

Excerpts from Remarks at the August 27, 2009 General Assembly

Let's thank the Texan Marching Band, under the direction of Dr. Gary Westbrook, for raising our spirits!

Ladies and gentlemen, a year ago, I stood here as your new President, just one month after coming to Tarleton. The old cliché among university presidents is that the high point of your optimism and good feelings about the institution is in those first weeks. Then, as you peel back the layers and learn more - you wonder what you have gotten yourself into.

That has most assuredly not been the case for me - well, except for the day of the Homecoming Parade. As I sat on my trusty steed, Pistol, in what the *Empire-Tribune* called "true Texan style," it occurred to me that the future of my tenure at Tarleton could be determined by that horse! What if it bolted up Washington Street or, worse, into a crowd? At that moment, I did wonder what I had gotten myself into! Fortunately, Pistol had plenty of "horse sense" and it was a very enjoyable day.



It has been an exciting, interesting, and very quick year. The Tarleton family has shown Lisette and me many kindnesses. We quickly formed close bonds with the university and its remarkable people - here on campus, in Stephenville, and well beyond. I want to thank each of you for making us feel right at home.

I have come to understand that Tarleton is unique in its history, character, and opportunities. Spirit, pride and tradition are woven into our fabric. We are grounded in our roots as a private college, and we are growing in stature as a state university. Tarleton is a perfect blend of the best of public and private institutions.

I remain very proud to be your president.

Last year, I sharpened the focus of a detailed Strategic Plan into four simple statements:

- Excel in Scholarship, Teaching, and Learning
- Expand Our Horizons
- Encourage Leadership, Service, and Student Success
- Extend Our Reach

These "Four Es" are well known around campus. They have been memorized by many - perhaps in fear that this "walk-around President" might ask about them or that there might be a quiz. They have been featured in skits and songs at New Student Orientation. They

have been added to the e-mail signature line of faculty and staff. They've been highlighted on shirts, buttons, memory sticks, and, most recently, the mugs distributed by Staff Council. I even received this branding iron at the Tarleton Stampede from our rodeo coach, Mark Eakin. The Education faculty have developed a "cheer" to help them remember the Es. What a creative effort!

I think you can safely say that the Four Es have become part of the Tarleton vocabulary. Now, some of you are worried about what I will do next. Will I announce Ten Es? Or Four Fs? Three Gs and an H? What will he come up with next?

Let me assure you that we do not need new goals every year. In fact, if we have done it right – and I believe we have – our goals will stand up to changing times and shifting circumstances.

With a foundation in our mission and with nearly limitless possibilities for innovative implementation, these four goals will continue to carry Tarleton forward. Our strategic goal statements have not only been repeated, they have been advanced. The people of Tarleton have brought them to life in a number of interesting ways. I would like to introduce a few of the people whose good works contribute to Tarleton's success and demonstrate how our strategic goals are put into action each and every day.

- Lucy Armstrong in our Department of Social Work, Sociology and Criminal Justice was honored by the National Association of Social Workers as the Texas Tarrant County 2009 Social Worker of the Year. Lucy extends our reach into the community with her involvement in civic organizations and as a child advocate.
- In April, I had the honor of dropping by Dr. Richard Winton's freshman trigonometry class to surprise him with the Faculty Excellence in Scholarship Award. His work in theoretical mathematics resulted in several significant publications this year – which I will not attempt to summarize. Once he said "trigonometry," I was in over my head! What I hope is not lost is the fact that an esteemed theoretical mathematician is excelling in teaching fundamentals to first-year students. That, ladies and gentlemen, is the strength of Tarleton.
- This spring, Dan Malone was inducted into the Texas Intercollegiate Press Association Hall of Fame. Dan was already a Pulitzer prize-winning journalist who recently arranged for Tarleton students to gain professional experience by writing, editing, and publishing the journal of the International Texas Longhorn Breeders Association.
- Lieutenant Colonel Richard Pierce is the head of the Texan Battalion and our Military Science department. Over the summer, two of his ROTC students received a distinctive honor for their skills and leadership. They were among the more than 6,000 ROTC cadets from 280 universities who attended the leadership



development course at Fort Lewis, Washington. A Top Cadet was selected from each 500 person regiment. We are extraordinarily proud that two Tarleton cadets earned this distinction, placing them among the top Army ROTC students in the nation.

- There are many service projects that enhance the leadership abilities of our students and encourage their success. Johnny Robinson, the director of our student leadership programs, coordinated one of the projects I most enjoyed participating in this year – the Tarleton Round Up. Nearly 200 students, faculty and staff volunteered at some 40 sites in Stephenville to clean, rake, weed, and cut grass for Stephenville citizens who needed a helping hand. I have heard many compliments on the good work and

the great spirit of the students who participated in the Roundup.

Lucy, Richard, Dan, Colonel Pierce, and Johnny, we thank and congratulate you.

There are several faculty and staff who worked many hours on two separate diversity reports. The Task Force on Diversity in the Curriculum, chaired by Dr. Pat Zelman, prepared a report that addresses the need to improve the diversity climate at Tarleton through our academic activities. The Diversity Task Force for Expanding Our Horizons, chaired by Dr. Javier Garza, had a broader charge of developing a plan to advance Tarleton’s diversity and global awareness goal.

All of the recommendations brought forward by these two groups are being given very serious consideration. However, one change that we are making immediately as a result of these two reports is the creation of the Center for Global and Multicultural Initiatives. This new department will be headed by an Associate Vice President who will report directly to the Provost. The Center will include both our current international program office and the Center for Diversity Initiatives (CDI). But, based on the explicit recommendations of the Diversity Task Force, the Center for Diversity Initiatives will be changed to the Office of Diversity and Inclusion. These changes will help us expand our global view of diversity and expand our students’ horizons. The time and dedication of the members of the two diversity committees is greatly appreciated.



Our facilities are also important to our success and to meeting our strategic goals. A number of exciting improvements and construction projects are currently underway. The campus is awash with orange – cones and barrels. It is the official color of progress . . . and inconvenience. I told some of you last week that we now have the 4 Ds: Detours, Delays, Demolition, and Dirt. All healthy signs.



Work continues on the Campus Loop, improvements are being made to the Thompson Student Center and Trogon House, and construction of the new Nursing Building and Southwest Regional Dairy Center is moving forward. I look forward to milking cows in that barn soon!

We have also just cleared the way for the new student housing facility next to Centennial Hall. Thanks to the miraculous work of our housing,

physical facilities, grounds and business office teams, Gough Hall has reopened to fill housing needs this fall.

Beyond the miracle at Gough, we just completed a very successful Move In Weekend with the help of many departments across campus. It was extremely well-organized by Ben Kunze and his committee, and I heard many positive comments from our new students and their family members. It was truly a campus-wide effort with faculty, staff and student organizations welcoming our new students to campus and helping them get settled in the residence halls.

Thank you to everyone who helped prepare Gough and to all who were here to help the students move in. Your work was truly a demonstration of Tarleton pride and spirit. Give yourself a round of applause!

Let me summarize where Tarleton is today. The people and programs I have mentioned represent hundreds of others who are committed to the quality of a Tarleton education.

We have innovative programs that prepare our graduates to lead in their careers and communities.

We have dedicated colleagues on the faculty and staff who take enormous pride in student success.

We have extraordinary students whose energy and ability inspire us all.

We have clear Strategic Goals, and, ladies and gentlemen, we have momentum.

These assets will enable us not just to survive in these tough economic times, but to thrive. We must seize the opportunities that you have earned.

And that brings us to the future. How do we seize opportunities and thrive in the years ahead? We will, after all, not be judged on the cleverness of an alliterative, aspirational list of goals. Not by what we say, but what we do. We will be measured by the quality of our graduates and our contributions to knowledge.

This year I have been asked repeatedly: What do you think of Tarleton? That is more than a polite question for a newcomer. It is the question I consider a lot. I always quickly remark on the beauty of this campus and the great spirit of its people.

But, what truly defines this university?
What sets us apart from other universities of our size?
What makes a Tarleton education distinctive?

These are questions of profound importance to us. Of the thousands of colleges and universities in this country, why should a student chose Tarleton?

With our four strategic goals as a guide, we must have a conversation about what uniquely defines a Tarleton education. Dr. Gary Peer, our new Provost and Vice President for Academic Affairs, and I have started a conversation around this idea. We want to know how we develop a distinctive educational experience that uniquely prepares our students for life. This is a conversation we hope all of you will be a part of in the months ahead.

I have come to understand that Tarleton is unique in its history, character, and opportunities. We are grounded in our roots as a private college, and we are growing in stature as a state university. I see many ways that Tarleton reflects strong characteristics of both public and private institutions. Our academic programs include professional and practical preparation alongside a strong liberal arts core.

However, to borrow a phrase from Denise Martinez and the committee working on our Quality Enhancement Plan, we must “Keep it Real.” The QEP committee is developing a plan that will enhance students’ engagement in their own education by making connections across the curriculum and connecting the curriculum to life experiences beyond the classroom.

I believe that each of us needs to do what the QEP is suggesting for our students: make connections across curricular, departmental and administrative lines. We must connect in-class learning to life experiences beyond the classroom. We need to talk more about the impact of education on life and a career. As we do so, we will provide a distinctive and relevant education to our students.

Some of you may wonder how this applies to you. All of us can do this, whether it is as a faculty member in the classroom, a coach on the athletic field, or a staff member who works with students on the Toro Team.

As we continue our progress this year, we must think creatively and collaboratively outside of our comfortable boundaries. Particularly in times of more limited resources, we can leverage our strengths by working together. Clearly, in today's world, issues, problems, and opportunities do not know parochial academic structures or boundaries between administrative units. New knowledge and significant solutions are often found through what seem to be unlikely connections. Let's talk to each other more and forge new collaborations. Let's find new connections. Let's excel in our service to each other and our students.

The First Year Experience team is encouraging our new students to think about the impact of their college days on themselves and on the university. Students are being challenged to "Make Connections and Become Legendary." At Duck Camp, the students were shown two remarkable, brief videos featuring Michael Jordan that were produced by Nike as part of a "Become Legendary" campaign.

Become legendary. Two words with a profound challenge.

In the video Michael Jordan offers us clues as to what it takes to become legendary and to achieve such a level of excellence. He said:

*"Maybe I led you to believe it was easy when it wasn't...
That my game was built on flash and not fire...
Maybe I led you to believe that basketball was a God given gift and not something I worked for every single day of my life."*

Today, I ask you the same thing we asked of our students: What will you do to add to the legend of Tarleton?

I know how hard it is each day for all of you. Answering questions. Solving problems. Adapting to new challenges. This university could not function without your hard work. This university cannot achieve excellence and we cannot become distinctive without your renewed efforts every day.

Except at commencement, we often don't see the outcome of all of our work. And you don't often enough hear "thank you." Hear it now: Thank you. Thank you for all you are doing every day to help our students – past and future – find success.

Our strategic goals are clear to all and I appreciate how hard you are working to achieve them. From all that I have seen, from all that I have learned, with your continued help, this promises to be an outstanding year for Tarleton.

Thank you.