students have contributed **280,000** volunteer hours to a multitude of community service projects.

Our faculty—committed, hands-on educators—are uniquely dedicated to their students. Many university professors prioritize research over teaching.

Not ours.

It's been almost a decade since we had the resources to add faculty to help keep up with enrollment growth. That's essential to helping students complete degrees in less time.

Thanks to some additional funding from the state, we are adding close to 130 new full-time faculty members over two years.

Statewide, just two in ten CSU students complete degrees within four years. That *has* to change; a recent credible study estimated that by 2030, California will need 1.1 million additional college graduates just to meet current demand trends.

We know that the demands of a family, a job, or personal circumstances make it unfeasible for many students to finish in four years, as many of us did.

But the world in which we grew up simply isn't the world in which we now live.

And we would be abandoning our mission if we expected every student to sacrifice a job or family commitment or incur more debt than they are prepared to handle.

But we need to help those students who can. And we've attacked this challenge on multiple fronts, adding faculty and academic advisors, smarter technology, and more.

By 2025, we expect to raise our four-year graduation rate to at least 60 percent.

We also are making significant improvements to campus facilities so that we can better serve students, employees, and the community. If you've not seen our campus in a while, you might not recognize it.

The renovated and expanded Diaz Compean Student Union is *such* a beautiful space, teeming with activity from morning to dusk. If you haven't seen it, I hope you'll visit.

We last fall opened an 800-bed residential tower, increasing on-campus housing to well over 4,000 beds. Nearly half of our undergrads live within a few miles of campus—we aren't a “commuter school” any more.

A new recreation and aquatics center, where two of the very dated “bricks” dormitories used to be, is under construction.

A multi-year partnership with CEFCU Credit Union will bring long-overdue renovations and improvements to the newly-named CEFCU Stadium: *Home of the Spartans*.

Speaking of the stadium, we are beyond excited about the future of Spartan football under the leadership of new head coach Brent Brennan. Our season opens on August 26. Tickets are going fast; give Barry your contact information and he’ll be sure you get on our mailing list.

Intercollegiate athletics are an investment in community engagement. Private support is fueling a comprehensive overhaul of our athletic and recreational facilities. A new golf practice facility officially opened a few weeks ago.

But sports facilities are by no means our only priority. For the Spartans in the audience: anyone care to guess when San Jose State last opened a new academic building?

The answer is **1988**. Yep.

It has been three decades since the building that houses our Davidson College of Engineering—some still refer to it as the “new” engineering building—opened.

That soon will change. Thanks to state bond funds, plans are underway for the first phase of an interdisciplinary science and innovation complex.

Given that we’re the leading STEM campus in the region, that just makes sense. But we want to do even more, so we are seeking private support to maximize the potential for this exciting project.

Another thing I’ve learned in my first year here is that there’s precious little public support for capital improvements, even as we add students.

Amazingly, our community colleges—and even some high school districts—have an easier time securing public funding for facilities than public universities. And if you visited their science facilities, you’d see the results.

I’m thrilled for them, but four-year universities supply much of the talent needed in a rapidly changing workforce. This funding gap hopefully will be addressed at a policy level. But for now, we’re largely on our own.

So, if you or your company are interested in talking about a partnership, let me know. We’re open for business.

There is much more to be done if we are to meet the needs of our students, employers, and this region.

We are more than willing to do our part. I make it a priority to meet with business and community leaders like you, as well as local, state and federal officials. I’ve just returned from Washington, D.C. and I’m accumulating lots of air miles—even though I can’t *ever* seem to get an upgrade.

San Jose State isn't new to partnerships. Nearly 15 years ago, San Jose State and the City of San Jose broke new ground when the Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. library opened its doors. It was a first-of-its-kind partnership, and remains a national model for university/civic collaboration.

Two years ago, we did it again. The City and San Jose State reached an agreement for the university to operate the downtown Hammer Theatre Center—which some of you might remember as the San Jose Rep.

We're excited to be bringing back artistic and cultural programming to the South Bay, and helping to revitalize the city's central core.

And I believe we should do even more. My vision for San Jose State is that it become *the* premier American metropolitan public university. And I think it's important for the region that we fulfill that ambition.

Here's why: everyone needs more college-educated talent, but we also face significant policy challenges. Housing affordability is one; gridlock is another. The imbalance between jobs and housing in many communities is yet another.

Local communities are doing what they can; South Bay voters last November agreed to tax increases to fund housing and transportation improvements. But we need systemic, long-term solutions. A public university brings considerable intellectual and creative assets to the table.

And beyond that, ours is an essential voice in the critical conversation this Valley is having about diversity and gender equity.

After conferring nearly 10,000 degrees this spring, San Jose State now boasts close to 270,000 living alumni. At least **two-thirds** of them live and work in the Bay Area.

Recalling my earlier point about our uncommon diversity, it seems to me that we are poised to help the valley systematically address its diversity challenges.

Being a premier urban public university also means thinking long-term.

A community leader recently asked me if we had a five-year strategic plan for the university. We actually are embarking on a *ten-year* strategic plan. And truthfully, we ought to be imagining a *twenty-five* year plan.

I'm serious. First-generation mobile phones were introduced barely two decades ago. Facebook didn't exist fourteen years ago. Uber publicly launched just seven years ago. And, be honest—did you *really* imagine cars would drive themselves?

Change no longer is incremental; it is exponential. As an IBM executive recently told author Tom Friedman, “the future is closer than you think.”

So, we must think differently about how to serve a region that bears little resemblance today to a decade ago, and will look *very* different a decade from now.

I'm sure you heard or read about Google's plans for development in downtown San Jose. We've been working with community leaders for months to ensure that when BART comes to San Jose, the stations are where they'll best serve our long term needs. These are *100-year choices*.

And you, your families, your organizations and your employees will be impacted by those choices.

Great regions and great universities go together. San Jose State has a remarkable legacy, and big dreams. I'm counting on you to help us fulfill them.

Again, thank you inviting me to be with you today. Time permitting, I am happy to entertain a few questions.