

# **INAUGURATION ADDRESS**

**April 2, 2005**

**WVU Parkersburg**

**Marie Foster Gnage, Ph.D.**

Thank you, President Hardesty, for your remarks and for your introduction. The investiture ceremony is made even more special by the fact that this medallion that I am wearing is a replica of the West Virginia at Parkersburg medallion designed and created by a member of the faculty, Professor Henry Aglio.

Good afternoon to all of you. Thank you one and all for coming on this day to celebrate a new addition to the traditions of this college. I especially thank you for braving the rains to be here. I keep in mind that rain is a necessary ingredient for growth and renewal. Thank you speakers for your kind and inspiring words, to our musicians for their tone-setting cadences, and to Troop 7 for presenting the reminders of our heritage and allegiance. I am truly honored to have been named the sixth president of West Virginia University at Parkersburg and to be the college's opportunity to celebrate.

I am very pleased to have such wonderful people and esteemed colleagues participating in this Inaugural ceremony as well as in the Inauguration week activities. This week has been a tremendous week and the Inauguration committee is to be applauded—note their names in your program. The week began with a history lesson on West Virginia University at Parkersburg by Professor Emeritus Bernie Allen at the community's Parkersburg Arts Center. On the following day, Open House at the college began with prospective students in the persons of 87 Neale Elementary School students who sang for us—Neale Elementary School is one of our partnership schools--and continued with academic division exhibits—from history lessons to economic impact study and a Nursing alumni reception offered by the Nursing Division. The week continued with inspirational readings—Chicken Soup for the President's Soul, a community reception at the Jackson County Center where a community member entertained with vocals and guitar, a luau, Spring Sweep for campus beautification and a celebration of donors. If you tried to attend all of these activities, you know the feeling of being tired yet exhilarated, as I have experienced.

Thank you to the faculty and staff who nourish and support our students for donning your regalia for an additional time this year. To the students of West Virginia University Parkersburg and WVU, This is your history; this moment is about you and is dedicated to you. To the members of our communities, this is your college. To the community—those who donated to make this event happened—you have **again** shown your commitment to this college.

Thank you Board of Governors and Board of Advisors members, Mayors, fellow presidents, delegates and distinguished guests and community. Specifically, I thank President Hardesty my newest mentor, President Lang who supports me even in my unawares, and to Board of Advisors Chair Joe Campbell, one of WVUP's most ardent advocates. You all add radiance to our proceedings and I am truly grateful.

A point of personal privilege... I want to thank my family for traveling many miles to be with me today: I begin with someone who used to write my speeches for me until she could teach me to do so for myself, my beautiful 90+ year-

old mother, Mrs. Etta B. Booth of Collins, Mississippi. My siblings are here, five of the six. In birth order they are Lillian of Dallas, Pearl from Scottsdale, Rosie-St Louis, Carolyn-- Jackson, MS and Alesia--Atlanta. I thank my daughter, Kendra, for foregoing Australia to be with me. I acknowledge my husband and best friend and fellow college president, Dr. David Gnage, who is ever with me in spirit. And to my many friends....I express to all of you the depth of gratitude that is really impossible to articulate. I owe this incredible opportunity to family and friends and mentors who nurtured and encouraged my study in higher education and my philosophy of access to learning and higher education for all.

At this moment in time, WVU Parkersburg and I are experiencing some firsts. For the institution, this is the first inauguration. This is a first presidency for me. For the college, I am the first female president, the first African American President, and you can put the latter two together for another first. But the institution and I have in common that we have been in the business of education for quite some time.

Having a first inauguration has required a great deal of explanation. The best explanation that can be given is that it is a celebration of an institution's coming of age. My appointment gave opportunity for the college to celebrate itself: this day is *a little* about me and *a lot* about West Virginia University at Parkersburg. Inaugurations are not personal events; they are for the college. An inauguration serves as a bridge between the past and the future and is a vantage point between the past and what is possible. At this moment in time, both WVUP and I are probably more than we thought we could be and not nearly as much as we are going to be. Celebrate this college, its distinguished past and its bright future.

The role of President of West Virginia University at Parkersburg connects me with seven counties in the State of West Virginia--my territory, but since the need for opportunities in education have no boundaries, it also connects me to the whole of West Virginia and the world. I feel at home in West Virginia. Don't worry, I won't start singing, although I must tell you that when West Virginia University's band plays the song,...chills and tears. The

mountains, hills and valleys are here to fall in love with even as they are somewhat symbolic of the challenges that we as citizens of this state face. Challenge and opportunity.

Inaugurations are occasions that encourage reflection, and they provide the opportunity to set the stage for future acts. Let's look at WVUP's past and then let's take a look at its future. Dr. Bernie Allen was with us earlier this week to speak on the history of the college and its place in this community. He titles his story: WVUP--Wise Ventures Undertaken for Power--emphasizing that as Francis Bacon noted, "Knowledge is Power. This college has a great history with "threads" reaching back as far as the late 1800's when some in the valley recognized the need for a higher education and asked for the establishment of a college. This great college has a history of reinventing itself--it has been substantially re-imagined and invented anew. There are those in this audience today, I am sure, who remember the college's beginnings back in 1961 as the Parkersburg branch of West Virginia University, a time of limited but much appreciated opportunity for public higher education. Certainly, Dr. Bill Coffindaffer remembers: he was here and was the visionary. He saw today. So many sectors of the

community merged efforts to make higher education possible. Example: Camden Clark Hospital and St Joseph's hospital closed their nursing schools and their faculty became faculty of WVU Parkersburg Center. Wood County voters approved a bond levy for the construction of a facility on the county poor farm. What foresight the community had! In 1971 when Parkersburg Community College became a reality--the college that this community built. How symbolic is it that the land on which this college stands was once a poor farm!!! The poor farm becomes the place for increasing ability of the people to have economic stability. The county provided the land and a full service college became the result. What was then made available to the community was a comprehensive two-year college experience, with four-year college opportunities offered on site by state colleges. The college's mission broadened even more after legislation caused a change in 1989 to West Virginia University at Parkersburg. Each iteration has provided for the seven counties staked out as the college's scope with additional higher education opportunities. The Mid-Ohio Valley now has a regional campus of West Virginia University that is a baccalaureate/associate college-- a two-year community college, offering several four-year programs, and serving as

a host campus for other baccalaureate degrees and also masters degree programs. In addition, the college provides workforce development opportunities. There is no doubt that being a regional campus of West Virginia University has given the college a level of note that it would not have otherwise. WVU Parkersburg is prominent in the legacy of this community. The college's odyssey is analogous to those of the students who enroll here.

We pause to thank those with the ingenuity and foresight. We are here today because so many before us--some who are still with us--had the courage to dream big dreams—Dr. Bill Coffindaffer, Dr. Eldon Miller, Dr. Erik Bitterbaum... My predecessors may have differed in their approach to education, but we share the trait of dreaming even when we dream in different ways, of having vision for an even better WVUP.

I am here because I have a deep appreciation for the power of higher education to transform lives and for the contributions it makes in advancing knowledge, human understanding and the quality of life. This is the moment in time when I can provide the leadership to achieve the

college's vision. That vision is to be the regional college of choice...what does that mean? It means that when parents think of college for their children or themselves, they think of WVUP as the place to go; when students talk about where they WANT to go, they say WVUP; when adults think of returning to college, they think WVUP; when companies need customized training, they know that WVUP is the place to go. We, the college community and I, have developed a strategic plan and are already engaged in implementation. We needed a strategic plan, a roadmap because we are not yet all that we think we can be: we are making headway. We focused in on recruitment and retention of faculty and staff, recognizing the "graying" that is taking place as well as the need to ensure reflection of the diverse world that our students will enter. We recognize that our faculty and staff are most students' window to the world. Enrollment management is a second goal area, understanding that we must continue to retain our students--which requires strategies that are sometimes too out of the box for the "average Joe and Jill". Our enrollment has reached historic proportions this year—3800 students strong in the fall: we want to increase 2% each year. Embracing technology as a tool for academic and student services areas—we must

enter the 21st century where communicating knowledge and information electronically is taken for granted. Ensuring that our ENVIRONMENT is conducive to learning—a facilities master plan is a requirement and is in the making to ensure, a safe, aesthetically pleasing environment. And resource development--stemming the tide of the downward spiral in state funding by riding the tide of private and grant--other types of funding with the WVUP Foundation as our partner: we must enhance old and develop new partnerships.

There are challenges. When we scan the environment, nationally, regionally, across the state, locally, we know that we are not alone. Why does the fact that we are not alone make us feel no better? The word *deficit* has been used by some to discuss the challenges and to emphasize just how great the challenge. Two deficits were identified in a higher education report published by the National Center for Public Policy and higher education: a deficit of opportunity and a deficit in learning. In our strategic planning we address those--access and retention, as well as harnessing technology to ensure that it meets our needs, initiatives and expectations, the emergence of competition in higher education, and the big F, Funding. Locally, statewide, the

big F lays heavily on our minds. A challenge for WVUP is the very thing that makes it the gem of the region: its mission to meet the needs of the region for higher education with the funding formula in place--or not. Some of you may recall the story of Mary McLeod Bethune—certainly one of my s-heroes—in her endeavor to develop an outstanding educational institution with almost no resources: "we burned logs and used the charred splinters as pencils and mashed elderberries for ink....I begged strangers for a broom, a lamp, a bit of cretonne to put around the packing case for my desk. I hunted the city dump and the trash piles behind hotels, retrieving discarded linens and kitchenware, cracked dishes, broken chairs, pieces of old lumber. Everything was scored and mended. This was part of the training--to salvage, to reconstruct, to make bricks without straw...." Well, as Mary McLeod Bethune proved, "it can be done."

We draw upon our past as we engage ourselves to address our future. Reflecting on history, this college has grown in its ability to meet the higher education needs of the community because there was a "felt" need. Remember, when the community wanted a college, it built one--first a center, then a community college, and now it has a regional campus that

offers certificates and degrees, two-year programs, four-year programs, and workforce development and customized training. Comfortable... one might say... It is very easy for the community to become comfortable that a college is around the corner and over the hill because it has been that way for a while. Ask somebody: most will tell you that they took a course when.... It is dangerously comfortable for us at the college to become satisfied that we are doing enough. Our future demands **discomfort** on the part of us all. We can't be satisfied to keep on doing what we always have done--without honestly evaluating its benefit or deficit: we have got to be both responsive and proactive. The community has to challenge us and **never ever** take WVUP for granted.

I am here as President of West Virginia University at Parkersburg because I believe that I can make a difference. I mean that I can provide leadership for the unfolding of WVU Parkersburg's next chapter in history. When I look at our community college component and know that there is something more that we can do to meet the needs of the region, I can team with the faculty staff and administrators, partner with technical centers, business and industry and

other community colleges to do more. When I go out into the community and learn that there are those who are place bound but want to complete bachelor's degrees that we do not offer, I can partner with WVU and other universities to do so. I can stand on the shoulders of the leaders who came before and look even more expectantly into the future. I can encourage and inspire people--faculty, staff, donors, community-- **to give until it helps somebody.**

There is nothing magical about this day or this inauguration that will suddenly cause all of our challenges to disappear, that will turn all of our straw into gold, but there is something about this day this week--this moment in time that makes us want that one moment in time when we are more than we thought we could be--when we exceed expectations. In the words of Harold Taylor, "The roots of true achievement lie in the will to become the best that you can become." That **will** is alive and well at WVUP.

As for me, I want to follow Andrew Carnegie's advice: "think of yourself as on the threshold of unparalleled success. A whole clear, glorious life lies before you. Achieve! Achieve!"

Thank you President Hardesty, the Board of Advisors, the Board of Governors, the Community and Technical College Council, and the Higher Education Policy Commission, the West Virginia University at Parkersburg faculty, staff and students, the group of West Virginia University that includes my colleagues from the university and its regional campuses, and the communities of our seven county service area for the opportunity and for your help as I move towards my goal—to make this great institution greater. Thank you.

