

Inaugural Address of Dr. Carol F. Probstfeld  
Sixth President of State College of Florida, Manatee-Sarasota  
November 8, 2013

Thank you so much.

Chairman Trigueiro, Vice Chair Bailey and Trustees of the Board, distinguished guests, faculty, staff, alumni and students: It is a privilege to stand before you today as sixth president of State College of Florida.

While I readily acknowledge that this is not my personal ceremony but instead a significant ritual in the life of this College, the region's first and largest public institution of higher education, I nevertheless am filled with gratitude for all of you who have extended yourselves for me and for State College of Florida. You honor me with your presence.

I am both humbled and inspired anew by the generous remarks of my colleagues and friends, Rick, Karyn, Drew, and Vida. Thank you for being a part of this special day.

The confidence the Board has placed in me is deeply appreciated and personally very heartfelt. Thank you for this privilege.

Dr. Korcheck and Dr. Pappas, thank you for your friendship and the unwavering support you have given this College over the years.

To my husband, Bill, your love and encouragement are with me always even when we are continents apart. Thank you.

And to my brother: Mike, thank you for immediately saying “yes” when I asked you to leave your important work in Arizona and come speak on my behalf. Like with many of the exciting and kind of scary moments growing up together, I can’t imagine this moment without you at my side.

Thank you to my father-in-law Gil, who next month will be celebrating his 90<sup>th</sup> birthday. It means a lot to me that you are here today. Thank you also to my sister-in-law, Celia, and cherished friends for coming from around the country to mark this special day with me.

Finally, I offer my sincere gratitude to all of those who planned and carried out today’s celebrations. It has been a privilege to serve alongside you for the last ten years. Thank you for always giving your best to State College of Florida.

Giving our best: That is one of the most admirable traits of the State College of Florida family.

And that shared passion for excellence is why I feel so much at home here. It was a strong family value implanted in me as a child and it has been rooted in the values of this College since the founding.

Mike has introduced you to our parents, Ralph and Madge. They were a hard-working couple who were united in their determination to see their son and daughter receive a college education, but it was my mother whom I credit for instilling in me a firm belief that higher education can empower a person to transcend otherwise limiting circumstances.

Frugality is in my soul and that's inherited from my mother, too.

I watched her sit at the dining table late at night, poring over budgets and figuring out ways to pay for our college. Because of the example and expectations that she and my father set, I never questioned *if* I would go to college. And I always strived to show them that they had invested wisely in me.

Mom lived to see Mike and me graduate, and I know it would please her mightily to know that the seeds that she and our father planted keep bearing fruit through the college accounts that our father set up for their grandchildren.

We all grew up with stories and fables, but the problem was that most of the morals of the stories didn't relate to our lives as kids. Mom took advantage of everyday experiences to come up with adages that invariably were designed to impress on me that education was the most important thing I could acquire.

Remember the Miss America pageant? It was the scholarships that captured my mother's attention. I can hear her now saying, "Looks will fade, but education you will have with you forever," and "The material things in life aren't as important as the knowledge and experiences you store up here."

Mom's "morals of the stories" still resonate today as I view our College's mission from a broader perspective. "There's nothing I hate more than an educated snob" was her reminder that education for the sake of having letters behind a name and a framed diploma on the wall is meaningless; it's what we do with the education that matters.

And this particular adage reverberates with me, as I believe it will with you: "We will do all we can to make sure you have the opportunity to go wherever and be whatever you want, but never forget from where you came."

Mom's expression is at the core of my personal philosophy and we would be wise as an institution to keep it as a central principle as well. Let us not forget where we came from as a College.

Almost 57 years ago the State Board of Education established Manatee Junior College with the primary mission of providing college training in this region. In the first year, more than twice the expected number of students showed up in borrowed classrooms in downtown Bradenton while this campus was being built.

The founders were determined to have a first-class College from the beginning. They persuaded a highly respected leader, Dr. Sam Neel, the namesake of this performing arts center, to come as the first president. Dr. Neel in turn attracted outstanding faculty, staff and students who wanted to be part of a College committed to excellence.

Dr. Neel has passed, but in the audience today we have his stepson, The Honorable Ed Nicholas. Ed grew up on the grounds of this college. He has a long history of being actively engaged with us from being an adjunct professor to serving on the Foundation Board of Directors. How very fortunate we are to have this lasting connection to our founding father.

Over the decades, as our community has grown and developed, so has our College. We have evolved, expanded and transitioned from MJC to MCC to SCF. Word-crafters have created beautiful mission statements that reflected various periods. But while the words and names have changed, the institutional commitment to a College of excellence, to student success, and to our community remains.

As long as the keys words -- **excellence, student and community** -- are at the heart of our mission, we will never forget why we're here. And we will remember from whence we came.

That is not to say that growth and transitions are without challenges. It seems that the more some things change, the more they stay the same. Sixteen years

ago, when Dr. Sarah Pappas stood in this same hall and gave her inauguration speech, she noted challenges for the College that included:

- Being held more acutely accountable for our performance
- Having to respond with ever more flexibility to the increasingly diverse expectations of students
- Needing to substantially adjust major aspects of curriculum and course content to meet the requirements of education reform and
- Having to continually reorganize and re-budget to deal with diminishing financial resources.

Those challenges from 1997 sound all too familiar. It makes me wonder if Dr. Pappas had a crystal ball because these are very similar to challenges that we confront today.

Let's borrow that virtual crystal ball and shift our collective gaze to tomorrow, some 20 years from now: In this or a similar hall, another presidential inauguration is underway. What does our crystal ball tell us about the institution that the future president, Board, faculty, student body and community will inherit from us?

You might wonder about forecasting 20 years in the future when we have pressing immediate deadlines and priorities.

Consider this: The sole reason we are able to be here today in this hall is because in 1957, people were passionate about bringing College education to this community.

We were able to invite Governor Bob Graham to the grand opening of our Venice campus in 1985 because 15 years before that, people in south Sarasota County saw a need and worked diligently to meet that need.

We could celebrate our first building in Lakewood Ranch in 2003 because years earlier, leaders saw the growth out east and stepped up to fulfill our mission and provide college education for the young people and adults in that area.

For tomorrow's promise to be met, it is incumbent on us to create the vision and plan *today*. Looking back at our great heritage is an exercise in nostalgia unless we honor the work of our founders by paying it forward, just as they did for us.

Education is about the future. We often don't get to see the fulfillment of our labors. But that doesn't relieve us of the responsibility. The time to plan for the College of 2033 is TODAY.

Here, another adage comes to mind: Growth for the sake of growth is as meaningless and as wasteful as a diploma obtained just for show. This is a call to action. What will we leave for the benefit of those who come after us? Just as the Boards, faculty and community of yesterday worked with Drs. Neel, Korcheck, and Pappas to build *our* College of today, so must we!

Speakers on this platform have shared how this College directly contributed to their success in life. It is a point of pride that the State College of Florida family continues this tradition. I have never seen such dedicated people in one organization as the staff and faculty at SCF. They love this institution and they know what we do is meaningful and has the power to change lives.

Let's consider an SCF where: "Best" is the first word that comes to anyone's mind when State College of Florida is mentioned. . . . We graduate the best of the best--nurses, university transfer students and students--all prepared for the workforce needs of the day. Employers everywhere see an applicant with an SCF degree and say, "I can't wait to hire that person." Our outstanding faculty, student clubs and teams are routinely nationally recognized. We have a wait-list of applicants for open positions; they all want to be part of a College that chooses excellence.

We have the fundamentals in place right now to make that College a reality but some hard work will be required.

We must be candid with ourselves and conduct honest self-examinations.

We must never settle for average. Being "good enough" is *not* good enough when we can and must be better.

We must be open to innovation and here I am not referring to tools of technology but to the tool of the mind.



We must think about things in different and new ways.

We must give ourselves permission to fail because if we don't occasionally fail, we are being too cautious.

We must engage all stakeholders and never allow ourselves to be disconnected from our greater community.

When envisioning and developing our future College, there is one part of our DNA that must remain: Our commitment to open access so any student with a HS diploma or GED (General Education Development) certificate can continue their education and improve their future.

In a few minutes the Choir is going to sing a song that is a favorite of mine. It is titled "Because We Believe." I hope you will draw inspiration from the song, as I do. To me, it speaks to this point.

Some might say the goals of achieving a reputation as "the best" while retaining "open access" are contradictory. To illustrate why I believe they are complementary terms, let me tell you about a little boy named Seth.

Seth is part of a large family that holds reunions where they play family Olympics-style games. A lot of athletic young men in the family take their games seriously, so little kids are kept out of the play and harm's way. Ever since Seth was a

toddler he begged his father to let him play. When he was 7, he said “Dad, I’m big now. Please let me be in the sack race.” So his Dad helped Seth into a sack, rolled down the edges to keep him from being swallowed up, and put him at the starting line with the young bucks. The whistle blew and the young athletes bounded like kangaroos and collapsed in a laughing heap at the finish line.

Then someone said, “Look at Seth!” Way down the field, there was little Seth, making tiny bunny hops, his eyes fixed on the finish line and a fierce determination on his face. His family members lined up on both sides of the field and yelled, “Come on Seth! You can do it!” Seth broke into a grin when he saw everyone cheering for him, and he hopped steadily all the way to the finish line and there he pumped both arms into the air and yelled, “I did it! I win!”

Seth did what *he* set out to do. He crossed the finish line. He did *his* personal best.

At State College of Florida, we take tremendous pride in our super-students, and there are many. The Brain Bowl team, Phi Theta Kappa scholars, Model UN competitors, Music and Theatre performers, student-athletes, Math Club and Phi Beta Lambda members, our A-grade Collegiate School--these are just a few of our top-performing student groups that cross the finish line in leaps and bounds.

But we can’t lose sight of the Seths. They come to us because we are the College that offers an opportunity for everyone to be successful regardless of where they start the race and at whatever pace they proceed. We are the family members who line up on both sides and cheer equally fervently for the Bright Futures

scholars and their colleagues who need developmental education to cross the graduation stage.

We have always been more than just an academic institution. This full spectrum of opportunity is what makes us unique. This is who we have been, this is who we are, and this is who we are compelled to be.

As we honor our heritage, let us also plan and prepare to leave a worthy legacy for the SCF of tomorrow.

Thank you for the great privilege of being YOUR president. I invite you to join me in the work that lies ahead.