Good morning to you all, and thank you for your warm welcome. The opportunity to serve Cuesta College in this new role as superintendent/president is both exciting and intimidating. The outpouring of support from you, the campus community, and the citizens of the communities that we serve has been, needless to say, very humbling.

I am going to be speaking to you today about three topics: gratitude, history, and legacy. To understand me, you need to know me, so that as we work together through these challenging times, you will have a greater sense of what drives my decision-making process… what I value as a college president.

Nine months and fourteen days from today will mark the 50th anniversary of the tragic crash of an airplane that carried 37
members of the 1960 Cal Poly football team, the team manager, 4 coaches, a sports writer, a booster, and 5 members of the flight crew. Twenty-two people were killed, and twenty-six of us survived and were forever bonded together. As a survivor, I often reflect on that day, that fateful day that had such an incredibly powerful impact on my life.

As teammates we all arrived on campus in August of 1960 with big dreams and hopes for the upcoming football season. The 1959 team had gone 6 and 3, but lost 25 players to graduation and transfer. Seventeen varsity players returned to form the nucleus of our team, nine sophomores came up from the undefeated freshmen team, and another fourteen players transferred in from junior college and other college programs.

We had an unusual mix of players in that some of us were married, some of us had children, and some of us were typical 19 and 20 year olds, like me, just learning what life was all about. We had “old guys” like Ray Porras, Don O’Meara, John Bell, and Don Adams who were 26 and 27 years old, and the kid, Jerry Williams who was just 18 at the time.
We came from all over California … from Gridley in the north, Escondido in the south, Barstow to the east, and, yes, even San Luis Obispo. The largest group and, I might add the most rowdy and spirited came from Bakersfield. We also had players from Detroit, Chicago, and Alberta, Canada.

We had nicknames like Bumper, Dauph, BJ, Buzzy, Brownie, and General. We later found out that “General” Owens was actually his real name and not a self-appointed rank!

But, despite our differences, we all came together with a common purpose, which was to play Mustang football.

On October 29, 1960 we found ourselves in Bowling Green, Ohio trying to rebound from having lost the two previous weeks on the road at Fresno and Long Beach. We were facing one of the top small college teams in the country and knew that we were in for a tough afternoon. Even though our quarterback, Ted Tollner, had a record setting day passing, we were soundly defeated and looked forward to our return trip to San Luis Obispo.
We boarded the bus bound for the Toledo airport, drove through an extremely foggy countryside, boarded our twin-engine airplane, and waited for clearance to take-off. After receiving the OK, we taxied down the runway amidst a blinding fog, lifted off the ground momentarily, heard the left engine quit, sensed a moment of quiet, suddenly broken by screams as the aircraft begin to fall…. Then disaster struck!

The next few days and weeks were somewhat of a blur. Some of us returned home immediately, some of us stayed in the hospital to heal before traveling, and some of us never returned home.

Some of us lived, some of us died, and some around us were not a part of the crash at all, but we were all victims of this tragedy. Of those 26 who survived the crash, some returned to finish their education at Cal Poly, some never returned to campus.

Some of us have been able to lead fairly normal, successful lives having moved passed the tragedy. Some of us have struggled with survivor’s guilt, trying to find an explanation as to why some were killed and some were spared. Some of us
have harbored deep seeded anger over our losses and the losses of others. Some of us have been disappointed in the fact that the university took so long to establish a significant and meaningful remembrance to those whose young lives were taken so early.

But, I can tell you, as one survivor, Mustang Memorial Plaza, located at the south end of the stadium, which was created and dedicated in 2006, will forever play a significant role in my own grieving and healing processes.

In the University facilities master plan, there will be a parking structure built just to the south of the football stadium. People will come from the structure, walk through the plaza area, and enter the stadium. Thousands of people in the years to come will see this plaza, be able to learn about this historic event in the life of Cal Poly athletics, and meet face-to-face these fallen warriors.

This sacred place on campus provides a permanent, public monument to our brothers – a place that we can take our wives, husbands, brothers, sisters, children, grand children, and other significant people in our lives – to tell them the story
of these eighteen individuals, to teach them the importance of
the gift of life and to never take it for granted -
   Make each day count;
   Make each relationship meaningful.

When I visit Mustang Memorial Plaza, I am able to, once
again, “huddle up” with my teammates, embrace each one with
a hug, look each one in the eye and whisper to him,
   “Hi, brother.
   I love you.
   I miss you.
   I think of you often.
   I will never, ever forget you!”

I share this story with you today, not to sensationalize this
historic event, but rather to share with you its impact on me
and how I see the world. The first six years following the crash
were filled with anger, guilt, suffering, sorrow, healing, and
lengthy litigation. But, when my first child was born in 1966,
when I witnessed the miracle of life being created before me, I
began to realize that my survival was truly a gift… a gift that
allowed me to move on in this world and try to make a
difference in other people’s lives. I have had the opportunity
to finish college, get married, have a meaningful career, have a family, be a grandfather… experiences that my fallen teammates would never realize. To honor their memory, I share my life experiences with them each time I pay a visit to Memorial Plaza. My life today is filled with gratitude… I am grateful for a second chance in life, I am grateful for my family, I am grateful to the faculty, staff, and students of Cuesta College for their part in helping shape my career and personal development, and I am truly grateful to have the opportunity to lead this college and to work along side each of you as we move forward during these difficult times.

In the spring of 1959, just prior to my graduation from San Luis Obispo High School, San Luis Obispo Junior College was informed that it was losing its accreditation and would need to close. The college, which was housed on the high school campus, had been in operation since 1936. In the absence of a local junior college, local high school graduates could attend Allan Hancock, Taft, College of Sequoias, or Hartnell. Local property taxes would follow those students in order to support the cost of educating them in another district.
The 1960’s

Finally, in April of 1963, the voters of San Luis Obispo County approved the formation of the San Luis Obispo County Junior College District. Dr. Merlin Eisenbise was appointed as the first president, and he, in turn, chose his Citrus College colleague, Dr. Frank Martinez, to be his Vice President for Instruction. Together, with two large cardboard boxes, a leased office in the County Office of Education, a college was born. Originally targeting a Fall 1965 start, it was learned that Allan Hancock was infiltrating the south county with classes. Some things just don’t change!!!!

To offset this southern assault, Dr. Martinez wrote the entire curriculum, and evening classes were offered in Fall 1964. They were held at San Luis Obispo Junior High School, Paso Robles High School, Atascadero High School, and Arroyo Grande High School. The enrollment that first semester was 463 students. All teachers were part-time.

The first classified employee and just the fourth person overall to be hired by the college was Elaine Coates. She served as secretary to the superintendent/president as well as to the two assistant superintendents. Following her retirement in 1992,
she returned as a part-time hourly employee in 1993 working in various offices including the Foundation Office until 2008.

Also during that 1964-65 year, the first full-time faculty and staff were hired... First the eight division chairs: Harald Platou in Biological Sciences, Dr. Jay Basseri in Business Education, Arnold Frank, in Engineering/Math/Technology, Dr. Earle Blakeslee in Fine Arts, Dr. Ivan Jones in Language Arts, John Bowen in Physical Sciences, and Frank Avila in Social Sciences. Following the chairs selection, 30 other faculty hires were made to round out the original full-time faculty.

By the 1965 fall semester, property had been secured at Camp San Luis Obispo, and barracks, mess halls, and other facilities were refurbished to hold classes. A full schedule of day and evening classes was developed with 917 day students and 991 evening students enrolling. On October 4, 1965 the name Cuesta College was officially chosen following a spirited balloting process which included other possible names such as Tolosa, Santa Lucia, and even Frog Hollow.
In November 1966 a construction bond measure was placed before county voters for $12 million which would have built the entire campus. It was rejected by the voters.

By 1967 when I joined the Cuesta family, we didn’t have many amenities in terms of classrooms and campus surroundings, but what we did have was amazing camaraderie and a pioneering spirit. All of our mail boxes were in the same place, so you regularly saw colleagues from all other disciplines. My box was between Dick Stone in Business and Chris Thorup in Social Sciences.

In January 1968, the Western Association of Schools and Colleges granted Cuesta College its first accreditation, initially for a 3-year period. This meant that Cuesta could now apply for federal and state financial assistance to upgrade temporary campus buildings on the National Guard site.

The 1970’s
The second decade of Cuesta’s history featured continued rapid growth, developing a master plan for the campus, passing two construction bonds, and building a campus. In 1970, following the purchase of 150 acres of military property
adjacent to Highway 1, the voters approved our first construction bond measure for $5 million. In 1970, a military chapel was converted into the Interact Theater seating 150 patrons, thus replacing the original theater on the Old Campus, called the Play Box. It seated only 30.

On October 15, 1970 a ground breaking ceremony was held on the site where the men’s Physical Education shower and locker room would be built in 1972. This project was quickly followed by the construction of the science complex which opened in 1973. These buildings contained state-of-the-art equipment featuring latest technology for the time: remote slide projectors, movies controlled from the podium in the science forum, and an electronic periodic chart that featured lighted chemical elements. The physics lab had an HP45 scientific calculator cabled to every lab station. They were purchased for $450 each. This was a technology that is available today in many cereal boxes as a “prize.”

As each of these projects was completed, faculty and staff moved from what we called the “Old Campus” to the “New Campus.” It was challenging for students, especially if they had back-to-back classes on both sites getting to class on time.
It was also in 1973, that the Cuesta College Foundation was formed for the purpose of raising private gifts to support student scholarships.

A second construction bond measure for $8.5 million was approved on November 5, 1974 which provided the funding for much of the remaining permanent campus. During 1974-76, the library, business and engineering classrooms, cafeteria and bookstore, business and engineering offices, language arts classrooms, and the language arts/social sciences office buildings were completed. In 1977, the Humanities forum opened for instruction.

During this very active period of construction with faculty and staff relocating from the old campus to the new site, a change began to take place that affected the close working relationships that we had with each other. Not only did we have a split college on two different sites, but the new “campus culture” featured programs and staff organized in clusters of buildings. No more were the common area mail boxes; no more were there opportunities to just “run into” a colleague from another division. What used to happen naturally required much effort by everyone to stay connected.
Dr. Eisenbise retired in early 1977, and Dr. Frank Martinez was appointed as the second president of Cuesta College on February 19, 1977. During his first year as president, the gymnasium, auto/welding/electronics labs, and the snack shelter were completed.

On June 6, 1978, shortly into the second year of Dr. Martinez’s presidency, Proposition 13, titled the People’s Initiative to Limit Property Taxation was approved by the voters. This landmark legislative amendment stripped the authority of local Boards of Trustees to set local property taxes to support schools and colleges. The limit on property tax growth and the funding of schools and colleges shifted to state control. The impact on Cuesta College was devastating. Classes were eliminated, operating budgets were frozen, hiring freezes were enforced, all off-campus classes, centers, and coordinators were suspended, and the most dastardly deed of all was committed… intercollegiate football was eliminated. The name of the game was “survival.” In spring 1979, the college established two off campuses centers, one at Templeton High School and the other at Arroyo Grande High School. Not only were classes offered but support services as well.
The 1980’s

The decade of the 80’s didn’t start much better than the 70’s ended. The college was, however, with the remaining construction bond money, able to build the current administration building, even though it ended up half of its original size. The president’s office, administrative services, and human resources all moved from the library building to the new building.

In the early 80’s, California faced an economic downturn leading to a recession in 1982. The state, in an attempt to limit certain types of classes that colleges were offering, published its first “hit list;” classes that would no longer be funded. The state and the college slowly recovered, followed by improved funding and enrollment growth. In the absence of football, the swimming pool complex was completed, men’s and women’s swimming were added, men’s water polo was introduced, as well as women’s basketball and softball.

As the 80’s came to a close, rapid growth led to many new faculty hires in 1988 and 1989. It also meant the end of another decade and a change of presidents. Dr. Martinez
retired in 1988, and Dr. Grace Mitchell became the third president of Cuesta College, taking office March 15, 1989. The students voted to tax themselves for the purpose of building a student center that future students in the years to come would enjoy.

The 1990’s
The decade of the 90’s was one of change, planning, adjustment to a new downturn in the economy, unionization, community outreach, expansion, and new school colors. The state economy began to turn downward in the early 90’s creating a climate of limited resources and many demands.

No new buildings had been built in ten years, but additional space was needed. Expansion took place by means of leasing multiple portable buildings to accommodate the Foundation, Community Programs, Faculty Offices, Associated Students, Health Center, and Academic Administration.

In October 1994, the Student Center and expanded bookstore opened for business. The revenue collected from the student center fee, combined with bookstore profits, provided a
revenue stream to pay off the money borrowed to build this very important complex.

The faculty voted to enter the arena of collective bargaining in 1994, and a first collective bargaining agreement was ratified on October 2, 1996.

Even though funding was flat, it was a perfect time to plan for the next twenty years. The first Education and Facilities Master Plan since the late 60’s was written which identified future programs, services, buildings, and expanded campus sites as well as a time-line for implementation. Proposals for new buildings were submitted to the state for consideration so that as construction funds became available, Cuesta College would be in a position to receive funding.

As the state recovered from its economic woes, funding for community colleges improved with an emphasis on growth. Cuesta grew steadily through the mid to late 90’s reaching an enrollment high in 1998.
In 1995, the Allied Health and Nursing building was completed and named in honor of Ada Irving who was an avid supporter of the health sciences and major donor to the program.

Over the previous two decades citizens of the north county consistently reminded the Board and the college president that Cuesta had not delivered its promise to build a campus north of Cuesta Grade. As the college struggled with finding the resources to purchase land and then find the funding to build buildings, a group of very eager, influential north county residents met with Dr. Mitchell and insisted on helping the college to secure a site and raise the money to have a campus. The Foundation was called upon to engage in its first capital campaign – a departure from the role of primarily providing funds for scholarships. The $4 million support that came forth from private donors, businesses, and organizations was phenomenal.

A piece of land was identified as a suitable site located off Highway 46 in Paso Robles, and in July 1996 John and Berna Dallons bought the 82-acre parcel for $435,000, holding it until the college received funding from a state bond to pay them back. Two million dollars worth of portable buildings were
secured through a surplus program at Vandenberg Air Force Base for just the cost of moving them, and the city of Paso Robles annexed the college property to allow us to have access to city services. Much work took place to ready the new campus for students, but the doors opened on August 17, 1998 to 1,292 very appreciative students.

Later that fall, in December 1998, the late Russ Kiessig and his wife Carol donated an additional 23 acres adjacent to the north county campus property. That site will house the future Trades and Technical Center and will be named in honor of the Kiessigs.

The decade of the 90’s closed with a familiar ring to it… the retirement of a president, Dr. Mitchell in 1998, and the arrival of Cuesta’s fourth president, Dr. Marie Rosenwasser, on August 1, 1999.

The 2000’s
Near the end of the 90’s the voters of California passed construction bonds that allowed Cuesta College to make significant progress in completing the facility development plan outlined in the Facilities Master Plan.
Construction began early in 2000 for the Fine Arts and Music remodel and expansion project which provided new photography and digital art labs, lecture hall, recording studio, offices, and the art gallery. Also under construction were the Children’s Center and Human Development classrooms and offices. This new facility paved the way for the Children’s Center to move from the old campus where it resided alone for 14 years. Also under construction, with the help of a $2 million capital campaign mounted by the Foundation, was the Hi Tech Center. These projects were completed in 2002 and helped catapult the college into the computer networked era. The new millennium found Cuesta turning to the web to automate many of the services that were provided to students, such as course history, financial aid status, ordering transcripts, holds on records, and registration.

State funding for community colleges took another hit as California struggled to stabilize its economy. For the first time, categorical programs were cut by 30-40% with Matriculation and DSPS being impacted the hardest. Both areas suffered staff reductions as well as other positions on campus being affected resulting in workload reductions.
Distance Learning became the new buzz word, and students were searching for classes and program options that would make their education more flexible to fit their complex lives involving work, family, and child care. No longer were students interested in taking a 5-day per week algebra class, but were demanding MWF and TTH options.

The Education and Facilities Master Plan was updated in 2003 and the first permanent building on the North County Campus was completed in Summer 2005. With the addition of the Math/Science/Allied Health building enrollment rose to 4,000 by the 2009 Spring semester. State funding was approved for the Library expansion project after a five-year wait and the Library expansion was completed in 2006, only one project from the original Facilities Master Plan for the San Luis Obispo campus remained – the theater. First planned in the mid-90’s, construction was finally started in 2006.

Dr. Rosenwasser retired in 2006, and Dr. Dave Pelham became the fifth president, arriving in March 2008. Dr. Pelham has since left the college.
Today we are appreciating the efforts of those faculty, staff, and administrators that put a vision for a theater on paper, worked with architects and planners, and saw their dream put on hold time after time. Some of those left the college, some new faces came on board and tweaked the project, and many are here today who are celebrating their collective dream, their contributions, their legacy for the future.

**Legacy**

So, here we are, at the beginning of the second decade of the 21st century, and the State of California has done it to us again. The story has been repeated in every decade of this college’s history, and we have somehow survived each time. This time, however, the economic impact on community colleges is the most severe in my 46 years in public education. These are EXTRAORDINARY times that will demand EXTRAORDINARY actions.

Community colleges in California have had the reputation of being everything to everybody. This is no longer a reality. The core mission of community colleges in California is to provide programs and services for students engaged in transfer, career/technical training, and basic skills. Everything that lies
outside that core is subject for evaluation, especially if general fund dollars are being expended. Much of what happens in our professional and personal lives, we have little or no control. All we can control is how we respond to it.

Twelve months from now, we will be a different college…

- We will be a college that can live within the funding provided by the state legislature,
- We will be a college that will be doing less, but with elevated level of excellence and greater sense of pride,
- We will be a college that, with the help of Institutional Advancement, will aggressively pursue private gift support,
- We will be a college that will provide its staff and students with a sense of certainty - a certainty of continued employment, a certainty of classes delivered,
- We will be a college where trust is a creed to live by and not just a slogan on a bumper sticker,
- We will be a college where each employee will assume a responsibility to make Cuesta a better place to work, a better place to learn,
- We will be a college that celebrates its history, and honors its retirees and alumni,
• We will be a college where consultation is a welcomed process, and it is clearly understood that the president is charged with making the final decision,
• We will be a college that serves our students with dignity and respect,
• We will be a college that serves each other with dignity and respect, and
• We will be a college where creating our own legacy for the next decade of employees and students will be our PASSION and not our OBLIGATION.

“The future of Cuesta College is in OUR hands.”