

UC MERCED CAMPUS OPENING CEREMONY
President Robert C. Dynes
Monday, September 5, 2005 – Merced, California

It is my privilege to greet the University of California Merced campus community, on behalf of your colleagues throughout UC, as you open your academic year.

On this day of celebration, our hearts must go out to our fellow Americans in the Gulf States. In keeping with the spirit of California and the University of California, we have had emergency medical teams on the ground there for the past week with hundreds of doctors, nurses, and other health professionals either there or on their way there. Every one of our campuses is offering to continue the education of the students in the universities in the region until they are in the position of taking the students back. We will, of course, be providing housing, financial aid, and counseling services to these students.

As we take pride in today's events, let us take a moment to think of our fellow citizens.

Now, to the Merced community, you have aimed high and worked hard to reach this glorious day. As you built this campus from the ground up, you have pursued a dream that is older than the state of California itself.

At the Constitutional Convention in 1849, a year before California was admitted to the Union, Californians began planning a university that would assemble the finest minds to create knowledge and benefit the citizens. The convention delegates were mostly immigrants who moved here from other places for a better life. They had no money to build a university. They had no land to put it on.

But they did have a bold vision for California's future. And they shared a peculiar trait: They did not comprehend the meaning of the word "impossible."

Like those pioneers, UC Merced's founders – its faculty and students, administrators and staff, and community supporters – have defied the odds to establish this magnificent institution. In the process, you have forged a template for higher education in the 21st century. Future universities will follow your lead in shaping their programs to fit the resources and needs of their regions.

As the site of our new UC campus, the San Joaquin Valley will offer scholars an array of research opportunities in environmental stewardship, economic development, health care management, and cultural engagement. Students from across California will see this valley as their gateway to a UC education. Young Valley residents who attend "their" UC campus will follow in the path of our illustrious keynote speaker, Charles Ogletree, in bringing honor to their hometown.

The leaders of this community grasped that potential early on. They wanted a UC campus to boost their economy, and they were determined to improve their children's prospects.

I have fond memories of a July 1997 Regents' meeting – I was there as the new UC San Diego Chancellor – when Bob Carpenter, Tim O'Neill, Jim Cunningham, and a cadre of Valley leaders made a forceful case that a UC Merced would transform Central California.

Five years later, that theme was taken up by a distinguished UC alumna when she was inaugurated as the founding chancellor. In her inaugural address, titled "Transforming Lives," Carol Tomlinson-Keasey predicted that this new campus would stimulate, quote, "our state's continued economic viability ... our children's opportunities and careers ... [and] our society's ability to solve critical issues."

The 55 or so members of the UC Merced founding faculty have already begun to deliver on that pledge. In the Schools of Engineering, of Natural Sciences, and of Social Sciences, Humanities and Arts, scholars are charting new intellectual terrain. They are pursuing ideas at the intersections of disciplines, which is always the area most fertile for academic excellence. They are focusing on what makes the Valley unique today – and on what will help it thrive in the years ahead.

Let me end with a thought that was expressed by the last UC President to launch a new campus.

Clark Kerr was on hand in September 1965 when UC Santa Cruz formally opened. Years later, when asked why the startup succeeded, he gave as a primary reason, quote, "the leadership of that impressive pioneer faculty."

To the impressive pioneer faculty of UC Merced, and to the impressive pioneer students and staff, I would like to express my appreciation... and also my envy. As UC President, I know that this campus exists because you took risks and then you performed miracles. I am personally and profoundly grateful to you. As a UC professor at an older campus, I can only imagine the exhilaration of shaping a brand new campus. You all have had quite a ride. Fasten your seat belts – you're in for more.

This is a proud day for our system and our state. I wish the best of luck to the University of California, Merced. I look forward to watching it grow and shine for decades to come.

###