Good afternoon! And welcome to the first week of the Spring semester.

We have about eleven hundred new transfer students joining us this semester and two other new members of our community who I am especially pleased to introduce today. Please welcome our two new deans:

Judith Hennessey, for the College of Business;

and Angela Trethewey, for the College of Communications and Education.

Judith comes to us from CSU Northridge where, since 1980, she served as a professor of marketing, a department chair, an associate dean, and interim dean in their College of Business. So, welcome to the North State, Judith, where all the water supposedly is that the governor would like to ship to the south.

And welcome home, Angela. Although Angela is coming to us most recently from Arizona State University, she started her academic career here, earning both a bachelor’s and a master’s degree in Communication Studies from Chico State. It’s quite a family affair for Angela here, for her mother is one of our alums and so, too, her husband, whom she met in a class when they were both students.
And a heartfelt thank you to those whom they succeed: Maggie Payne and Julie Indvik. I especially want to congratulate Julie and her colleagues again in the College of Business for a piece of news we received just before the holidays, that is, full reaffirmation of accreditation from the national association which accredits colleges and schools of business. This is neither an easy nor an automatic accomplishment. Especially as the College has worked to meet the standards during a long period of severe budget reductions. But they did it! Congratulations!

Judith and Angela, you join a terrific group of deans. And there is another new one in your company, well, sort of. This is our dean for all seasons, Mike Ward. Mike is now heading up his third college at Chico State, Natural Sciences.

I’ve been doing some checking on this kind of decanal service. Not only is it pretty extraordinary, but it probably underscores why Mike might be “the most interesting dean in the world.” Consider the evidence:

When he dines alone, most of the University’s colleges are represented at the table.

His business card has won essay contests.

When he is seen in the company of another dean, everyone knows that dean’s days are numbered.

He works both sides of the creek, because he owns the bridges.

If he were to pat you on the back, you would list that experience on your resume’.
Donors have no idea which of his colleges to support, so they just give him money to do whatever he wants.

His dean’s list is so long that even Abe Bailey needs a rest to read it.

He doesn’t retire; he resurrects.

He is the most interesting dean in the world.

[conclude with Mike’s testimony: “I don’t always drink water. But when I do, I prefer bottled water from Big Chico Creek.”]

We have several other special, even interesting, guests here this afternoon, too, who I asked to join us because of the nature of my remarks today.

These include members of our city and county government; leaders of some of our city and region’s organizations which champion economic development; representatives of some of the principal service organizations in our community; and members of several University and community advisory boards. Thank you so very much for attending.

In 2009, when I marked my first five years at Chico State and in this community, I wrote an article for the Chico News & Review entitled “Shaping Our Shared Future.” It was influenced by deeply considered views on the nature of campus/community relationships and the experience of other institutions where university relationships with their surrounding and host communities are both historically important and future-focused.

The article also reflected scores of conversations that I had had over those first five years with long-time Chico and North State leaders and other members of our community on such topics as sustainability,
community development and well-being, civic virtues and life, change
dynamics, and the importance of a sense of place.

It was not hard to reach a conclusion that so many of us in this room
and in our larger community share: our University and town are
powerfully connected to each other, neither would prosper as much
without the other, and we share certain values, engagements, and
expectations.

I have been revisiting that article a lot recently. First, to be reminded of
those early observations and impressions. But, second, and more
importantly for my remarks today, to test their validity and relevance in
light of several developments over the last five years on this campus, in
this community, in our state, and beyond. Developments, which, I
believe, will significantly affect the type and character of our work
going forward. Especially as we move to update our strategic plan,
experience some modest restoration of State support, respond to a
new compact for higher education which Governor Brown has
proposed, prepare to move into the public phase of the first
comprehensive fundraising campaign in our history, and begin to gear
up – yes, believe it or not, it’s that time already – for our next WASC
accreditation review.

So my remarks today are guided by two elements that are rooted in my
own academic discipline. First, there is the historian’s mantra that the
past is prologue. It sets the stage and drives the action. We must try
very hard to get it right.

And, second, there is the historian’s responsibility: translating that
understanding to our times, to our circumstances. This is not the same
as some fatalistic notion that those who forget the past are doomed to
repeat it. Unless, of course, you are a Chicago Cubs fan. And, if you are a Cubs fan, you are probably aware of a famous bumper sticker that commemorates the team’s futility of not having won a World Series since 1908. The bumper sticker says: “Hey, everyone’s entitled to a bad century.”

But, for the most part, the past provides context and inspiration and caution. It does not dictate, but it does inform. And we need to listen.

We need to listen – to each other about the kind of university we want to be, to the beat of our community, to the vibes of a world both new and familiar.

These messages, and how we interpret them, help inform our sense of place. In fact, they help us understand the paradox of place. For we are still at the beginning of a revolution in digital technology that is remaking the geographic, social and educational landscapes of our nation. It is influencing, in fact, “a placeless society.” Yet, and herein is the paradox, it is also revealing how increasingly valued and important it is to cultivate and achieve a sense of place.

Like railroads after the Civil War, interstate highways and air travel after the Second World War, and the World Wide Web in the late 20th century, digital communications in the early 21st century have transformed our nation’s economic, social, and educational conditions and encouraged both connection and separation.

We now have the capability to do business, to pursue relationships, to earn a college degree, anywhere, anytime, and to do so instantaneously, unbounded by distance or geographic barriers. People meet online, court online, fall in love online, fall out of love online. Yes,
this is the era of “Christian farmer mingle.com.” Who would have thought?

Home theater packages provide an extraordinary viewing experience of any movie or concert without standing in line for a ticket or popcorn. Wii technology and Play Stations enable one to race Jimmie Johnson around Daytona, play Pebble Beach with Tiger Woods, catch passes from Peyton Manning, and defend the planet against alien invaders. Albeit, virtually.

And there’s the rub. The digital revolution has provided unprecedented freedom to do things – alone. This technology will only improve, and new applications will serve isolation even more. But, as so many folks who fled cities and their crowded work and living environments in the ‘70s and ‘80s for a home in the suburbs or gated golf communities have since discovered, there is something critically missing when flight and privacy take precedence over community and connection.

What we are now experiencing is a new localism, a renewed appreciation for the importance of place, where people can experience the arts, cultural amenities, entertainment, learning, face-to-face meetings in real pubs and restaurants, and a “Main Street agora” where shopping, business, local politics, and social encounters meet and mix naturally. These are places where the innate energy, diversity and creative joy of people define the scene. These are places where the quality of life is tangible and attractive to visitors and permanent residents alike. In short, place matters.

We need to listen to the voices of business development and forecasting, like our own Dan Ripke, the director of our Center for Economic Development and the Northern California Business
Development Center, and Chico’s Chamber of Commerce, Downtown Business Association, and Innovate North State, whose leadership includes several of our alumni. They are tuned to what we need to grasp more fully, namely, that the digital revolution enables companies and people not just to locate where they must, but where they will.

In other words, enabled by the digital revolution through which companies can go almost anywhere to conduct business and people can live almost anywhere to find employment, the question of where to live becomes increasingly contingent on the character and culture, the attributes and attractions, of any given location. These are matters that transcend such traditional business-location factors as land costs, taxes, the quality of a local workforce, transportation networks, and the regional and state regulatory environment. Again, place matters.

When asked about life’s biggest questions, many of us, especially our students, start with two things. First, the what question, that is, discovering what work we want to do and the promise of a comfortable and fulfilling life that comes with the right career choice.

Second, there is the who question, that is, finding the right life partner who will support our endeavors and provide the loving foundation for a happy life.

But there is a third question that the digital revolution has provided a lot more flexibility to think about. This is the where question, that is, finding the right place to live and work and recognizing its relationship to one’s personal financial future and happiness. And like the what and who questions, the question of where to live and work is not a random one, for it affects every aspect of our being, including what we do and with whom.
The search for the right place to live, though, is elusive. The average American moves every seven years; more than 40 million Americans relocate every year; 15 million make significant moves of more than 100 miles. And notions of the “right” place to live will change as the circumstances and needs of one’s life change.

But the indications and the experts strongly suggest that places with a clear sense of their identity and spirit and values can attract, and keep, people who want not just to be there, but also to contribute to their community’s well-being. And, just as important, places that emphasize talent, tolerance, innovation, inclusivity, opportunity and creativity will succeed no matter how challenging the larger economic environment might be.

This is the case whether we are talking about a community in which to live and work or a university at which to study and work. It should be all the more true if the community and the university are in the same place and on the same page, connected in their physical proximity and, more often than not, in their outlooks and their commitments.

There is mighty evidence to suggest that our town and our University share more than a zip code and John Bidwell.

We are a unique college town in California, where no physical barriers or distance separate the campus of the University from the life and charms of the city and its neighborhoods. A vibrant intellectual and cultural scene flows from this identity and extends to a first-rate K-12 school system and community college.

And speaking about Butte College, I want to congratulate President Kim Perry and the Roadrunners for once again bringing to our community
something we haven’t seen coming from our campus in a few decades – a collegiate football championship. Just don’t anybody get any ideas out there...

Although over ten years old and, like our Strategic Plan, also in need of a refresh, our current Master Plan envisioned significant, pedestrian-friendly improvements to First Street and its intersections, such as Normal and Chestnut Streets. The completion of the new Arts and Humanities building will accomplish much of that vision. And, as I often tell Jack Sterling, who runs that other great institution next to us, I think this is a building that the Bear will be proud to have as a neighbor.

Just as First Street on campus flows downtown and greets safer traffic patterns and widened sidewalks that enable outdoor dining at such places as Tres Hombres and Celestino’s, there are similar improvements on Second Street. Campus buildings no longer turn stark high walls to the outside and signal a less than inviting message to neighbors and passers-by. Rather, plazas and courtyards and sight lines into the campus core grace their design, as well as wider set-backs from the street in order to accommodate improved landscaping and bike lanes.

But there is so much more than spatial intersections that underscore the dialogue between our town and our University.

Both of us are keenly aware of the natural beauty surrounding us and we are cognizant of the responsibility to be its stewards. From the defining creek that runs through our town and campus, to the magnificence of Bidwell Park and the Sierra foothills beyond; from the hills that mark the western boundary of the rich agricultural lands of the northern Central Valley, to Mounts Shasta and Lassen on our horizons in other directions, we are surrounded by green views, flowing
rivers, open spaces and protected natural spaces. The latter include the many thousand acres of the University’s Big Chico Creek Ecological Reserve and the arboretum which is our campus. Our efforts to achieve harmony between our built and natural environments is just one expression of appreciation and stewardship for the beauty of our natural world.

We – town and university – are stewards of another heritage that also informs and delights our lives – the arts. For so many good reasons, Chico is ranked among the finest small city arts communities in the nation.

The University, of course, is home to an extraordinary gathering of faculty, students, and visiting artists in all performance and creative arts areas. Local artists in all media complement a rich community performing arts scene that includes a children’s choir, a symphony orchestra, dance companies, live theater, and several first-rate performance venues. Murals, mosaics, sculptures, and “art” benches enliven both the downtown area and the campus and suggest how much more we can be doing in the area of public art. Attractive galleries and studios abound on campus and throughout the city, showcasing the talents of local artists and bringing renowned visiting artists to the attention of our community. And impressive private collections delight guests in our homes and through public exhibitions.

Moreover, we are seeing important new commitments to the arts, both on and off campus, which will strengthen this aspect of our identity and appeal:
The newly formed Museum of Northern California Art aims to showcase the talent and art forms of our region and to give new life to Veterans Memorial Hall.

The Gateway Science Museum purposefully includes art work, such as photography and architectural features, in its design. Moreover, located next to Bidwell Mansion and a stone’s throw down the Esplanade from Veterans Memorial Hall, it introduces an historical and cultural corridor that extends south through the center of downtown and west through the campus of the University.

And we are seeing the early construction phases of our new LEED-certified Arts and Humanities building. Its many features include John Pugh’s new rendition of “Academe,” a beautiful new home for The Janet Turner Print Museum (which will celebrate the centennial of Janet Turner’s birth in 2014), a state of the art recital hall, ample studio space, and a striking design, which both embraces the architectural vernacular of the historic center of the campus and moves beyond it.

A foundation of being historically-informed, rooted in the land, and committed to the arts lends itself to so many other ways in which our community’s assets are counted.

We are, for example, a community where environmental issues and “green” values shape our businesses, inform our conversations, affect public policy, and influence our academic curriculum, both in and outside of the classroom. University faculty and students, for example, have sat on the City of Chico’s Sustainability Task Force since its inception and our Institute for Sustainable Development played a significant role in the development of the city’s 2020 Climate Action Plan.
The depth of our engagement in these matters has recently resulted in our University being named a finalist for the 2014 Second Nature Climate Leadership award. We are the only California institution so recognized. This is the highest award of the American College and University Presidents Climate Commitment, of which we were one of the twelve founding signatories. There are now nearly 700.

We are a recreation community finding its character in our geography and a climate with as many sunny days as some destination cities in the Arizona and southern California deserts. As our alumnus Jake Early celebrates in his “Chico Experience” art series, Chico is “cycle city.” And we must continue to promote a healthy and safe environment for pedestrians and cyclists on our campus and throughout our city.

We are an entrepreneurial community where successful start-ups, homegrown local businesses, and efforts to generate investments in Chico and the immediate surrounding area provide evidence of an enterprising spirit and the conditions to support it. No conditions are more important than the assets that our University brings to these conversations and ventures, especially, the expertise, energy, and imagination of our faculty and students.

Right on cue, by the way, is the latest issue of Sunset Magazine, which lists Chico among its 24 best places in the Western United States to live and work. Chico is described as “beauty and brains” and “fertile ground for budding businesses thanks to the support from groups like Innovate North State and the tech-savvy students at Chico State.”

We are an altruistic community that dates back to 1887 when John Bidwell and his fellow citizens united to support the normal school that would become Chico State College and then California State University,
Chico, through their gifts of land and cash. And ever since, a long litany of service organizations, boards and causes have contributed to the quality of life of our community.

But the value that our community places on service goes well beyond fundraising and volunteering. Our highest honors recognize those who have served our community and University through the force of their personal example. Citizens like Judy Sitton and Marilyn Warrens and Farshad Azad and Matt Jackson uplift all of us through their caring, generosity, energy and vision. There may be no better identity for any community than to be known as a place that cares and welcomes.

Yes, these are among the assets that make the case for Chico as a place and as a choice. And it’s far from being a complete list, as each of you can undoubtedly add to it. And that’s a very good thing.

But I want to turn my remarks now to a different take and a broader agenda on all of this. And suggest that as we succeed with this agenda we will shape our University’s reputation, define what it means to “choose Chico State,” strengthen campus ties and contributions to our local community and region, and, just as importantly, benefit the communities wherever our students choose to live and work after they graduate. This is an agenda that is truly locally-committed, future-focused, and values-driven.

But, first a little background drawn from recent events in our town.

As I pointed out in the most recent issue of Inside Chico State, over the last few months our town has witnessed a very intense, even polarizing, debate around issues of safety, civility, and cleanliness in the
downtown area. The focus of much of this attention has been on the homeless.

But not exclusively. It has also targeted some elements of our resident student population, out-of-town guests of our students who come here to party and who could care less about our city, and others, true trouble-makers, near and far, who come here to prey on our students and other members of our community.

On one hand, a coalition of downtown business owners and other citizens has emerged seeking to rid our community of the homeless and transient populations, whom they find unsightly, anti-social, dangerous, and detrimental to attracting visitors and shoppers to the downtown.

On the other hand, there are members of our community who recognize that homelessness is not a condition that most choose. That generally there are other factors that contribute to it, like such tragic life occurrences as the loss of loved ones, or job loss, or domestic violence, and, yes, bad luck, mental illness, and despair.

Although similarly concerned with quality of life issues in our city and sympathetic to the concerns of the business owners, these citizens advocate an approach that is guided more by empathy and kindness than anger and fear, by an appreciation of the underlying factors that contribute to homelessness. And they aim to address these factors, as much as deal with the individuals who turn up on our streets to live or hang out.

It is a delicate balance, but not an impossible one to achieve.

Unfortunately, the debate between these two views has not often been a model of civil discourse. It often feels more like a drive-by debate, as
proponents for one side or the other of this complex issue have shouted at one another and quickly rushed past one another to hardened positions without a whole lot of interest or consideration for what others might have to say. The art of listening has been a casualty in all of this.

Yet, the challenge of conducting civil discussions, reaching fair conclusions, and achieving consensus on difficult and vexing issues is not unique to the city of Chico. We face this challenge on our campus, too, even as we emphasize that civility and community, reason and respect are fundamental building blocks of our academic culture. In no small measure, our commitment to these values reflects our awareness that the most powerful lessons we teach our students come through the force of example. As Yogi Berra once said, “You can observe a lot just by watching.” And our students do watch us closely.

Just as we should watch and acknowledge our students when their example is praise-worthy. Such is the case in dealing with the homeless, where long-standing and commendable student-led and student-staffed programs include the Associated Students Chico Homeless Ambassadors Program, the legal services provided by CLIC, a campus chapter of Habitat for Humanity, volunteer work at the Torres Shelter and Jesus Center, and the Blitz Build projects for transitional housing for both Chico’s Catalyst Domestic Violence Center and the Salvation Army. It is a shame when these activities are not noticed and, even more so, when our students and University are criticized for not helping the city deal with such issues.

And all the more so because the city has often turned to the University for help – and received it. A few years ago, for example, having
recognized campus efforts and the resource that the University potentially represented in the matter of effecting civil discourse on even the most difficult issues, a few city leaders asked the campus for assistance. And our faculty and staff – and especially our students – responded immediately.

This was the genesis of the Great Debate Program, which, for the past four years, has taken on some very thorny issues, including freedom of speech, immigration, the legalization of marijuana, and mental health. But, beyond involving our students in studying these topics, that is, the content of the semi-annual Great Debates, the program has also focused on the conduct of the debate, that is, those fair and sensible rules of engagement that underscore civil, respectful and consequential dialogue.

The Great Debate is part of a larger effort on our campus to bridge classroom learning with the experience of public, democratic participation. Led by our colleagues Bill Loker, Thia Wolf, Ellie Ertle, and Zach Justus and supported by a host of faculty and staff who serve as mentors and facilitators, the Great Debate is linked to such other programs as the Town Hall Meeting, the Book in Common, and our newest endeavor to integrate academic and civic work, the U-Course initiative. The U-Course project is a highly interactive, interdisciplinary curriculum that both focuses on public issues affecting the larger Chico community and aims to develop a greater sense of civic-mindedness and personal and social responsibility in the students who take the course.

All of these expressions of public engagement are elements of our First-Year Experience Program. In higher education circles, these activities
are collectively known as “public sphere pedagogy.” And no college or university anywhere has embraced this effort as deeply or as well as Chico State.

And, herein lays the connection between the city of Chico as a place and as a choice, and Chico State as a place and as a choice; the connection between a shared sense of identity and responsibility and a common commitment to strengthen our ties and assets.

There are two additional dots I want to connect, though, before concluding with the proposition that I have for us; and before turning it over to the very promising conversation about “new possibilities” that Provost Belle Wei and the Council of Deans have undertaken in order to explore a common vision for our academic community.

First, the Chico Experience dot.

We talk a lot about this. We have a fortnight devoted to it in the fall. We invoke it. We promote it. We treat it as a unique phenomenon.

And encouraged by the last WASC visiting team, which heard the term a lot, but wondered what it meant, we have also taken several steps to define it, including surveying our students and alumni for their views on its elements.

What these surveys reveal is comforting. Our students and alumni have a high level of satisfaction with their overall educational experience here, especially the quality of their academic programs and the active learning that characterizes them. This satisfaction begins with the people whom they meet, whether in a classroom or an administrative office. Overwhelmingly, they tell us that the faculty and staff of our University care about them and want them to succeed.
The surveys reveal great pride in the beauty of the campus and the ambiance of college town.

Our students and alumni further identify exposure to the arts and different cultures, the outdoor recreation scene, community service opportunities, and, of course, the fun they have here as assets common to the city and the University. What it all adds up to is that special “Chico Experience.”

Yes, special for them. And, of course, for most of them this is their only collegiate experience. So, their point of reference is, well, Chico.

But here’s the question: Is “the Chico Experience” really any different than “the Cal Poly Experience” or the “Idaho State Experience” or, for that matter, the undergraduate experience at hundreds of very good, primarily residential, full-time enrollment, undergraduate institutions located in college towns and all claiming that their faculty and staff really care about their students? Put another way, do you think that any of these places say that their faculty and staff do not care about their students?

And an even more provocative question: is “the Chico Experience” any better, any richer, than the student experience anywhere else? Is our claim any stronger than someone else’s?

So, to cut to the chase. I do believe that the experience which our students have with us is distinctive and compelling and measureable. And I also believe it can be even more so.

So, to the other dot, which is a one hundred year-old proposition borrowed from the University of Wisconsin. This is the so-called “Wisconsin Idea,” that is, a Progressive Era articulation of the
University’s mission around the notion that “the boundaries of the campus are the boundaries of the state.”

Yes, we have a very different mission than this very large, Research-1, flagship, land-grant institution. Its roles and responsibilities to serve the public good focus primarily on the research conducted there that aims to improve the health, quality of life, the environment, and agriculture for all citizens of the state.

Make no mistake about it, there is no shortage of solid research and programs on our campus that benefit our local community, the North State, and beyond. An inventory of these engagements, which the North State Initiative Task Force compiled, reveals hundreds of efforts and commitments flowing from every corner of our campus.

And, of course, the example of our faculty and staff, whether engaged in these matters or not, is inspiring to our students. Faculty such as our five colleagues who were honored just before the holiday break as this year’s class of Most Outstandings. And the annual recipient of our Outstanding Staff award, named last spring, Carol Rudolph. Carol, by the way, after nineteen years of exceptional service to our campus is retiring this month. So, thank you, Carol, and all good wishes for a long and happy retirement.

But the opportunities to be so engaged, to experience first-hand with faculty the hard work and reward of research and applied expertise, is limited. I strongly believe that we need to increase these opportunities – to support faculty professional growth and development; to enhance student mentoring and learning; and, needless to say, to benefit those who are served by such efforts – and I have encouraged the provost to consider strategies and investments to this effect.
But there are other ways to define and demonstrate our responsibility to serving the public good:

- Ways that reflect the fertile ground here to do so: CAVE and CLIC and the Associated Students “Green Fund” and how it complements the University’s Climate Action Plan and its goal of total campus climate neutrality; the CCLC and other programs of student leadership development, such as LeadCat and the Freshman Leadership Opportunity, the results of which we see manifest in the quality of our AS leadership; the annual Blitz Build and the transformation of Cesar Chavez Day and Fall move-in weekend from party times to service days; the restructuring of Greek life along lines of citizenship and service; and new student orientation messaging that emphasizes the high expectations we have for our students both on campus and in our community.

- Ways that transcend disciplinary lines and college years.

- Ways that recognize that a most fundamental requirement of a democratic society is an educated, informed citizenry.

- Ways that cultivate a sense of personal and social responsibility and translate that into civic engagement and community service.

- Ways that prepare our students not just to work in the 21st century, but to have the ability and inclination to improve where they live and how they live.

And ways to touch all of our students. Not just deep immersion for a few, albeit a growing number. Or a faint tap on the shoulder for many more. But in a way that distinguishes and marks all Chico State graduates and underscores why we are a university worthy of the trust
that our students, our community, and the people of California should have in us.

And that’s what this is all about.

Yes, gladly learn and gladly teach in the spirit of Chaucer’s clerk/teacher. And gladly take on the “public good” role for higher education. This role embraces faculty research, community service programs, mission alignment with the state’s needs, and student volunteerism. But it goes beyond these elements – beyond to the future of our democratic society that our students will touch and shape.

Let us more effectively articulate the need to do this; more clearly identify the ways to do this; and more fully demonstrate the capacity to do this.

At Commencement every year, I urge our graduates to think kindly of this place. This community of purpose and promise that has equipped them and encouraged them for the journeys ahead.

I tell them that I hope they leave us more autonomous, more tolerant, more curious, more concerned about the health of our planet, more dedicated to the wellness of their communities, and more imbued with such habits of the heart as generosity, empathy, altruism and a service ethic than when they first joined us.

And there are clues that this is the case, that this is not just wishful thinking. Yes, some of those clues are in those Chico Experience alumni surveys. But I think the most powerful ones are in the achievements of our alumni.
In the vision of Koudougou Alfred Koala (B.S., Business Administration, 2012), who formed a non-profit organization as an undergraduate here to help educate children in his native African country of Burkina Faso. He is someone with the rare ability to make a vision both compelling and practicable.

In the spirit of Alexa Benson-Valavanis (B.A., Journalism, 2000), the President and CEO of the North Valley Community Foundation. Under her leadership the Foundation has raised over $40 million and supported the largest discretionary grant program in the North State, “Annie B’s Community Drive.”

In the service of Kit Miyamoto (B.S., Civil Engineering, 1989), an internationally-recognized expert in high-performance earthquake engineering. His work in disaster mitigation, response, and reconstruction as taken him to Haiti, Japan and Turkey in order to help communities and nations recover.

In the skill of William Carroll (B.S., Biology, 1973), the director of the New York University Cancer Institute and the Pediatric Hematology Oncology Program at the NYU Medical Center. He has consistently been named one of our country’s best doctors in the care of children with cancer and blood diseases.

In the commitment of Gene Keluche (B.S., Applied Engineering, 1954), a member of the Wintun Tribe of Northern California, who has devoted much of his life to assisting Native American and First Nation communities in the development of sustainable enterprises and health and wellness programs.
In the caring of Judy Martin-Holland (B.S., Nursing, 1977), the president of the American Nurses Association for the state of California and a dean at the University of California-San Francisco. She has provided extraordinary leadership for the Bay Area Black Health Consortium and the National Black Nurses Association.

In the energy of Matt Petersen (B.A., Political Science, 1990), the President and CEO of Global Green USA. Global Green has a modest agenda: to eliminate weapons of mass destruction, fight climate change, promote green building and renewable energy, and ensure access to clean water for all of humanity.

In the goodness of Lance Lew (B.A., Speech Pathology and Audiology, 1979), the community marketing director for NBC Bay Area. He has led the Bay Area’s Second Harvest food drive and co-founded the “Growing Up Asian in America” essay and art contest as part of Asian Pacific-American Heritage month, which has distributed over a quarter million dollars to over 600 students in the Bay Area.

If these folks don’t make you swell with pride, I’m not sure what will.

But I believe that we need to work more resolutely and purposefully and certainly to ensure that these folks, and so many more like them, are our story. That our alumni are exceptional champions of goodness, service, justice, and the promise of a democratic society because we are a university exceptionally committed to these goals.

This is the proposition, indeed, the challenge, that I see before us.

For somewhere between “the Chico Experience” and “the Wisconsin Idea” is “the Chico Idea.”
It is predicated on the altruism and goodness that helped found our University and which have sustained us and our community ever since.

It is historically-informed, locally-committed, globally-aware, entrepreneurially-inclined, values-based, and future-focused.

It chooses bold imagining, respect, and consensus over paralysis, cynicism and polarization.

It is something in our character and in our capacity.

It affirms that today does, indeed, decide tomorrow.

It has the promise of answering in quite specific ways, and in very personal terms, the questions “why choose Chico State?” and “why support Chico State?”

It confidently asserts that if you build it – if you accomplish something distinctive and worthy – they – faculty, staff, students, and support – will come.

And we – campus and community – will be a better place for our vision, our efforts, and the uplifting spirit of their engagement.

As always, I appreciate your kind and receptive attention to my messages. This one, though, is a little different. It is an invitation to a conversation that has important implications for the choices and investments ahead of us. And I look forward to listening to you and working with you as we consider these matters, both within the context of the “possibility conversations” already underway in Academic Affairs and beyond, as must be the case.
Again, welcome to Judith and Angela, another grateful nod to “the most interesting dean in the world,” thank you Chris Ficken and the tech team that helps pull these presentations together for me, and thank you to our many guests and community members who have joined us this afternoon. To all of you, a Happy New Year and a great spring semester on our campus and in our town.

Thank you.

January 23, 2014