

Introductions and Acknowledgements

Chancellor Gallagher, Provost Cudd, Pitt-Bradford Advisory Board Chair Jeannine Schoenecker, Pitt-Titusville Board Chair Emil Spadafore, President Emeritus McDowell and President Emeritus Alexander and other distinguished members of the platform party, distinguished members of the Pitt-Bradford Advisory Board, McKean County Commissioners, Carol Duffy and John Kriener, faculty, staff, students and alumni of this great institution, distinguished delegates, honored guests and dear friends, thank you very much for being here today to celebrate this season in the life of Pitt-Bradford and Pitt-Titusville.

Welcome again to the Class of 2026! I do want to clarify! While we have many annual traditions, inaugurating a new President isn't one of them.

I also want to take just a moment to acknowledge my family members who are here. While my parents are not here in body, I feel their presence in spirit. I trust they would be very pleased on this occasion.

I'm overjoyed to have two of my three children here today in person and one participating remotely. My daughter Amelia is here along with grandson Flynn and granddaughter Avalynn. My son Michael and daughter in-law Elizabeth and grandson Brody and granddaughter Audrina. My daughter Elena, from Aurora, Colorado, and her boyfriend Daniel Geller from Miami, Florida, who are watching remotely. I would also like to acknowledge my brother Bob and his wife Ann and my brother Don and his wife Carol who traveled from New Jersey to be here. I would also like to give a shout out to all of the international exchange students Lisa and I hosted over many years especially Sebastian Munoz who is watching today's proceedings remotely from Lima, Peru.

To my wife, Lisa, who supports me and keeps me grounded. Those who know me well know I can get fixated with whatever I am doing. Lisa knows when to step in and offer her support or when to step back and let me continue on my way. Lisa, please stand to be recognized.

Lisa and I would also like to acknowledge the outpouring of kind words of support received through social media, emails, cards and letters. These commitments of support were very meaningful to both of us.

I'm deeply honored and moved by this expression of confidence in my ability to serve the people of this region and of this Commonwealth as the 5th president of the University of Pittsburgh at Bradford and the sixth president of the University of Pittsburgh at Titusville. At the same time, I am humbled by the words that have been spoken this afternoon. You see, I hold very firmly to the conviction that this celebration is as much about the legacy that has been built here, as it is about my assuming the presidency.

For 59 years, this institution has served as the pathway to a better life for the mothers, fathers, sons and daughters of the people of this region and nearly every county of the Commonwealth of Pennsylvania and Beyond. So let us regard this moment as a time to also celebrate the legacy, traditions, and strengths of the University of Pittsburgh at Bradford and the University of Pittsburgh at Titusville.

I am very grateful to follow in the footsteps of such legendary former presidents, Dr. Donald Swarts, Dr. Richard McDowell, Dr. Livingston Alexander and Dr. Catherine Koverola who shepherded this institution through 58 years of tremendous growth and stability during very challenging and turbulent times. Dick and Livingston, let me take this opportunity to thank you for your outstanding service to Pitt-Bradford.

Chancellor Gallagher and Provost Cudd, I accept the responsibility you have entrusted to me. I understand the trust implied, and commit myself to working tirelessly with our constituencies to continue to build an institution that will be a source of pride for the entire Commonwealth of Pennsylvania and beyond.

Even though higher education and the current world environment are challenging in many ways, I remain very optimistic that our campuses will thrive because of what our past presidents were able to accomplish during very challenging times.

In 1963 when Dr. Swarts was charged with establishing a new campus in Bradford and hiring faculty, there were civil rights protests happening throughout the country, (which ultimately led to the Civil Rights Act being passed in 1964) and just months after Dr. Swarts was appointed president, President Kennedy was assassinated.

Ten years later in 1973, Dr. McDowell became the 2nd president of the Bradford Campus. The last US combat soldiers left South Vietnam, and the televised hearings of the Watergate scandal begin in the US Senate, another turbulent time in our nation's history.

Twenty-nine years later, when Dr. Alexander was announced as our third president in 2003, the United States had just invaded Iraq, a war that lasted for nearly half of his 15-year presidency.

In 2019, just six months after Dr. Koverola assumed the presidency, COVID-19 was discovered in Wuhan, China and three months after that, we and so many others in the United States, were shuttered in our homes, working remotely.

Despite the many global and domestic events that occurred in 1963, 1973, 2003 and 2019 the past presidents of Pitt-Bradford were not only able to survive, they also were able to thrive and to build the amazing campus we have today.

My presidency also comes at a challenging time, both domestically and globally. As we continue to deal with a once-in-a-lifetime pandemic, we also are grappling with ways to effectively work together and support each other for the common good, despite any differences of opinion or viewpoints we may have.

Also, the tragic and senseless deaths of black men and women and the inequities that continue to exist for so many of our friends and neighbors, emphasize the fact that despite all of the work of Dr. King and so many others, there is still much more work to be done!

It's important that we review the past and use what we have learned from it to help shape and touch the future. I am reminded of the inspirational and now-famous words of Christa McAuliffe, the social studies teacher/astronaut who perished in the Challenger space shuttle explosion in 1986, who said, ***"I touch the future; I teach."***

At Pitt-Bradford and Pitt-Titusville we are touching the future every day.

Touching the future in Academics:

- We are here to teach our student **how** to think – not what to think – to help our students develop the critical-thinking skills they need to make wise decisions.
- As our world becomes increasingly complex, it is vital that we continue to provide our students with a strong liberal arts foundation, which is at the heart of every academic discipline, to help our students develop a broad knowledge and understanding of the world and help them meet and overcome future challenges.
- The new Duke Building, which will provide the spaces for students to be creative and innovative and develop projects and technological innovations
- By launching new academic programs in high demand areas such as Healthcare, Environment and Technology.
- By making sure we offer high quality academic programs that meet the future needs of our students, the Commonwealth and the world. After all, we know a quality education can change a student's life trajectory.

Touching the future in Athletics:

- Meeting the future needs of our student-athletes by planning for new facilities and athletic programs ...
- With the planned construction of the soccer/lacrosse stadium and with the addition of Men's and Women's lacrosse.
- Finding ways to support the body and mind through intermural and recreational activities

Touching the future in Enrollment Management:

- Attracting, enrolling and graduating future students, which is essential to our success in a very competitive higher education market.
- Pitt-Bradford's future hinges on our ability to continue to attract, enroll, and ensure student success day one through graduation.
- We need to be data driven internally and externally and be aware of current trends and future needs.
- We must continually anticipate what our future students may want and will need in the next five and 10 years, again to enable them to touch the future.

Touching the future in Facilities:

- With campus infrastructure that is fully worthy of our great faculty, students, staff and our surrounding communities. This means buildings—some new, renovating others.
- Completion of the George B. Duke Engineering and Information Technologies Building is touching the future
- Everything we do in facilities management must be done with the environment and sustainability in mind to protect the future of our environment for generations to come.

Touching the future in Marketing and Communications:

Utilizing the latest communication tools to effectively communicate to our target and future audiences:

- How great our students, faculty and staff are
- How important our institution is for the economic health and viability of our region.
- Helping our audiences know and understand the value proposition of a college education. That those with bachelor's degrees:
 - On average earn more than \$1.2 million more over a lifetime than someone without one
 - They tend to be healthier, live longer
 - They are more satisfied with their jobs
 - They tend to volunteer more than twice as often as high school graduates
- Being a good institution is no longer enough! We have to be exceptional at everything we do and then let the world know it!

Touching the future with Leadership:

- We are touching the future by recognizing the faculty and staff who are here for their commitment to the institution and supporting their efforts and contributions to the future.
- By recruiting new faculty and staff, and providing them with the opportunities and resources to thrive and become leaders in their fields and leaders on the campus and in our communities.

And finally; touching the Future in Student Affairs

If the past few years have taught us anything, it's that we don't know the opportunities that lie ahead, the challenges that will face us. That is why we must build a student affairs program with innovation and flexibility at its core. We must be forward-thinking and pay attention to the generational differences – some subtle, some substantial – between each incoming class of students.

We are bridging the gaps between the traditional approaches and the most contemporary positive psychology, building our entire program around students' strengths, their assets rather than their deficits, and equipping them to flourish both at Pitt-Bradford and beyond. This is why we're engaged in strategic planning, to better structure student affairs to meet the needs of future generations of students

We are touching the future of society by shaping a campus environment that prepares students for the real world – a world of diverse individuals in an ever-changing society. The communities and workplaces of the future are pluralistic, just like our campus, and we are focused on developing within students the capacity to contribute to such a society, to thrive in it, and when needed, to be a voice and advocate for justice and virtue.

And, we are touching the future of community by answering the question: What does it mean to live in, and succeed as, a community? This is the question at the heart of much that occurs on campus. The future of community is deliberative dialogue – individuals engaged in meaningful conversation and finding common ground and new paths forward – and touching that future means developing within students the knowledge, the skillset, and the maturity to engage in those critical conversations.

We're touching the future because we're touching the lives of the future's leaders.

The legacy of Pitt-Bradford will be our students, what they accomplish and how they change their world. Our focus is on providing them the transformative experiences here and now, in a diverse environment shaped by inclusivity and justice that give them every opportunity to grow and flourish as individuals, so they can lead the way to a better future.

As I conclude my remarks, I would like to share a poem I wrote for this occasion title the **Panther Path**:

The Panther Path

Over Quintuple Ridge

Down in the valley
By a tree near a stream

A place where forest floor
Like fading day
Eagles soar not far away

Where mountains high as rivers deep
With secret passages
Where promises keep

A place where Taylor Cubs once ruled the sky and Harri Emery taught us to fly
Panther perched on Cathedral rock
Keeping time with Bromeley clock

Like a sentinel
Watching students as they walk
Across the Bromeley Quad to Fisher, Hanley, Swarts, and Commons

If you listen, carefully
You can still hear the voices
Of Dr.'s Laing, Thomas, Kohler, Gray, Stuckart, Fohr, Blackmore and many more...

Pitt-Bradford is a place
Where for two score and nineteen years
More than twenty thousand students have been meeting

Out beyond ideas of wrongdoing and right doing, there is a field...

Let's touch the future
And meet them there in Rumi's field