Dr. Summerlin’s Address at a Fund Raising Event in 2005

Thank you for coming to our place for lunch. I hope you feel well fed and comfortable. It has been a pleasure during the last five years for Schreiner University to have so many community members over for events at this great facility. Now I would like to talk with you for a few minutes about shaping lives.

Most of us in this room have our own stories about individuals who had an impact on our lives, and many of them were teachers-- folks who listened to us when others didn’t want to, who refused to let us slide into mediocrity, or who inspired us simply through their own example of excellence. You are sitting today at a place where that kind of impact occurs regularly, because faculty and staff understand that to be their role—and have for decades.

How has this improbable institution, founded by Charles Schreiner, a Texas pioneer in his eighties, and deeded to the Presbyterian Church for oversight, persisted all these years and created such a bright future for itself? I think that I know part of the answer. One of the happy aspects of my job as president is talking with students past, present and future. Would it surprise you to know that there is a common theme in the comments of all these folks?

Jim from the 1940s says it this way: “I got more educational value at Schreiner per unit of time than at any of the three major universities where I took degrees later.” Harris from the early 60s, says, “Schreiner …let me have success for the first time.” Or Teresa, who graduated a few years ago: “These people…believed in me when I hardly had the energy to believe in myself.”

These are all testimonies to what I regard as the truest Schreiner tradition, the ability to care more about student success than anyone else does. It is born of teachers and mentors who present challenges to their students, and then help them meet those challenges. Those are not values that every college or university embraces. But we persist in holding to them here at Schreiner. We see them deeply rooted in our church-relatedness, not because we are here to serve a particular denomination—our students come from many faith backgrounds—but because that tradition so deeply respects human intellectual and spiritual potential and embraced education as the proper response to God’s creation. So it was a natural step last year to adopt “Learning by Heart” as our mark or brand. It may sound a bit corny, but I always hear in that phrase the words of Austin columnist Bob Lively, who wrote about Jonathan, a young Schreiner student he knew: “Schreiner does the best job of any school I know of loving students into realizing their potential.”

And here we are in 2005 looking into a still-new century and asking the question “where is Schreiner headed in the future?” As you walk through this campus and realize that
nearly 1/3 of our facilities, 1/3 of our academic majors, and ¼ of our student population were not here seven years ago, you know Schreiner is on the move. We are blessed with a community that has long been a partner in this work, through support for the Hill Country College Fund and other efforts. We, in turn, are committed to giving back to our community. That commitment begins with an annual economic impact of nearly $70 million, a big public boost for a private not-for-profit! Beyond that, we delight in sharing library and internet services, cultural events on campus, the Symphony of the Hills, Living History Day for grade school kids, free course enrollment for qualified high school seniors, and scores of our own students who serve local non-profits as volunteers and interns. Few small colleges are blessed with the setting and people like you that we have here in Kerrville.

But let me shift gears for a moment and share some realities about higher education in our state. Right now, of every 100 students in Texas entering the ninth grade, only 13 will have earned a college degree after ten years. Think of our saying to this audience, “These three tables will earn degrees, but none of the rest of you.” In the next decade the number of high school graduates in Texas will grow by 15%, increasingly minority students from families with modest incomes and little or no college experience. Where will our state be if we don’t find a way to provide postsecondary education for these young people? How will their potential be realized? Will they become productive citizens or wards of the state?

Well, that is just where Schreiner comes in. It will take all public and private institutions to meet our state’s ambitious goals of expanding college attendance and graduation by 50% in the next ten years, but I know that many of the students who are considering college today are precisely the kind of people likeliest to thrive at a Schreiner and likeliest to be swallowed up in the huge classrooms of large universities.

Perhaps some of you are thinking, “But Schreiner is a private university. It is out of reach for the kids you are describing.” Let me share some information to illustrate how inaccurate such a myth can be:

- Students who apply to Schreiner often apply to UT-Austin, Texas A&M, UTSA and Texas State, all quality public universities. Did you know that when you add up the cost of attendance of these four—tuition, fees, room, board and incidentals—and when you factor in the average amount of tuition aid Schreiner provides, the average annual cost of those four institutions is only about $200 less than the cost of attendance at Schreiner? That’s so because we provide over $4 million in our own aid annually.
- One of the critical factors in affording higher education is the federal Pell Grant, awarded strictly on the basis of need. Institutions with significant numbers of students receiving Pell Grants are institutions serving students from modest circumstances. Did you know that approximately 45% of Schreiner students are Pell recipients? That is one of the highest percentages in the state!
- Schreiner for over 25 years has offered a Learning Support Services program for students with dyslexia and other learning disorders. We know that these are some of our best and brightest when given the learning opportunity, as they prove through their
graduation rates and success beyond the campus. LSS is also part of our commitment to develop potential, even when others may overlook it.

Does this sound like a place and a purpose that you can care about? Your readiness to be part of this great enterprise is very important: of the more than $4 million per year in direct support we provide to students, half is unfunded. Schreiner’s faculty, as great as they are, continue to be paid below the median pay scale of their peers elsewhere. Your gift will not only help us recruit and retain strong students and faculty, but will also allow us to provide more academic programs for our students and extra-curricular programs that bring together students and members of our community.

Our core mission will continue to be excellence in preparing students to live purposeful, humane and productive lives in their work, faith groups, families and communities. To make this possible through this century, we intend to continue our growth from 842 students to 1200 by 2010, and we will build our endowment of $40 million to $100 million by 2013. With endowment we can provide aid to those with merit and need. It is a daunting task, but it is a realistic one because the Schreiner community, from its grounds crew to its admission staff, from its faculty to its student life professionals, is as keen on making a difference in students’ lives now as it was 30, 40, or 50 years ago. And that is our greatest gift to the community and state. That is the fuel that will take us into the future.

Now let me introduce you to some people who have had their own Schreiner experience to speak about in a brief video.

(See the “Learning by Heart” video…)