Thank you, Dharma. Good morning. It is an honor to be among the members of the President’s Circle, all of whom, in their own special ways, have given so generously to UMUC. And I would like to take just a moment to recognize a few of you: Members of our Board of Visitors, Art Board, and Alumni Board.

We are also proud to have members of our university leadership team with us, as well, all of whom are members of the President’s Circle.

And it is my very special privilege to welcome Rich Blewitt and his wife, Elizabeth Reinhardt, both of whom are being honored here today for their many remarkable contributions to this university.

Rich and Elizabeth are quintessential 21st century knowledge leaders. Inexhaustible lifelong learners who view education as the engine of opportunity and intellectual capital as a priceless asset… Rich and Elizabeth have used both to build highly successful careers.

Like so many of our students, Rich found his way to UMUC while serving as a Navy journalist in Japan. After completing his undergraduate degree with us, he went on to earn an MBA from the University of Chicago…while later completing the Harvard Business School’s Owner/President Management Program.

So it’s no surprise that he is a nationally respected consultant, specializing in business communications and crisis management. Before launching his own consulting firm, he received national recognition for his transformational leadership at Velsicol Chemical Corporation…where he served for many years as vice president of public affairs.

Of course, we have reaped the many benefits of his knowledge leadership here at UMUC. Rich is not only a founding member and former chair of the university’s
Board of Visitors and a charter member of the President’s Circle….Rich has advised 3 UMUC President’s and an Interim President. He is also one of our most dedicated Alumni Association members. So dedicated, in fact, that he was named Distinguished Alumnus of the Year in 1998 and received the Edward A. Parnell Outstanding Alumnus Award in 2003.

Rich started the Blewitt Foundation a few years ago, dedicated to providing enrichment opportunities for families of active duty service members. And, once again, he honored his alma mater by asking us to partner with him in this service.

He launched Destination R + R and continues to support activities for wounded service members and their families.

Elizabeth is equally learned and accomplished, having built a distinguished 30-year career in the field of corporate communications. She received a bachelor’s degree from the State University of New York College at Cortland, as well as a Master of Science in broadcast journalism from Boston University. Elizabeth is now Director of Communications for BAE Systems, a global defense and aerospace company.

A longtime civic leader and avid arts patron, Elizabeth serves on the Board of Directors for Wolf Trap Associates, while also working diligently with the Blewitt Foundation….an organization dedicated to providing enrichment opportunities for families of active duty service members.

As outstanding members of the President’s Circle, Rich and Elizabeth continue to change lives here at UMUC….having generously supported this university and its students with their many philanthropic investments.

Most recently, they established The Marge and Frank Blewitt Endowed Military Scholarship. This very special fund provides financial assistance to our brave men and women in uniform, especially active-duty single parents and those who have been wounded in the line of duty.

Rich and Elizabeth are generous, extraordinary people who give because they care.

Like Rich and Elizabeth, all of you have helped shape and clarify UMUC’s vision for the future. You have shared your dreams and aspirations, your unique perspectives, and your lifelong learning needs. You have also given selflessly of your valuable time, enormous talents, and precious resources.
And in doing so, you have made UMUC’s mission come alive, with world-class academic offerings; innovative technologies; and a learning network that literally spans the globe.

Yet, like any great institution, ours needs constant nurturing, if we are to meet --- and even exceed --- the expectations of our students….as they prepare to become knowledge leaders in their own right. That’s why we look to this elite circle of supporters to help us grow in new directions. And you never let us down.

UMUC is half way through a 26 million dollar campaign – 12.9 million raised and 13.1 million remaining to achieve our target.

Certainly, there are many ways to give…beginning with scholarship funds for military service members, community college graduates, working parents…or any other qualified student, who simply needs a little extra help in realizing their academic dreams. These scholarships reward academic achievement, while also providing the extraordinary gift of education to literally hundreds of deserving UMUC students every year.

Endowed chairs and professorships create yet another enduring legacy, with which to attract and retain the highest caliber of academic faculty. Or if you are more interested in “bricks and mortar,” you can always designate special funds for building classrooms, labs, and technology.

And for those of you who love the arts, the university’s Arts Program is a wonderful fit. Launched nearly 30 years ago with great vision and only a few pieces, this program has since grown to include two outstanding permanent collections. Our Asian Collection, which reflects the university’s longstanding international presence; and our Maryland Artist Collection, which serves as a permanent visual reminder of UMUC’s deeply planted roots here at home.

But regardless of how you choose to give, I am delighted to welcome you to the President’s Circle…on behalf of this university’s students, faculty, and staff. Your leadership…your accomplishments…and your generosity amaze and inspire us all….empowering us in so many ways to change lives….by being what and where our students need us to be.
Thank you.

Susan C. Aldridge, Ph.D.
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