

**Dr. Mary A. Papazian
President, San José State University
Rotary Club of Saratoga
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12:15 p.m.**

Thank you, Sandie, and thank you all for that warm Rotarian welcome. It's a privilege to speak to you today.

I'm told the Saratoga Rotary Club first met in 1955. As it happens, that's also the year a young man with a penchant for hard work...a winning smile...and a nose made permanently crooked in the water polo pool...began his studies at San José State University.

I mention this student because the 23rd Olympic Winter Games are currently underway in South Korea. I'm sure you've been following the events.

This San José State student, who graduated in 1959 with a degree in management, would go on to manage one of the greatest successes in Olympics history. In the process, he would help save the modern Olympics movement.

I'm talking, of course, about Peter Ueberroth, CEO of the 1984 Olympics in Los Angeles.

Back then, the Games were in big trouble. The Munich Games had ended in horrific violence. The Montreal Games were a financial failure. The Moscow Games of 1980 had fallen victim to global politics.

In fact, when the bidding opened for the 1984 Games, only two cities bothered to apply. One was Los Angeles—the citizens of which were decidedly underwhelmed by the prospect. The other was Tehran—which, at the time of the selection process, was otherwise occupied with the Iranian revolution.

New thinking and approaches were needed, and Peter was more than up to the task. Rather than build expensive new facilities—which, as so many host cities had learned, can quickly turn into White Elephants—Peter would embrace Southern California's sprawl, and for the most part scatter the Games across the region, in already available venues.

To raise money, and to take taxpayers off the hook, he decided to limit severely the number of corporate sponsors. This might seem counter-intuitive. But this decision made the sponsorships more valuable to corporate bidders, and allowed the LA Games to negotiate significantly greater amounts for the privilege.

This laid the foundation for the first privately financed Olympics. And when the 1984 Olympic Games came to a successful close, there would be a large enough funding surplus to underwrite an ongoing legacy of youth programs throughout greater Los Angeles.

In short, in his Olympic context, Peter Ueberroth was a creative thinker.

He was an innovator.

He was a game changer.

All of which is to say—in my admittedly biased view—he was, and he is, a Spartan.

San José State has never been only about buildings, or rankings, or academic accolades. San José State has *always* been about people. Our people are our legacy, and our people are our promise. Since the 19th century, students, and professors, and community members have convened on our campus looking to create, and to innovate. To offer new thinking. To explore fresh approaches.

“I like to find challenges that nobody else wants to tackle.” That’s what Peter told us in 2016. He came back to campus that year to receive the Tower Award, which is our university’s most prestigious honor.

Peter also said this: “When I can find something that’s never been tried this way or that way, I get interested. And I’m looking every day, looking forward, living in the future—not the past.”

Now that’s Spartan thinking. And he’s not the only Spartan who has lived by that creed.

There’s Amy Tan, Class of ‘72—a celebrated writer who gave voice to the experience of immigrants from China, much like the Armenian-American writer William Saroyan did for my own Armenian immigrant family members.

There's Harry Edwards, Class of '64—a scholar who is arguably the social conscience of sports in America, the founder of the Olympic Project for Human Rights, and a regular presence on our campus to this day.

There's the late Gaylord Nelson, class of '39—a U. S. Senator who created Earth Day, and galvanized a generation of environmental activists at a critical juncture for the health of our planet.

I could go on. From members of Congress, to Super Bowl coaches, to founders of major corporations, I'd put our who's who list of distinguished alumni up against that of any university in the country. Bar none.

But when it comes to people, the most significant San José State alumni are all around you. There are nearly 270,000 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 can be found singing arias at Opera San José, or playing percussion in a jazz club, or making films come alive with animation.

They contribute by the thousands at the tech companies that created what the world has come to know as Silicon Valley.

But they also walk among the homeless of San José—nurses, wearing backpacks filled with medical supplies, seeking out people on the streets in need of care.

In short, the people who come through San José State represent the living glue needed to bind together any thriving community.

My guess is that there are many Spartans among us here today...and by Spartans I mean alumni, retired or current professors and staff members, parents or

grandparents of San Jose State students, and sons and daughters (or even grandsons and granddaughters) of Spartans of yesteryear.

How about all you Spartans in the room stand up and be recognized.

Now, I'd like to take a moment and say this about all you members of the Saratoga Rotary. This club has a long tradition of service. "Service Above Self" is the first thing a visitor to your homepage reads; the words leap off the screen.

I applaud you for that tradition, and for the more than 2.5 million dollars your charitable foundation has distributed for so many worthy causes. It's truly impressive.

At San José State, we like to think we provide a service, too. Our university serves as a place for people to come together, to collaborate, and to explore new ways of thinking and living.

The Olympic motto is "Citius, Altius, Fortius"—"Faster, Higher, Stronger." That's the same energy you find among the people who make up San José State—a relentless, ceaseless, ever-growing energy that brings the power of possibility into the world around them.

Let me tell you about a bit about one average San José State student who embodies that energy. Actually, that's an oxymoron. Not one is average.

But the particular student I'm thinking about is named Eulises Valdovinos [you-LISS-ees] [vahl-do-VEE-nos]. When he was 12 years old and living in Mexico with his parents, Eulises returned to the United States to live with his oldest brother.

Eulises never thought about going to college. Many of his family members in Mexico didn't finish school beyond third grade. It wasn't until Eulises was a junior in high school that one of his teachers told him he needed to talk to a guidance counselor because, quote, he had "too much potential to waste."

Eulises enjoyed math and science, but he had no idea what he could do with those interests beyond high school. He thought perhaps he might go into a vocational program. But with the support of his counselor, his teachers, his brother, and even, from afar, his parents, Eulises began to look at college engineering programs, and

to focus on the necessary coursework he would need to be accepted into a university.

Ultimately, and fortunately for us, Eulises enrolled at San José State. That he would be the first in his family to attend college is not unusual on our campus. A large percentage of our 30,000 students fit into that category...about half of all the students in each entering freshman class...and California will be a better place because of it. Diversity is our greatest strength, and has been for generations. From a societal perspective, it's proven to be greater than gold. Greater even than silicon wafers.

Eulises majored in Industrial & Systems Engineering, and was honored as a President's Scholar. That means he held a 4.0 for *at least* two contiguous semesters. He graduated a year ago with a bachelor's degree. And in short order, he was hired by Oracle.

But Eulises's story doesn't end there. Like all of you, Eulises, too, has long been focused on "Service Above Self." As a first generation college student, Eulises wanted to make sure other students like him had the same guidance and support that he did.

So, just as Eulises's *older* brother helped him, Eulise began to mentor his *younger* brother. And soon he was mentoring other aspiring college students as well. In fact, by the time Eulises graduated from San José State, he was a peer advisor to more than 35 students in our MESA Engineering Program, which provides elementary, junior high, and high school students in the South Bay with hands-on learning opportunities in math, science, and engineering.

I can tell you that there's nothing more energizing than to walk among students like Eulises—to get to know them, to get to know their stories, and to get to know their dreams.

You want to be a pessimist? Turn on cable news.

You want to be an optimist? Spend an hour hanging out at Diaz-Compean Student Union.

Of course, what sits in the shadow between optimism and pessimism is reality. There's no doubt a lot of change has come to our region. And sometimes change can be hard to accept.

I'm an English literature scholar by training, and one of the great poets I studied was John Milton.

“Time numbers motion,” Milton wrote, and the words still ring true almost four centuries later. As long as time passes, the world’s motion does not cease; the world changes, it alters, it moves on.

Saratoga and its sister communities in the Santa Clara Valley are no longer surrounded by open space and orchards. With high tech has come high density...and high rent...and a whole heck of a lot of traffic. Those of a certain age might wonder today if their grandchildren will ever be able to afford a home in the community where they were raised.

Yet time numbers motion, and that motion cannot be resisted.

The challenge is to try and shape the change for the better. And this is where, in our shared community, those who put service over self—and those who come together to create and innovate—can work together in practical, meaningful ways.

There are things we can work on together.

The Bay Area’s quality of life issues...from income disparity, to pockets of urban blight...from housing costs, to transportation quagmires...these issues are very real, and they must be addressed.

At San José State, we aim to do our part. With nearly 40,000 students, faculty and staff, we are a city within the heart of the nation’s 10th largest city. We are the only public university in Silicon Valley, and we consider it both our honor and our obligation to keep looking for ways to serve our region.

We joined with the city to open the doors of the Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr., Library on our campus to San José as a whole. This is the first library in the country to be co-developed and co-managed by a city and a university.

In that same spirit of collaboration, the city of San José approved a plan to allow the university to operate the Hammer Theatre Center, which had been shuttered by bankruptcy.

And then there's the partnership we call CommUniverCity. For more than a decade, San José State students by the thousands have gone into the neighborhoods near our campus to survey residents, catalog their concerns, and, in collaboration with their professors, explore ways to address the issues our neighbors face. Collectively, our students have contributed more than 280,000 hours to these efforts.

Dayana Salazar, a professor of urban and regional planning who leads the partnership, says the fruits of this work will take time to reach full bloom.

She has said, quote: "It's going to take many years for us to capture the impact of what's happening. You have to be quite persistent and keep at it until something major happens."

I'm not worried about the persistence part.

For generations, San José State University has been right here in the heart of the Santa Clara Valley, adapting to the changes, taking on the challenges, and working in so many ways to make this vital corner of California an even better place.

And I can tell you. We are just getting started.

Thank you.