Chancellor Brian Levin-Stankevich address

UW-Eau Claire Chamber of Commerce Breakfast, April 4, 2012

It is my pleasure to welcome you to the 2012 Chamber breakfast here at UW-Eau Claire. I want to thank the Eau Claire Area Chamber of Commerce, our annual partner in hosting this event, as well as Sodexo, which has provided not only a delicious breakfast for us this morning, but whose attentive staff take exceptional care of our students. A special thanks to Christian Wise, general manager, and Terry Knudson, catering director for Sodexo.

I’d also like to introduce some of my colleagues with us this morning — please stand as I call your names:

- Provost and Vice Chancellor for Academic Affairs Dr. Patricia Kleine;
- Vice Chancellor for Student Affairs Dr. Beth Hellwig;
- College of Business Dean Dr. Diane Hoadley;
- College of Education and Human Sciences Dean Dr. Gail Scukanec;
- College of Arts and Sciences Dean Dr. Marty Wood; and
- College of Nursing and Health Sciences Dean Dr. Linda Young.

Also here this morning are faculty and students from each of our four colleges who are seated throughout the room — you can identify them by the “Ask me about UW-Eau Claire” nametags. I hope by now you’ve had the opportunity to chat with them about their scholarship.

These faculty and students are doing research and internships in China, India, Scotland, Tanzania and South Africa as well as on the Rosebud Reservation in South Dakota and in the Rio Grande Valley in Texas. Closer to home, others are working in the Chippewa Valley, helping industry with lean process improvement and designing new bus graphics. Others are preparing for national presentations on gender identity, synthesizing new polymers and studying genome rearrangement.

As I have said many times, each week on our website we celebrate more outstanding achievements by faculty, staff and students than most other universities can do in a year. We’re very proud of the faculty and students who are with us today — please join me in recognizing the many contributions of UW-Eau Claire faculty, staff and our students.

I want to congratulate all of you on successfully navigating your way from your parking space to our breakfast here in what we are now calling the “Old Davies.” That’s because not only will there soon be a “New Davies” on campus — you can see it outside the window behind me — but we have also begun to ready the campus for a new Education Building, which will begin construction the minute our 2012 graduates leave after commencement this May.
UW-Eau Claire is truly “under construction,” as our theme for the breakfast reminds us. We are under construction in regard to our physical plant and also, as you know, in regard to our leadership transition.

This May, after six years as chancellor of this distinguished university, I will leave to assume the presidency of Westminster College in Salt Lake City, Utah. I do so with mixed feelings: While I look forward to new challenges, I am leaving behind colleagues and friends — including many of you in this room — who have made our time in Eau Claire so memorable for Debi and me.

Every day during the past six years, the commitment of our faculty and staff to our students has inspired and challenged me.

The tradition of excellence at UW-Eau Claire has been the standard to which I aspired and to which every person at this university is dedicated. While the leadership of this institution will change, I know the bedrock values of leadership, innovation, stewardship and inclusiveness will continue to guide even greater achievements.

That commitment to excellence is not limited to my colleagues on this campus. As I have gotten to know you and the Eau Claire community, I have seen the same dedication to preserving and enhancing a city and county that is healthy, growing and innovative. The spirit of collaboration across civic, business, non-profit and educational sectors is real and productive — and for that I commend you all.

But that spirit of partnership cannot be taken for granted — it is a value that must be continually protected. The economic challenges of the past four years and the breakdown in political civility across the state and nation have real potential to isolate us in pursuit of self-interest and to undermine the unique “Eau Claire spirit” that I have come to value so highly.

I use the term “Eau Claire spirit” intentionally. It’s not my term, but was first coined in 1914 by T.P. Branham, the president of the newly formed Civic and Commerce Association of Eau Claire—a predecessor institution to this Chamber.

He delivered a keynote address to the business leaders of this city almost a century ago, as they gathered to make plans for a “bigger and better Eau Claire,” according to the Eau Claire Leader newspaper. In his speech, President Branham warned that they could raise thousands of dollars for improvements but without the “Eau Claire Spirit” it would not succeed.

“Gentlemen,” Branham said (there were no female members at that time), “our task now seems to me to be the development among ourselves of that spirit of cooperation and interest in ...
our neighbor’s success that will bring the practical results that we all know will come from such cooperation.”

Those were not just empty words — the Civic and Commerce Association members had been active for years in advocating with the state legislature to establish a state normal school — or teacher’s college — in Eau Claire.

When the Regents finally approved the school in Eau Claire, another partnership helped to give it a home: The Park Company, a local land developer, sold 12 acres to the city of Eau Claire, which combined it with Putnam Park and donated all the land for the construction of the Eau Claire State Normal School.

And so, on a blustery fall day in 1916, the cornerstone was laid on Schofield Hall for the 20 faculty and 159 students of the Eau Claire State Normal School — our predecessor institution. Eau Claire’s civic leaders predicted that the school would be the “largest in the state,” that the amount of money it would bring to the city would reach “an astounding figure” and that the new institution would be “a better asset to the city than a manufacturing plant.” Those words were prophetic.

We may not be the largest college in the state today, a century later, but we have grown. From 159 students we now enroll 11,400 students from almost every county in Wisconsin and from 34 states. Today you’ll find students from around the globe, almost a hundred from China this year, as well as students from as far afield as Malaysia, the United Kingdom and Mexico. I will argue that while we are not the largest Wisconsin university, we are among the most distinguished and highly regarded, as attested by national rankings.

I also imagine that the members of the 1916 Civic and Commerce Association would be amazed at the financial impact UW-Eau Claire now has on our region. A 2005 economic impact study estimated the annual contribution of this university to the region’s financial health at more than $161 million. We are updating that study this summer and expect that value to be even more significant. We know, for example, that this past year our students provided area employers and non-profit organizations with more than 440,000 service hours. At minimum wage, that translated to a $3.2 million annual impact last year.

And speaking of economic boosts, Eau Claire just got one last weekend, when almost three quarters of a million dollars of revenue was generated by the Eau Claire Jazz Festival, under the leadership of artistic director and UW-Eau Claire faculty member Robert Baca.
I am confident that not only has this institution been a “better asset to the city than a manufacturing plant,” as the Association predicted, but over the years our graduates have also helped to found and grow countless businesses and organizations here and across the state.

As never before, we are doing our part to prepare graduates who can step into and excel in the jobs that Wisconsin needs now and in the future. More than half of our graduates move into the workforce with internship experience under their belts. More than 1,100 education students serve in 130 area schools — providing important assistance in the face of recent K-12 budget cuts. And 400 of our students provide clinical work at more than 100 regional medical facilities.

From those early days a century ago when Eau Claire business and community leaders — men and women like you — championed a new normal school, to today, when our faculty, staff and students continue to be a vital part of the cultural, intellectual, civic and economic life of this city, the Eau Claire spirit has been alive and well here.

But like a century ago, I believe we are standing on a threshold of even greater change, one that will require you to reaffirm our partnership as never before.

No less than a century ago — when our country was also recovering from a recent war and facing uncertain economic times — our future depends on strengthening our mutual partnership for the good of all.

I think we have a lot to learn from the spirit of collaboration between the Eau Claire Civic and Commerce Association and this university.

That partnership exemplified three characteristics we can emulate today:

1. Persevere in challenging times;
2. be innovative; and
3. think big.

When the regents put out a call for a new normal school in Western Wisconsin in 1891, Eau Claire was one of 28 communities that showed up to lobby. We lost out in that first round to Stevens Point and Superior, but persevered and were eventually successful.

Collaborations — then and now — require commitment and resolve, as the recent renovation of Hobbs Ice Arena illustrates. An unprecedented partnership included the university hockey programs, our students, our Foundation, the city of Eau Claire, the Eau Claire Figure Skating Club, the Eau Claire Memorial and North High School hockey programs, and Eau Claire Youth Hockey. Together they provided the funds necessary to create a new sports home this community can rightly be proud of.
The partnership has been successful because we each believed the outcome would benefit all of us and that our community would be a better place because of our commitment.

I see that same commitment in other recent efforts such as Clear Vision Eau Claire, which has engaged literally hundreds of people from the university and the community to envision the future of our region, and in the revitalization of downtown — more about those efforts a bit later.

I know there is real power in such collaboration.

The second lesson I’ve learned from Eau Claire’s early history is the importance of innovation. When the Civic and Commerce Association lost out in its bid for a new school, it took a different tack and instead was able to place Emmet Horan, a local educator, as Eau Claire’s first university regent. They found it pays to have a regent on your side — and today we are also grateful for the advocacy of our local UW System regent, Ed Manydeeds. We also look forward to working closely with our second newly appointed regent, John Behling.

But innovation involves more than political connections. Today, the state building process is such that the average project takes six to 10 years to complete, from application to ribbon cutting. Our new Education Building, on which we will break ground this spring, will have taken more than six years to complete when we open the doors in 2014.

We appreciate our partnership with the state of Wisconsin, which will make that building possible, but we also know that if we are to remain not only Wisconsin’s most beautiful campus, but also the campus that can provide 21st century learning for our students, we need to update and expand our current facilities more aggressively.

To do that, we have formed two new partnerships that we think exemplify the kind of innovation and entrepreneurial spirit that would make our predecessors proud. The first is with our UW-Eau Claire Foundation. Private philanthropy is an increasingly important source of support for public universities — and not just for the UW-Madisons of the world. It used to be that individuals assumed their tax dollars were adequate to support our public institutions.

But today, with only 17 percent of our total budget covered by state dollars, private support is increasingly important.

We used to say that state funding opened our doors, and private donations provided the extra dollars for the specialized programs that make us distinctive. That’s no longer true. Our students are now the primary funders of this university, and private dollars are increasingly needed to ease the burden of rising tuition costs.
Our Foundation annually provides more than $1.5 million in scholarships to students with need, enabling many more first-generation and low-income students to study here without having to take on heavy debt.

Fortunately, the UW-Eau Claire Foundation is one of the most professional and well run in our UW System. Last year it raised more than $4.3 million from more than 13,000 alumni and friends of this university, for which we are very grateful.

But more than that, our Foundation has a visionary board. When a community jewel — the St. Bede Monastery — was identified as a potential solution after bids for construction of our new Children’s Center came in well over budget, the board saw not only a good investment, but also an opportunity to serve the university and the Eau Claire community.

The Foundation created a new real estate subsidiary — Blugold Real Estate — and, with the support of our students, local Regent Manydeeds, legislators, Eau Claire county and Town of Washington officials, purchased the monastery and received permits for university use. The first tenant will be our Children’s Center, which will now have a home for environmental and outdoor education that is second to none.

We envision a campus complex — now called The Priory — that will be home not only to the Children’s Center but also to year-round learning. We are in the process of updating the facilities to accommodate a range of uses and identifying additional tenants.

While this Foundation partnership benefits the university, it also preserves a community treasure and will provide opportunities for enhanced community activities in the years to come.

I know many of you are familiar with St. Bede’s, but I asked our Foundation Executive Director Kimera Way to give us an inside look at UW-Eau Claire’s newest campus.

[Priory video plays.]

You should know that the Foundation has been able to draw on exceptional talent to assist in the new real estate ventures. Highly accomplished alumni from Chicago, Milwaukee and New York City have donated countless hours and incredible expertise to facilitating the new real estate entity. I want to especially recognize the chair of Blugold Real Estate, George Stroebel, who is here this morning. George would you please stand?

Our second innovative partnership is with our students, who are the underwriters for our new Davies Student Center, now nearly completed, as you can see behind me.

This $48.8 million investment in our community is possible because in 2003 our student leaders — all of whom have since graduated and did not have the opportunity to benefit from their
decision — believed in this institution. Their investment has created a facility that people across our entire region will use and treasure, from dancing in one of our new ballrooms at the Viennese Ball to hearing concerts or attending meetings in our new conference rooms.

We are very excited about the new Davies Center — we’ll begin moving in by the end of June, with the grand opening at Homecoming this September 29.

I thought you might appreciate a sneak peak at this new facility so you can see now what our student partnership has helped us accomplish. I’ve asked Phil Rynish, president of our Student Senate, to give you a video tour:

[New Davies Center video plays.]

Our students have served on the Davies planning committee from the beginning, and I want to publicly thank them for their leadership, which will leave a lasting legacy on our campus.

We are not the same university we were in 1916 or even a decade ago. I leave an institution that has the leadership, vision and expertise to be a strong partner for future shared projects. We know how to innovate and how to be entrepreneurial.

But more than that, we share with the founders of the Eau Claire Normal School and, I hope with all of you, a third characteristic, namely, the ability to think big. When Eau Claire applied for a Normal School there were only 20,000 people living in this city, and yet they knew their investment would be worth the risk.

Certainly the Davies Center and The Priory are big ideas that many thought would never happen. Thinking big is what will be required if we are to continue to compete in attracting new students and new businesses to this community.

Last year we completed our long-range facilities master plan. This was a two-year project that involved our campus as well as many of you in developing a plan for the next 20 years. We held listening sessions and shared different proposals with you to learn what kinds of facilities our students and faculty will need, as well as what opportunities there may be for us to partner with Eau Claire on shared facilities. We believe this plan is true to the spirit of thinking big.

The truth is that in this economy, with declining federal and state dollars, it is no longer possible for the university alone or the city alone to construct major facilities like an arts center or multi-purpose complex for large events or conventions. In the past that might have meant we were doomed to struggle along with a State Theater in need of repair or a Zorn Arena much too small for our needs, or a Haas Center that needs updating. Instead, as I have said since I first came to this
community, I believe the solution is to collaborate on facilities that will meet both community and university needs.

I’d like to invite Assistant Chancellor Mike Rindo to give you an overview of our new facilities master plan and to discuss some of the opportunities for new partnerships this plan includes.

[Mike Rindo reviews master plan, invites Ben Richgruber and Linda John to discuss Clear Vision process.]

Thank you, Mike, Ben and Linda.

You know, I think our 1916 predecessors got it right. They knew that together we can persevere, be innovative and think bigger than any one of us can imagine alone.

Today, this university is here because Regent Emmet Horan, university leaders, faculty and staff, and the Eau Claire Civic and Commerce Association believed in working together for the good of all. They understood the importance of investing time, talent and dollars in the Eau Claire spirit.

As I leave this special institution I want to thank you for the help, advocacy and encouragement you have provided to me and this university over the past six years. It has been a privilege to serve this community with you.

But as others step into leadership here — during the coming transition period and beyond — I urge you to continue to value and support this institution as the incredible asset it is. This partnership will not only preserve one of Wisconsin’s premier universities but also provide the community and region with the distinguished educational resource that will be critical to success in the century ahead.

With the new Davies Center behind me and the sounds of construction around us, I know there will be even stronger partnerships between UW-Eau Claire and the Eau Claire community in the years to come.

Because excellence — for this university and this region — is always under construction.

Thank you.