

I am proud and humbled to accept the privilege of serving as the 36th President of Athens State University. This is a university of which we can all be proud, with an inspiring history; outstanding faculty, students, alumni and staff; and a long tradition of distinguished academic leadership, most recently personified by our three living former Presidents – Sidney Sandridge, James Chasteen, and Jerry Bartlett. Where ever we go as a university in the future, our success will stand firmly on the exceptional foundation these men and the others who came before them have already laid so ably. You probably cannot see this from where you are seated, but each link in this presidential medallion is inscribed with the name of one of our former presidents. When I wear this medallion I am reminded both figuratively and literally that one of the weights on my shoulders as president is the responsibility to those who labored in this post before me. And, when I put this on I will remember that this medallion also represents the gifts of the faculty and staff of this institution that made its purchase possible.

The great Tennessee Olympian Wilma Rudolph once said, “No matter where you are, someone helped you get there.” Let there be no mistake that I arrived here today precisely because of the support and help of many, many people, of which many are here today. I am honored to speak today in the presence of so many who made my journey here possible. I thank my colleagues from my past institutions for taking the time out of their busy lives to come here today. If I am able to fill the shoes I have stepped into, it will be because of what I have learned from each of you. Journalist Merry Browne once said, “If you want an accounting of yourself, count your friends.” Today I count myself most fortunate. Thank you.

And I am especially proud today to be in the company of my immediate and extended family. Author Kendall Hailey said, “The great gift of family life is to be intimately acquainted with people you might never even introduce yourself to, had life not done it for you.” My immediate family is a wild and woolly lot and I am thankful for each and every gnarl in the family tree. I say immediate and extended because I am fortunate to have here today those who are related to me by blood, and those related to me by heart. They know who they are, and they are just as wild and woolly as the blood kin, and I am just as glad to see them. Chief among them is my good friend Van Foreman who is very much like the brother I didn’t know I wanted. It was Van who congratulated Laurie at our rehearsal dinner for marrying a well-educated man. In fact, he opined, I was educated beyond my intelligence. My children have been agreeing with him ever since. Most importantly I thank my wife.

My thanks to my colleagues at the University. There is an old joke about a college president being like the caretaker of a cemetery. You have a lot of good folk under you, but you just can’t get any of them to listen to you. But that is not the case here. I am truly blessed to have the opportunity to work with an extraordinary group of professionals. Each and every member of the faculty and staff has been completely open to me and willing to take a chance on this rookie. I would like to particularly thank the members of the inauguration committee who have been working since January to make this day possible and have spent countless hours working to make each event possible and special.

I am also appreciative for the presence of my fellow presidents within the Alabama Community College System and the professional members of the Department of Postsecondary Education who honor me and honor the University today by their presence. I appreciate the presence of

three members of the Alabama Commission on Higher Education. Thank you for honoring ASU by being here today. And most certainly my thanks to Dr. Mary Jane Caylor who has so ably represented our interests during her tenure on the State Board of Education, and prior to that was also a member of our faculty for many years. Thank you.

My thanks to our students, you are the reason we all come to work every day. You are the stories that inspire us. You are the lifeblood of the institution. Thank you for being open and welcoming to me. I appreciate it more than I can say.

And finally, my thanks to all of you from the communities of Athens and Decatur and all the communities of north Alabama the University serves. Thank you for thinking enough of the University to join us here today for this ceremony of institutional renewal, we welcome you.

We are gathered here today in this historic church to celebrate both our future and our past. The theme we chose for the inauguration is Roots and Wings: An Institution Rooted in a Historical Foundation of Building Success Stories by Providing the Wings to Discover New Horizons. The Wings are symbolic of our future. The Roots are symbolic of our rich past.

Roots are a vital element of living things, including communities. In the plant world roots are vital to life itself. It is the root that reaches down into the earth and brings water and nourishment into the plant. Without roots, a plant cannot survive. With humans the roots are harder to see, but just as important. One example of our roots can be found in the ritual of this event and the symbolism that surrounds us in this sanctuary. Many people come to a church week after week unaware of the deliberate symbolism that surrounds them. They may not notice that the center aisle always leads to the altar, symbolic of our journey towards God and its centrality in our lives. The baptismal font is always located near an entrance at the front of the sanctuary, symbolic of our admission to the family of God through baptism. The candles that are lit at the beginning of each service are symbolic of the word of God, the Gospels on the left – lit first and extinguished last – and the epistles on the right. The candles also represent the word of God as the light of truth peeling back the darkness. The pulpit on your right is elevated because it is from this point that the word is proclaimed from upon high. The ministers in many churches wear robes when preaching to signify that they are speaking for more than just themselves.

Many of our academic traditions are rooted in these rituals and symbolism. As many of you know, the mace we use harkens back to an ancient battle weapon that was quite deadly because it was extremely heavy and could only be used by the strongest warrior. The mace became a symbol of strength in battle, later becoming a symbol utilized by rulers to represent their strength and it was eventually accepted as an academic symbol of an institution's independence (strength). It is particularly appropriate that our symbol of strength was carved from an original timber from Founders Hall, another enduring symbol of our strength.

Truth and knowledge, another symbol of institutional strength, are almost universally represented by candles, or a flame or some other source of light beating back the darkness.

The robes we wear connect us back to a time, almost a thousand years ago, when monasteries were the primary repositories of books and thus knowledge. It was the clerics, who wore robes

for warmth, who were among the few who could read, and who were responsible for making copies of books by hand. Being able to read, and having access to books was a source of considerable influence and power. Over time more and more people sought access to knowledge by coming to the monasteries. Originally, the only avenue was becoming a cleric and assuming cleric robes and responsibilities. But in time, universities evolved from the monasteries. While students were no longer required to become a member of the order, they wore robes at first as a tribute to that time and so the robes became associated with the academy and over time became used primarily for ceremonial purposes.

All of these rituals and symbols are important because of they connect us to a past that is important to us. They provide us sustenance by reminding us each time we participate, of the reasons we come together, they give us a stability we would not have otherwise. Rituals like an inauguration give us stability by reminding us that even in times of change and uncertainty, like when a new president arrives, that this institution is greater than any one part. It has survived new presidents in the past and will survive one more. And, they provide us a link to our future. They act as roots.

Roots can be very personal as well. One of our delegates today is an august gentleman who is the Provost for Winthrop University. And he is wearing a very special robe that connects him not only to his profession, but to his personal past, and to this institution and to me as well. There are one or two folks here who will remember his father, the Rev. Charles Moore, a Methodist minister who served as district superintendent of this northwest district here and received an honorary doctorate from Athens College while he was serving in that capacity. Tom's mother sewed the doctoral chevrons onto the sleeves of the robe and then the robe was passed down to Tom when he received his doctorate in Chemistry. Tom taught me about collegiality when I was a young administrator at Birmingham-Southern College. He was there to teach Chemistry. He and I and Sam Pezzillo, another august delegate, would play bridge each day at lunch and systematically solve the problems of the college, or the world, which ever needed our help the most. He is here today honoring me by nurturing our roots with one another while he also nurtures his roots to this community and to his own past.

I am proud of my roots to so many people here today, as well as my roots to this institution.

My roots go back to my great-great-great grandfather, James Elizabeth Glenn, who moved to south Alabama in 1835 as a Methodist missionary. His grandson, my great grandfather, Edgar Massillon Glenn, followed him into the ministry. I understand that he initially wanted to be a missionary also, intending to go to Texas. But, my great grandmother dissuaded him and so he went into the circuit in Alabama. And, during a 50-plus year career in the ministry he served as president of two Methodist schools, the fledgling North Alabama Conference College (later to become Birmingham-Southern College), and Athens Female College in 1902. His grandson, my dad, went to Texas to attend seminary and ended up staying in the Lone Star State, although I think he always thought of himself, like my great grandfather, as a Piney-woods Parson. When you visit me in my office on campus I will show you my great grandfather's roll top desk, which he had with him at each of his charges. I keep it in my office as a reminder of my roots. And it is a reminder of how things come back around, the circular nature of our institutional and individual karmas.

And the roots of the institution are even deeper. We chose this sanctuary as the site for this ceremony as a way of celebrating the institution's historic tie to the Methodist Church. I am standing here today in a place where I know my great grandfather stood. In this pulpit Edgar Glenn, and ministers both before and after him, stood and reached out to Methodists for support of a cause they held sacred. As an institution we have always served a population of students who, if not for Athens, would not have had an opportunity for a degree. In the beginning we educated women when no one else was doing so.

As I was preparing this address I reviewed the inaugural addresses of several other presidents, and I happened to read the 2003 address of Joel Seligman when he was installed at the University of Rochester. In his address he noted: "Few memories are more cherished in the history of the University of Rochester than that of Susan B. Anthony persuading our Board of Trustees to admit women to the class that entered in 1900." While I congratulate Ms. Anthony for the feat, I have to note that by the time that Rochester got around to it, Athens had been educating women for nearly 80 years. We have always been ahead of the curve.

In 1930 the college became co-educational, but our mission of serving those who would otherwise do without only expanded. We began to educate those women and now those men of north Alabama who did not have the means to go elsewhere. They were place-bound by their circumstances, but they were not held-back. Athens gave them the ability to go where they wanted. After World War II there was an influx of ex-service men who turned to the college for a chance to get what they needed to build a better life and they found it here.

Then in 1975 we went through another transition. We made the difficult passage from being a private institution to becoming a part of the public system, as a part of the Alabama Community College System. We were already the oldest institution in the state, and just like that we became the newest. And while I am in this venue let me just go ahead and say Thank You Lord for Sidney Sandridge, and Tommy Carter and Jimmy Beasley and all of the others who worked without ceasing to make that happen. We would not be here today had it not been for their efforts, combined with the generous donations of an entire community to pay off our debts and seal the deal with the state. And that karma thing began to kick in again. Because here we are 187 years later and we are still serving students who don't have other options. The technology has changed. The times have changed. But our students still find themselves place-bound. The difference is that now rather than being place-bound by birth, they are place-bound by circumstance. When you look at our demographics you see that our average student is a woman in her 30s, who is likely to be employed full-time, have a family and commute. Fortunately for them, we are once again ahead of the curve. Our technology and flexible formats for course delivery make it possible for students to secure a degree when it would not be possible for them to do so through traditional residential, or even commuter formats. They may be limited by a mortgage, or a job, or by family circumstances, but they are not held back. We make things possible. We build success stories.

This brings us to the Wings part. I have often said that I believe our best days are ahead of us. I am excited by the vision of the future I see from my vantage point. So I want to share a bit of that vision, with one caveat. My strong personal belief is that a good leader is the chief

messenger of vision, but not necessarily the sole author of that vision. I believe a good leader is also a good listener and he or she listens and translates the consensus heard into the common vision. So, based on that belief I recently commissioned a task force we call the Vision 2020 Committee. It is composed of 25 persons who represent faculty, staff, students, alumni and community members. They have been given the task to develop a University Master Plan that will carry us from September 2010, when the plan is to be finished and reviewed, until 2020. So part of the Vision will have to be revealed at a later date.

What I will talk about today are those things I believe are plain for all to see. These are the things I come to work each day thinking about, and they are the things I am thinking about when I go home in the evenings. Like all presidents, I am a little obsessive-compulsive. If I end up sounding like a broken record over the next couple of years, I appreciate your patience.

The first item is a matter of great importance, and one of simple practicality. We are going to get reaccredited by the Southern Association of Colleges and Schools. For the next two years this is Job One. We have a number of other important jobs, but none of them is more important than reaccreditation. And on this matter I want to say two things very clearly. The first is that I cannot say enough about the dedicated group of faculty and staff who are laboring away at this task already. There are folks like Robert Burkhardt, Debbie Ferguson, Sylvia Correa, Jackie Smith, Kevin Dupre', Karen Brock, Debbie Kelley, Jim Kerner, the chairs of the various SACS committees and many others who have other responsibilities but who perform this important duty because of their sense of responsibility to their profession and this institution. Secondly, I want to also acknowledge the work of the Deans and the Vice Presidents who provide leadership for this effort in a number of ways. I will be doing a great deal of talking about accreditation, but these are the folks who will really make it happen. I think it is important for you to know that your hard work and sincere efforts are not going unnoticed. Thank you.

The second item I saw clearly before I even arrived on campus. I asked the faculty and staff to send me their thoughts on our strengths and weaknesses. My purpose in doing so was to see what patterns emerged. One thing leaped out at me and that was graduate education. As many of you know, this institution has always been firmly rooted as an undergraduate teaching institution. However, we also had roots in graduate education at one time. Regrettably, for one reason or another we let those graduate programs get away from us. I believe the time has come for us to bring graduate education back to our campus. But, when a root becomes detached, it is very hard to nurture it back. We need to understand that we have our work cut out for us. The first step towards graduate programs is securing a change in level from SACS, which will not come until our reaccreditation process is completed. When we secure approval from SACS for a change in level, we can proceed to seek approval from the State Board of Education and the Alabama Commission on Higher Education for specific degree proposals.

Since this process can be long, and difficult, and sometimes frustrating, I want to suggest an analogy for us to use. The university is like a high jumper at a track meet. Like the athlete, we have to prepare ourselves for the task before us, which is to get over the bar. It is the job of the referees to set the bar. In our case it is the State Board and ACHE who are our referees. They have a solemn responsibility to act as fiduciaries for the citizens of Alabama to insure the quality of higher education. It is their job to set the bar. We need to respect the process and respect the

referees and concentrate on our job. If we make the commitment to properly prepare, we will get over that bar. I can guarantee you that I will come to work every day thinking about what we need to do.

Faculty and staff who responded to my request were nearly unanimous in stating that our greatest strength and our greatest challenge were one in the same – being a part of the Alabama Community College System. It is our greatest challenge because it makes us unique in the state of Alabama. Being unique is a good thing, but it leaves a lot of people scratching their heads. They don't quite know what to make of us. They don't clearly understand what we can do. That has held us back in the past. We will put that behind us by leaping fully into the system. I am reminded of the old story of two men arguing about the difference between being involved and being committed. Finally one of them said think about your breakfast of bacon and eggs. The chicken was involved in your breakfast, but the hog was committed. I am here to say that what we need to do is go “whole hog” into the system. I believe our being a member of the system really is a great strength, but only if we fully commit ourselves to it.

I can see several ways we can do this, and towards which we are already working. Some of you have seen a story or two about the Decatur Arts Project. We have been invited to work collaboratively with Calhoun Community College to develop a film and arts program in the downtown Decatur area. Part of the reason I believe we should do this is because it will expand our offerings back into areas like music and drama which are consistent with our liberal arts heart. But, another reason is because if we are successful in developing and delivering four year programs in this collaborative fashion, it opens up a tremendous horizon for the university. Our partners at Wallace State Hanceville would like to see us come to their campus and work collaboratively to deliver a BS degree in nursing, or forensics, or dental hygiene. Being successful in Decatur would give us the foundation we need to be successful in Hanceville. Our partners at Chattahoochee Valley Community College have expressed an interest in working collaboratively on a new BS degree in Homeland Security, combining their unique program in homeland security with our criminal justice degree. Being successful in Decatur will allow us to be successful in Phenix City. So as you can see, being successful in Decatur can help us fulfill the vision and mission of our predecessors who worked so hard to bring us into the system. I will come to work every day thinking about ways we can become more integrated into the system.

And while we are going to look for ways to fulfill our mission across the state, I can tell you we are also going to work very hard to expand our impact on our home community. The community of Athens has always had this institution in its heart. There have been many occasions when the citizens of Athens rallied around our cause and reached into their own pockets to keep our doors open. It is my intention to look for new and better ways for us to be even more a part of what goes on in Athens. It is my intention to secure property on or adjacent to the town square and to go out and meet the community more than half way. I see continuing education as one of many possibilities of programs we can literally take into the public square. We will also continue to talk with city and county officials about how ASU can be a part of bringing a viable civic center to this community. A vibrant town and gown relationship with the Athens and Limestone communities has brought to where we are today. The old saying is that you always remember to dance with the one what brung ya. We intend to do just that.

Let me now wind down with some promises. I am not exactly standing at the altar, but I take promises made in this setting pretty seriously.

To the Chancellor, Dr. Caylor and members of the commission, I promise that Athens State University will always be a team player. We will play by the rules and look at the big picture.

To my fellow presidents within the Alabama Community College System, I promise that Athens State University will always meet you more than half way. Whatever collaboration you may have in mind, we will work as hard as we can to make things happen. We value our partnerships with you and we will not let you down.

To the faculty and staff, I promise that my door will always be open to you. You will always get the best hearing I can give you. Even if we have to agree to disagree, you will be able to tell me candidly and honestly what is on your mind without fear of retribution. I really do believe that as long as we can continue to talk to one another as colleagues that there is a solution we can find.

To my family, I promise that you will always mean more to me than anything else. You are my most important roots and my most powerful wings.

My time is up. I appreciate your patience with me and your willingness to participate in this ritual. I think it is important that we took this moment in time to pause and think about who we are, where we have come from, and what we might become. We have both roots and wings and our best days are ahead of us.

Thank you.