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INAUGURAL ADDRESS
COLUMBUS STATE COMMUNITY COLLEGE
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Isn't this a great venue? Since its opening in 1928 many legendary performers have graced this stage, including Count Basie, James Brown, Miles Davis, Duke Ellington, Etta James, and Columbus' own Nancy Wilson. I guess we can add Mark Harrison's name to that list. Thanks to our friends at the Lincoln Theatre for opening your doors to us.

Thanks to all of you for being here today to celebrate Columbus State Community College. I'm grateful that Tracy agreed to be a part of today's event. We've been by each other's side through every step of our adult lives. It is no exaggeration to say that were it not for her, I would not be here. She is an accomplished professional, a loving mother, the most giving person I've ever met, my equal in every way. No one has sacrificed more to get us to Columbus than Tracy, our sons Sam and Mark, and our daughter Julie.

I'm lucky to have a lot of family and friends here today. I'm thankful that my mother Phyllis is here. My father couldn't make it. He's a little under the weather, but I know he's watching online. I learned the value of a hard day's work at an early age, with role models throughout my family spanning generations. My family works for a living – literally in the factories and the fields. My generation is the first to attend college, and any professional accomplishments I've been lucky enough to achieve have their roots in the tobacco fields of Lewis County, Kentucky and the night shift at Cincinnati Milacron.

Without question, I'm a lucky man.

A leader's first job is to say "thank you," and I'd like to take a few minutes to do that.

I'm grateful to the Columbus State Board of Trustees: Our Board Chair, Poe Timmons; our Vice Chair, Dr. Rick Owens; our past board chair, Bill Dolan; Lynne Bowman; Mike Flowers; Anne Lopez-Walton; Dianne Radigan; and Rich Rosen. I truly appreciate your trust and the partnership we've already developed.

I would also like to acknowledge Ms. Suzi Stilson Edgar, a devoted trustee at Columbus State for 16 years. Suzi served as the chair of my search committee, and lost her life tragically last spring.

My personal thanks go to Representative Heard, who agreed to join us only yesterday after Senator Tavares had a death in her family. Thanks to Mayor Coleman, President Gee, Superintendent Harris, Rich Rosen, Korie Jenkins, Dr. Judith Dann, and Poe Timmons for participating today and for their kind remarks. I thank Pastor Cory Simonton, who I'm dragging to Guatemala in a couple of weeks, and Dr. Victor Davis who will deliver the benediction. Thanks also to the student, employee, and community performers for being a part of this.

To the faculty and staff at Columbus State – thank you for taking me in, and for the patience you’ve shown in my early learning about the college. I look forward to working shoulder-to-shoulder with you to make Columbus State an even greater place to work, and a catalyst for positive change in the communities we serve. I appreciate and admire your commitment to students, to scholarship, and to service, and I feel a deep sense of responsibility to help create an environment for you to do your best work. We’re going to do important work together. We already are.

To our students, my heroes. You are brilliant, persistent, creative, stubborn, busy and talented. You overcome obstacles, don’t take no for an answer, and provide incredible hope for the future. You’re on your way to become doctors and lab technicians, first responders and engineers, teachers, chefs, software developers, and business leaders. You are why we are here and I thank you for your inspiration.

To the many elected officials, corporate and community leaders, and college, university, and K-12 partners, thank you for the incredible welcome you’ve extended to my family and me in our transition to Columbus. I’ve lived most of my life in Ohio, but never in Columbus. You’ve made us feel like one of your own in a very short period of time.

I’m not from here, but I feel like I’m home. My wife tells me we’re not moving again, so I gotta make this work. But I can’t think of a better place to make it work than in Columbus, Ohio. I feel very lucky to be here.

Last week Tracy and I were watching the late news, and we saw where Columbus State’s own Rick Brunetto, who accompanied Mark just a minute ago, was staging a benefit concert for his mentor who had fallen on hard times. Tracy looked at me and said “Columbus people don’t let Columbus people down.” Aren’t we lucky to be living in a city where that’s the first impression of someone new to town? Aren’t we lucky to be living in a city that truly cares about its people?

And while I’m at it...

Aren’t we lucky to be living in a city that knows how to get things done? A city that isn’t afraid to think ambitiously. A city that can marshal partnerships across all sectors to take on a bold agenda for the future.

Aren’t we lucky to be living in a city that truly values diversity? A city that is among the most inclusive in America. Where differences are not just tolerated, but celebrated.

Aren’t we lucky to be living in a region that cares so deeply about education? A region that boasts some of the greatest colleges and universities in the world. A region that aligns the expertise and resources of its K12 districts, higher education, business leaders, and economic development groups to ensure that all students have the opportunity to succeed.

Aren’t we blessed to be living in a time that demands our best work? To be living in a time when our very best thinking, our most creative ideas, our most persistent work ethic, are needed to address the

challenges and pursue the opportunities of our day. It's a real gift to have the opportunity to do your very best work. I think this is a moment in time that requires all of us to be at our best. I'm thankful for that gift.

One of my Guatemala friends, Reid Walker, likes to say "We all drink from wells we didn't dig," and that's certainly the case with me. My time at Columbus State follows four presidents who built the college into what it is today.

- Clinton Tosh was Columbus State's first president and served from 1963 to 1973. He took us from the Columbus Area Technician School to Columbus Technical Institute.
- Clarence Schauer oversaw the early construction of our downtown campus, including Columbus Hall, Delaware Hall, and Franklin Hall.
- Harold Nestor started at the college in 1963 and served as president from 1978 to 1995. He led the effort to re-charter Columbus Technical Institute to establish Columbus State as a fully comprehensive community college.
- Val Moeller served Columbus State for 14 years. She oversaw tremendous enrollment growth, established the college as a leader in online education, and led the development of the Delaware Campus.

Please join me in acknowledging these great leaders with a round of applause.

As I said, an inauguration is an important opportunity to celebrate a truly great college. An opportunity that hopefully won't come around again for a while. Columbus State has reached a number of important milestones recently, which provide a solid foundation for the important work that lies ahead. Here are a few facts about your college:

- Columbus State is the 4th largest higher education institution in Ohio, serving nearly 30,000 students.
- With full campuses in downtown Columbus and in Delaware County, plus 9 regional learning centers throughout central Ohio, we have a regional responsibility, serving our region by serving individual communities.
- In order to maximize access and convenience for students, Columbus State enrolls more students in online courses than any college in Ohio.
- And in a recent study, it was determined that Columbus State had an annual economic impact on our region of nearly one billion dollars.

We have 30,000 students with 30,000 different stories. Our students work hard. Most are working one or more jobs. Many have family responsibilities, caring for young children, aging parents, or both. Most are paying for their education out of their discretionary income. They aren't in school to pass time; they're in college to get somewhere.

Our students want it bad. Many are like me, the first in their family to go to college. Most of our students are from our region, but we serve students from all 88 counties in Ohio. Our students are from Ohio and they want to stay in Ohio. Our students are getting both younger and older. Each year Columbus State is the college of choice for more and more recent high school graduates, even as more working adults are returning to enhance their skills, or coming to college for the first time.

Laying out a bold vision for the future is a typical new guy thing to do. But I don't think that's authentic until you've lived it for a while. I prefer to think of this as the start of an important conversation about work we'll do together. A conversation that will lead to action, which will lead to significant progress for central Ohio. Columbus State has never been more important to our region than it is today. During tough times, community colleges do the heavy lifting associated with getting people back on their feet economically. Helping people reach their goals – achieve their dreams – will always be at the core of what Columbus State does. We will strengthen the pathway from an associate's degree to a bachelor's degree, helping students achieve that goal in a high quality, convenient manner. We will create new opportunities for returning adults to advance their careers or transition to new ones. Recognizing that a college education can change the trajectory of families, we will work to keep college affordable. Our value proposition is based on inclusiveness, innovation, opportunity for all, and a steadfast commitment to helping students achieve more than they ever thought they could. We will lead where we should, follow when needed, and rise to the challenge of our times.

While the specifics of our strategy will be developed in the coming months, the work of Columbus State will be built on the foundation of two fundamental objectives: student access and attainment, and workforce and economic development.

The hallmark of the community college movement has always been access, and that's certainly true of Columbus State. Enrollment has grown rapidly in recent years as the college has responded to people in need during the worst economic downturn in recent memory. Providing access will continue to be a priority, and we will work to ensure that higher education is within reach for anyone who wants it.

But enrollment growth alone is not nearly enough for our students or our region. So we've already begun a focused effort to create an environment where it's not enough just to be in college; you need a commitment to a goal and a pathway to completion.

We want to get more students into college, but we also want to get them out. Get them out with a degree, a certificate that prepares them for career advancement, or successful transfer to a bachelor's degree program. Our goal, in fact our expectation, is to dramatically increase the number of college graduates in our region. Beyond sheer numbers we will pay close attention to the different needs of different student groups, building a culture of completion for all students, regardless of their background. We will provide a rigorous academic experience for students who come to us well-prepared, and we will strive to close the gap for students who come to us under-prepared, or from disadvantaged backgrounds, or students who have been out of school for a while. We will work to ensure that all students in our region who want to earn a bachelor's degree will have the opportunity to

do so. We will partner with colleges and universities, public and private, to keep the promise of a bachelor's degree open to any student with the ability and desire. We will align ourselves closely with the needs of employers in Ohio, ensuring that our technical certificates and other credentials enable adults in transition to quickly re-enter the workforce. We will act intentionally, recognizing the unique needs of unique students, ensuring that as our region becomes more diverse, Columbus State is at the forefront of creating a pathway to success for all students.

Columbus State also stands ready to accept our leadership role in workforce development and economic advancement for Ohio. Workforce and economic development go hand in hand, and education fuels both. We help put people to work, and a core part of our mission will always be to help put people to work in high skill, high value career fields. We will do our part to advance the good work already underway in science, technology, engineering and mathematics education. We will continue to build career pathways in fields important to our region including health professions, logistics, information technology, and manufacturing. We will respond with agility to our state's priorities, ensuring that our program offerings are aligned with emerging workforce needs. We will utilize all of our resources and expertise to ensure that Ohio's workforce is the most productive in the world. To employers in central Ohio, we will be your trusted business partner, bringing all of our assets to bear to help your companies compete on a global scale.

We will accomplish these goals through creativity and innovation, responding with an entrepreneurial spirit to meet the changing needs of our region.

We will accomplish these goals through a commitment to stewardship, conducting ourselves in a business-like manner, living within our means, and being good stewards of tuition, taxpayer, and philanthropic dollars.

Most importantly, we will accomplish these goals through deep, sustained partnerships.

To our K-12 partners: your challenges are our challenges. Your concerns, our concerns. And we will help you pursue opportunities and priorities that you see as important to your communities. As Gene Harris and I have discussed, we serve the same students, and in growing numbers we're serving them at the same time. We have the opportunity to partner deeply to ensure that families understand how college works in the 21st century. It is our shared responsibility to make sure students and parents know how to go to college. We will work with you to overcome the language barrier that exists for many families, to make it easy to understand the pathways and pitfalls associated with the transition to postsecondary education. We will collaborate to eliminate cultural barriers and non-academic barriers that deny access to far too many students. We will work in partnership to improve college readiness for all students. And we will design pathways that meet students where they are and get them where they want to be, and where they need to be.

To my fellow college presidents and other higher education leaders: thank you for reaching out to me in my earliest weeks on the job, and for making me feel so welcome. More importantly, thank you for returning my calls. As home to more than 20 institutions of higher education and some 120,000

students, Columbus is one of the largest college towns in America. As the only open admission community college in this portfolio, Columbus State is the front door to higher education for many, if not most, students and families in our region.

The business we're in has changed, and I think it has changed permanently. In my view, colleges and universities who will thrive in this new environment are those who can develop partnerships that are strategic and sustainable. The diversity of our institutions positions us to serve the diverse needs of our state's student population. I believe that our network of colleges and universities has the potential to quickly become the most productive higher education partnership in America. We can accomplish things together that we simply can't approach individually. I always remind myself that partnerships are between people, not between institutions. Know that I'm always a phone call away. I look forward to our work together.

Without question, we're in the midst of a difficult time; a period of uncertainty. Perhaps the most challenging period in a generation or more. I see this as a time for educators, and our institutions, to provide visible leadership. Colleges don't have term limits...sometimes college presidents do. Our institutions stand the test of time. It puts us in a unique position to respond to the challenges of the day. This is a moment in time for us to stand united and take action.

What if we decided that education was the most important priority in our community? What if we decided that it was so important that we wanted to guarantee the opportunity to earn a college degree for every student in our region with that goal? What if we worked together to eliminate the barriers of cost, academic preparation, time and location? What if we opened the door as wide as we possibly could? As one of the largest college towns in the world, that can be a big door. What if we aligned our curriculum, our policies, and our systems so that a credential at each transition point ensured success at the next level? What if we channeled our philanthropy to ensure that no one was denied a college education because they didn't have the means? What kind of message would this guarantee send to students and families in central Ohio? Imagine how our reputation as a community would be viewed. What kind of economic impact might it have for *The Dispatch* to tout on the front page "Columbus guarantees college for all?" To have this message go viral, stating to the world that our region means business, that we care about our future, and that we're putting our money and our actions where our mouth is. What message would it send about the values of our region? Does anyone doubt that if we work together, and decide that this is a priority, that this goal is within our reach?

Aren't we lucky to be in this community, at this moment in time, where this vision is achievable?

Thank you for the opportunity to serve. I come to this job with a deep sense of humility, a profound sense of responsibility, a sense of purpose, and a sense of urgency. We don't know what the future holds, but I look forward to figuring it out together.

As I close, I would like to share a poem with you that has followed me for 10 years or more. The poet is Marge Piercy, and the poem is entitled To Be of Use.

The people I love the best
jump into work head first
without dallying in the shallows
and swim off with sure strokes almost out of sight.
They seem to become natives of that element,
the black sleek heads of seals
bouncing like half-submerged balls.

I love people who harness themselves, an ox to a heavy cart,
who pull like water buffalo, with massive patience,
who strain in the mud and the muck to move things forward,
who do what has to be done, again and again.

I want to be with people who submerge
in the task, who go into the fields to harvest
and work in a row and pass the bags along,
who are not parlor generals and field deserters
but move in a common rhythm
when the food must come in or the fire be put out.

The work of the world is common as mud.
Botched, it smears the hands, crumples to dust.
But the thing worth doing well done
has a shape that satisfies, clean and evident.
Greek amphoras for wine or oil,
Hopi vases that held corn, are put in museums,
But you know they were made to be used.
The pitcher cries for water to carry
and a person for work that is real.

Thank you for letting me be of use. God Bless.