

Investiture Remarks

By David Roland Finley, Ph.D., North Central Michigan College

Thank you very much Chairman Millard and members of the North Central Michigan College Board of Trustees. I extend further thanks to college and university delegates present, as well federal, state, tribal, and local officials in attendance. (I am very pleased to recognize Eric Keller of U.S. Senator Gary Peters' Office and Jason Kargol of U.S. Representative Jack Bergmann's Office.) To the North Central students, faculty, staff, and administration, you are why we gather this evening...to honor our heritage, celebrate our outstanding students, and forge the future together. To my parents, a very special thanks for being here this evening and instilling in me a belief that anything I dreamed was possible. (More about this later...) To my children—who are now young adults—thank you for being here, thank you for your abiding support...go out and conquer the world! To my wife Heidi, thank you most of all for believing in me through thick and thin, and always standing by my side. This evening would not be possible without you.

Before my remarks, I want to be certain to thank all those who have had a hand in making this evening happen. This includes Carol Laenen (you've truly gone above and beyond in the midst of adversity), Renee DeYoung, Megan Van Horn, Pete Olson, Ernst Rusche and the entire Physical Plant team, the IT staff, and last but certainly not least Laura and the crew in Conference Services. You all are amazing!

In the early 1950s, the plan to establish a community college in Emmet County began. A small group of thoughtful citizens shared a vision. With a sense of unity, conscience, and purpose, these citizens began a journey to create North Central Michigan College... This new institution would ensure that education beyond high school would be available, financially possible, and conveniently located.

Established in 1958, North Central held its first classes on September 14, 1959 in the old Sheridan School Building. An enrollment of 105 students that first year clearly demonstrated that the vision for a college in Petoskey had met a local need.

Over the next three decades, programs such as nursing, allied health, criminal justice and data processing began. (I think that last program is now call data analytics.) These programs continue to the present day. A 207-acre campus was established in 1960, and the first buildings were opened just three years later.

During these early years, the college was on the fast track. Accreditation was earned from the Michigan Association of College Accreditation in 1962, and full accreditation obtained, from what is now the Higher Learning Commission, a decade later.

By 1984, enrollment had grown to 1,800 students. With the increase in programs, students and staff, the Petoskey campus expanded, and education centers were added in Cheboygan and Gaylord.

The last two decades have seen the construction of the Student and Community Resource Center and the Jack & Dorothy Harris Health Education and Science Center. What's more, the spectacular Harris Sculpture Garden was built, with world-class art gathered from all across the country. During this time, University Center partnerships were formalized, the new mobile digital Fab Lab launched, and the College garnered Achieving the Dream Leader College distinction, among many, many other initiatives.

History will be kind to Dr. Koch and her predecessors Bob Graham and Al Shankland, AND...to all of you, those who've assisted in the efforts to improve the physical plant, strengthen the connection with our community, and open doors for students via higher education, **thank you**. We are truly fortunate to do this is important and meaningful work!

It is now MY honor and privilege to serve as the fourth president of North Central Michigan College. I believe that a president (of any institution) should lead by personal example and guide the further development of this academic community by emphasizing excellence. The president should have a vision of the future and the capacity to guide the institution carefully and prudently to achieve its goals.

In this regard, I have made four commitments that will guide my tenure as president:

1. to maintain the historic mission of the College—higher education that is **exceptional**, accessible, financially possible, and located near the Emmet County learner--high school students and returning adults (with a service area expanded to include all Tip of the Mitt counties);
2. to serve this College's purpose by assisting faculty and staff in their efforts to give their very best service
3. to manage carefully and well the human and financial resources the College now enjoys; and
4. to be available, approachable, sensitive, and open to students, faculty, trustees, alumni, and friends of the College

I have made these commitments because I believe that this institution can be even better—I want North Central to become the model rural community college, one that others choose to emulate! There are certainly challenges ahead, but I see these trials as opportunities. And, success is contagious! When an institution is prized and has a good momentum, people want to be a part of it.

North Central has all of the components, both tangible and intangible, needed to project a strong, positive image. I have seen them; they are the reasons that I am here. They include the high quality of our academic programs; the strength, quality, dedication, and loyalty of the

faculty and staff; first-rate facilities; the strong sense of community; the success of North Central alumni; the leadership of the College's Board of Trustees; and the support of our alumni and friends.

I am encouraged and optimistic, because of our potential, our challenges, our opportunities, and ultimately... our promising future. I ask you to assist me in directing and channeling our energies as a team, never losing sight of why we are here—to provide the very best education possible to our students.

Today, North Central Michigan College enrolls over 2,200 students in credit-bearing courses. For these students, North Central offers 24 Associate Degrees and 39 Certificates. The academic programs we offer lead to careers in business and industry, as well as the health, human services, and education fields. Our exceptional programs include the creative arts, natural sciences, and social sciences. Life on campus is vibrant, led by Student Senate and the Phi Theta Kappa National Honor Society. Service learning opportunities also allow for personal growth and the opportunity to give back.

Please allow me to share a few more facts about the College. With over 230 employees and an annual budget of nearly \$17 million, North Central Michigan College has a significant economic impact in northern Michigan. North Central's Lecture Series brings high-profile, national speakers to the Petoskey campus each year, and the College's Luncheon Lectures brings up to six regional speakers of interest to campus each semester.

Financial aid awarded in 2017-18 totaled nearly \$6 million, with 80% of our students receiving such assistance. Since 1960, the College has awarded over 11,000 total credentials (degrees or certificates) to over 10,000 students. Many more learners receive non-credit skills training through our Corporate and Community Education Division.

If all of those directly impacted by the College are counted, we have many alumni! What's more, these alumni have gone on to have amazing accomplishments and impact in their careers. We have alumni who craft national health policy (that would be tomorrow's Commencement speaker), another who provides international disaster relief (including Ebola in west Africa, earthquakes in Haiti and Nepal, and war in South Sudan), many others who've launched companies as entrepreneurs, still others that lead non-profits throughout the region, and even one who sailed solo around the world!

Having shared my optimism for the future and some facts about North Central today, I believe that three opportunities exist to move the College forward immediately. As such, I recommend that we pursue these initiatives even prior to the finalization of the new Strategic Plan.

- #1) We must pursue **mutually beneficial partnerships** with corporate and educational entities throughout the region. Examples include health care, hospitality, and Career & Technical Education (CTE).
- #2) We must adapt the **mode(s) in which we deliver learning opportunities**. Online programs, eight-week accelerated courses, and paid apprenticeships are but three examples. 'Bite-sized chunks of learning' for nontraditional students that lead to a credential are the future.

#3) **Conference and Events Services** must grow significantly in scale and scope, driven by strong curricular alignment, as it is no longer possible to exist by the growth of tuition revenue alone.

Finally (and this is actually an overarching opportunity), it is incumbent upon the College to become the convener for important conversations regarding the future of this region. We cannot solve every challenge. Our forte is to provide higher education to solve some of the problems that we face. Nonetheless, we can expand our role as the 'community's College' and serve as the venue where shared issues are discussed. As a community, we will find solutions for issues such as affordable housing, childcare, transportation, and the lack of available tradespeople.

During the Welcome Back Breakfast held for College faculty and staff last August, I shared Ten Points of Focus to guide our actions moving forward. The good news is that I won't repeat these ten points here. However, the really good news is that we are making progress on each of these fronts. Working together with purpose, I am confident that we will build an even better North Central Michigan College in the decade to come.

As I shared with campus last week, things are not always as they seem. In fact...for just a moment this evening, there was question as to which hat I ought wear! But I digress...

As a college president, I am often dressed in a suit and tie (or even regalia), but this has not always been the case. Allow me to explain with a brief story. Only one of my grandparents earned a high school education. There was no need for this 'book learning' in the 1920s and 1930s to work back on the farm.

A generation later my parents took a significant step forward by both graduating from high school. This had become the expectation in the United States by the 1960s. However, neither attended college. A high school education was sufficient to garner reputable employment off the farm.

Even so, we lived modestly as I grew up. There was certainly enough to go around, but few extravagances. In retrospect, I now see my youth as an idyllic childhood, playing in the woods of rural southern Michigan when not in school. I was very fortunate. There was always the expectation that I would go to college. This was not true for many of my classmates. My parents saw this as the path to a well-paying job. Higher education would lead to the American Dream.

As I now reflect, it is remarkable that both my younger brother and I graduated from the University of Michigan in Ann Arbor. The 1980s were an era when hardworking students of modest means could afford to attend college via summer earnings and the help of federal and state grants.

Fast forward to 2019... We now live in a 'college economy.' Two-thirds of the jobs that pay a livable wage require higher education, be it a degree or a certificate. Given this fact, it is ironic that the return on investment (or ROI) of such higher education is called into question. Unfortunately, tuition has risen to be out of reach for many Americans.

In many ways, Michigan's Tip of the Mitt today is no different from the rural southern Michigan of my youth. In fact, the socioeconomic variances may be even more extreme. A recent Frey Foundation report described this area as 'Poverty in Paradise.' The report poignantly states:

On the shores of two Great Lakes, two Michigans are pulling away from one another. For one, graceful summer homes rise on waterfronts, equipped with boats, tubes and toys. For the other, life is lived in trailers on back roads, or small houses tucked into the woods. One comes north in May and enjoys a summer of festivals, fun and restaurant dining. The other Michigan lives here year-round and waits tables or changes hotel beds. One is, like the state at large, recovering from the recession and building wealth. The other slips deeper into, or closer to, poverty.

Given this growing socioeconomic divide—and the crippling effects of student loan debt—consider the opportunity and responsibility that North Central Michigan College bears. It is vital that we continue to offer exceptional, accessible, and relevant higher education to the students we serve.

In closing, I note that choosing this path will provide a substantial return. (It is the return on investment—ROI—of which I just spoke.) This path will benefit, not only the individual student, but also to our host communities. Vibrant local communities, with an educated populous, make for a robust State of Michigan. This, in turn, strengthens our Nation. Such a plan is simply good sense. As those who shared a vision for this college over sixty years ago, let us choose opportunity!

Thank you.