



State of the University Address (Reunion Day)
September 24, 2023

Good afternoon, and welcome home to the university that we all love so much. Thank you for being here today. Mark Twain once advised that “It is better to keep your mouth closed and let people think you are a fool than to open it and remove all doubt.”

Given my role at the University, I am only too happy to speak with you. I only ask that you would please be kind to me in your assessment of my remarks.

I have two goals in my remarks today. First, I want to let you know where we are at the University in the present. Second, I would like to provide an early peak into the vision so far. Given I started my service on July 10, 2023 there remains much that I still need to learn, reflect upon and get others to weigh in on and help develop.

While Twain once wrote “A man who carries a cat by the tail learns something he can learn in no other way,” that has not been anything like my experience at Caldwell. People here are wonderful and supportive.

I have, once I was invited to interview face to face, doing very deep reading and studying. Caldwell indeed runs like most other universities that I have had the honor to serve. We have students, faculty and staff. Students live on campus, pay tuition and we operate really a twenty-four seven operation during the semesters. What is different are the people and the culture which takes time to understand, appreciate and get to know. I have already been engaged in some deep and serious learning, listening and discussions . . . mostly interesting and fun . . . some challenging. This sort of work is required when one joins a new university community.

So before I talk about vision I'd like to give you some insights into what I've learned about Caldwell today, on my 50th day, on the job. But who's counting? Before I arrived, I created a 20-page transition plan with a few dozen items and benchmarks and detailed tasks. Even before I arrived, I embarked on completing the first 100 days as effectively as possible and the first year as well.

Part of my initial work included detailed and deep building tours. Vice President of Administration and Operations Sheila O'Rourke joined me, as did members of her staff and building occupants in some cases. We looked at and took notes about every closet, every room, wall, every boiler room, etc. to get a good sense for the state of the art here. The review was thorough and complete to say the least. Two long term benefits will come from this: I

really know the facilities and I got to know Sheila her team and second, there is now a project list of large and small projects and the total estimate at this point is \$43M in projects. Simply put, completing even half of these will transform our university. A key project on our list for example is the Alumni Theatre, estimated at \$5 million, where a complete renovation and significant upgrade is a crucial project. This is the focus because it is really the only existing facility on campus that needs major work.

I have met a few alumni in their homes, at breakfasts, lunches and dinners. I have met a few mayors, Assembly members, commissioners, and Carlos Pomares on our Board (he's been a great help) a local member of Congress (who hugged me the two times I met her) and the Essex County Executive, Joseph DiVincenzo, Jr. (who did not hug me . . . although he was friendly and supportive).

I have hosted students, faculty and staff at events both at Hawthorne House (the President's residence) and on campus. The energy I have encountered when I spent time with alumni and the Caldwell community is simply amazing, there's no other way to put it. I have also found the Sisters of St. Dominic to be so generous and supportive. Their accomplishments in establishing this university and their other charisms are amazing.

I am deeply impressed by the passion you, and our alumni, have for Caldwell, by the intense pride you feel as Caldwell graduates, and by your commitment to assuring a strong future for Caldwell.

I have also learned that we are an international university. About 12% of the fall incoming class of 2027 are international students and come from several countries with large Nepalese and Ghanaian contingents. Our current students are truly an outstanding group of young women and men. Alumni have, however, set the bar high in terms of expectations and we continue to endeavor to maintain that standard.

Despite the rigors of their academic coursework, students find the time to do a great deal outside the classroom! They are active on our 15 NCAA Division II teams, Sprint Football (second only to Army in our Division and we beat Cornell last week and Chestnut Hill last night despite the hurricane). They do Midnight Runs into New York to help the homeless, care about others, engage in more than 40 clubs and organizations, student government and honorary societies as well as work on research projects with faculty and intern at businesses, organizations and companies throughout the region. Our music performances, from the Marching Band to various ensembles and concerts, are also wonderful.

Twain, for the last time . . . wrote "Do the thing you fear most and the death of fear is certain." We have a great faculty at Caldwell that help students do the things and experience the experiences they fear most. Faculty are dedicated to helping students achieve their academic aspirations and thereby their professional successes in life. Caldwell, I posit, has great teachers and scholars. I am confident many of you remember specific faculty members, and Sisters, that made such a positive impact on your life.

For example, on Friday night Manny Perez, a men's basketball alumnus who joined our Athletics Hall of Fame, had wonderful things to say about one Sister during his time here. So it is the role of administrators to help students achieve their goals, to support faculty and staff

in their work to make that happen. So too it is the role of alumni to focus on their alma mater to make it better and stronger each year. The University stands on the shoulders of everyone who preceded us. We should carry the good will that our predecessors brought to the University forward to today's students, faculty and staff and do everything we can to cheer them on, cheer them up and cheer for their continued success. One of the key ways to accomplish this for everyone is for each of us to represent that Caldwell University is on the move to your circles of friends and colleagues. To wear our Caldwell clothing with pride in the community. To support us with your time, talent and treasure when you can (\$43M in projects).

While the Sisters had been educating the people of Caldwell since 1892, they saw a need for higher education and started Caldwell College for Women in 1939. Planning by Mother Joseph Dunn began in 1928. Several sisters attended Villanova, Fordham and the Catholic University. Fordham actually offered extension courses in Caldwell. Archbishop Walsh finally gave Mother Joseph permission to start the college after the Diocese was reorganized and there was no Catholic women's college. The first class of 51 (+3,800%) students enrolled with a tuition fee of \$200 + \$400 for room and board. The University has come a long way since our humble beginnings.

We are at the same time at a critical juncture in the life of this university. Today's challenges are societal and as the result of the confluence of economics, technology, demographics, global changes, and changing societal expectations. Higher education matters to those of us who want to be successful now and in the future . . . I can guarantee that Chinese and Indian parents are not telling their children to forgo higher education! Society demands that we educate this generation with the skills and experiences they will need to navigate an ever-changing world, all at an affordable cost.

We are in the final steps of designing our new strategic plan that will begin as we enter our 85th year. We are calling it *Renaissance 2028*. It will focus on building additional academic excellence, creating financial opportunities and focusing on what we need to focus upon for the long-term future of the University.

- We will work to support our faculty's effort to strengthen their effectiveness.
- We will increase our enrollment, over a period of several years, to about 2,500 which is just about 10% above our all-time high enrollment. This will add to the vitality of our campus and foster a more dynamic community of teaching and learning while keeping us a personal and intimate learning community.
- We will renovate our facilities to be true to our core value of Excellence.
- We are planning to complete a major renovation of the Alumni Theatre as I mentioned earlier. If you know someone who can help . . . please let me know.
- We are also planning to add a Coop the Cougar statue as a point of pride, tradition and school spirit on campus.

Of course, we could not dream big like this if it weren't for the support of our Board of Trustees, community, friends and alumni. I thank you on behalf of our students, who benefit the most from your continued generosity. It is also very important to say that we cannot do everything we want to do on our own. It takes key partnerships with like-minded individuals

and organizations. And it takes “creative,” “innovative,” and “bold” thinking so that we can prepare our students for a future that is unknown and theirs to conquer.

As we look to the future, we have been experiencing even greater competition for the most talented students because of changing demographics and economic trends.

- More students will come from areas beyond Caldwell’s traditional regions.
- More students will be coming to us with greater financial needs.
- More honors students will come to us.

We have also seen that more young women and men have come to us from underrepresented populations, and more are first-generation college students.

With your help, we will continue our traditions and will innovate to assure that our future alumni, like those who are here today, receive an outstanding education so that they can make a difference in their world. Thank you so much for your attention.

Please enjoy your time on campus. May God bless you all and may God bless Caldwell University.

Jeffrey D. Senese, Ph.D.
President

