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UA3/9/5 Opening Faculty & Staff Convocation

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Good morning!

Welcome back to those of you who have been away for the summer and welcome to Western to all of you who are just beginning your Western experience as a new employee. To those of you who are new, we are excited about the creative energies you bring to our campus. You are joining a campus poised to continue remarkable progress. We anticipate the contributions you will make to our emergence as a nationally competitive university. Help me welcome more than 80 new faculty and a like number of new staff. A vibrant university requires new blood, new experience, new insights, as well as a firm understanding of the institution’s history, traditions, and values. I am also honored to introduce those among us who have served Western for 25 years or more. If you have been a member of our faculty, administration, or staff for 25 years or more, please stand. It takes both—creative new energy and long-standing commitment—to make an institution great.

Joining me on the stage this morning are members of the Administrative Council, our deans, and other campus leaders. For the sake of brevity, I will dispense with individual introductions—with a few exceptions. It is an honor to introduce to you this morning the new Chair of our Board of Regents Ms. Kristen Bale from Glasgow. I also want to acknowledge the efforts of our three elected regents—Mary Ellen Miller, Faculty Regent; Howard Bailey, Staff Regent; and Cassie Martin, our Student Regent. I am also pleased to introduce the President of our new University Senate, Patti Minter, and the President of our Staff Council, Marshall Gray. I would also like to introduce to you our new Vice President for Student Affairs and Campus Services, Dr. Gene Tice, who comes to us from Mississippi State University where he served as Associate Vice President for Student Affairs. Gene has been on the job for two weeks and has already immersed himself in the broad range of duties for which he is responsible. Welcome, Gene. Also with us this morning is Phil Huddleston of Bowling Green. Phil is a member of the Board for the Council on Postsecondary Education. Finally, I want to welcome the Honorable Jody Richards, Speaker of the House of Representatives, who has joined us this morning.

On the handout you received this morning, you will note our Distinguished University Professors and our Endowed Professorship Holders. Will both groups please rise and be recognized!

As we enter the third year of our Strategic Plan and as I prepare to begin my fourth year as President, it is appropriate that we take stock of our progress, of our vision to become the best comprehensive university in Kentucky, of our pursuit to be considered among the best in the nation. It is time to empirically measure real performance, to temper ambition with reality, and to incorporate new initiatives destined to help us achieve our vision. Jim Flynn continues to coordinate the production of the University’s second annual report card which unequivocally documents progress toward each of the performance indicators outlined in our Strategic Plan. Our appreciation goes out to all of you who are responsible for the data used to produce our report card; data which shows where we stand at this point in our five-year plan. These report cards, the one produced last year and the one to be distributed in January, document to all of our audiences our ambition, our progress, and our desire to be held accountable for that which we
said we will achieve by 2003. Furthermore, our Strategic Plan is dynamic. Our process will accommodate new initiatives and adjust those performance indicators fully achieved early in the Strategic Plan time line. We are at work in both regards.

During the past year, we were indeed fortunate to be the home of four national honors bestowed on members of our University community by independent parties—proof positive that Western can be nationally competitive. I take every opportunity I can to salute our Forensics Team which continues to win national debate tournaments and which successfully defended its international forensics crown. Our journalism program was judged by the Hearst Foundation to be the best journalism program in America—a first for Western and a tribute to the faculty and students in print, photo, and broadcast journalism. Our College Heights Herald was declared to be the best campus newspaper in not one but two national competitions, and finally Jo-Ann Albers was recognized by the Freedom Foundation as the National Journalism Administrator of the Year. Can we emerge from the pack of colleges and universities across Kentucky? Of course we can. These programs already have. There is not another program at any other college or university in Kentucky which is independently judged to be the absolute best among all American colleges and universities. We produced three such programs this past year.

We have numerous programs across this campus capable of national recognition. We have numerous faculty and staff competing with the best in their disciplines. Because of this confidence and the quality of students who enroll at Western, we will be telling all people within earshot of Western that they can expect the best on this campus.

We want students, parents, the public, prospective donors, legislators, and anyone who is interested to know that at Western they may expect the best.

Our Strategic Plan calls for a transformation, a word I have used often these last three years. In my mind a transformation means transition—transition from complacency to assertiveness—assertiveness in pursuing what Western must have to be successful—a transition from physical deterioration across our campus to physical renewal, a transition from traditional academic and administrative procedures to methods and procedures relevant to a changing society, and a transition from paper and traditional instruction modes to network communication and use of emerging technologies.

We are in the midst of numerous changes and change we must. Our emergence is in large measure dependent upon our ability to change our culture and to indeed shape change in our culture. Student and employer demands will continue to drive this transition.

Last week, I met with leaders across our community to attempt to define a vision for the greater Bowling Green area. We determined that our vision is to become a globally networked community at the heart of a dynamic thriving economic region. A noble vision to be sure, but if this is to become reality, it will be because Western provides the intellectual environment inherently required in such a vision. Leaders in Bowling Green and beyond fully support our vision at Western. They are contributing in tangible and intangible ways. They know that this community must have quality higher education which continually strengthens the human capital we recruit, graduate, and send into the workplace.

Two weeks ago, I met with officials of a major international manufacturing company. They, like so many companies we attempt to recruit to Bowling Green, are including a specific
assessment of Western as a major factor in their decision. They want to know if we as a University are capable of providing what they need. In this case, they are seeking engineers and a cooperative relationship with our engineering program to strengthen their research and development efforts. These meetings reinforce our mandate to be a campus bristling with innovation, creativity, relevancy, and a service mentality. We must feed this digitally networked economy, and given the impersonal nature of this new economy, we must feed it with a liberal, humanistic driven, but technologically focused, educational experience.

It is my observation that Western is on the verge of becoming a “hot” university in the minds of the traditional college-bound population in Kentucky—and I don’t mean the temperature in an unairconditioned Diddle Arena on an August morning! Our applicant pool is up, and our fall enrollment will be up for the third year in a row. Our African-American population will be up dramatically this year. Our summer school enrollment swelled to nearly 6,500 this summer, a 9.2 percent increase over the summer of 1999. We may not be hot yet, but the numbers suggest we are certainly warming up! This can be attributed to the efforts of hundreds of individuals across our campus. The admissions staff is certainly working hard to represent us well in all the right venues, but they can only represent what our faculty create and sustain every day in the classroom. It is the reputation of quality and the passion exhibited by our faculty and staff that attract and retain a good and stable student population.

But we cannot complacently assume we will be a university of choice. Understanding our market and pricing our educational experience will be of vital importance this academic year. The class entering Western this week will be the first to enter Western under the new tuition and fees policy in Kentucky. Last year, our Board of Regents, for the first time, had the authority to set tuition and fees independent of any of the other campuses in Kentucky. As fall enrollment numbers become final, we will assess the modest adjustments we made in freezing community college tuition, in eliminating out-of-state tuition for graduate students, and in expanding the number of counties in Tennessee and Indiana where students can attend Western at in-state rates, plus $300.

We know Western is a bargain. Our value-to-cost ratio is very good. We also know it takes resources to improve and to be nationally competitive. We know our tuition and fees rank 17th out of 20 benchmark campuses, and we are some $600 below median for the benchmark group we are trying to penetrate in a broad range of measures. We also know our mandatory student fees are lower than all but two university campuses in Kentucky.

Our tuition and fee options are complex. We discussed at length, at a Board of Regents’ retreat two weeks ago, a range of tuition-related considerations. We have identified five areas where we must make tuition decisions this year. They include determining the proper rate for distance-learning courses offered through Western and through the Kentucky Virtual University. While Western has the largest number of courses and the highest number of students among all of the state’s colleges and universities, we are paying a significant price to offer distance learning courses. Our costs dramatically exceed revenues generated primarily because most of the students taking distance-learning courses are full-time students on our campus. Therefore, revenue is only coming from 20 percent of our distance-learning students who are only enrolled through that delivery method. In this regard, we will work with the other universities to attempt to set a distance-learning rate consistent across all of Kentucky’s campuses. Because campus and state boundaries are irrelevant in the delivery of distance-learning courses, I have also
suggested to the Southern Regional Education Board that it encourage distance-learning rates consistent among southeastern states.

Secondly, we must reaffirm or set new incentives for out-of-state graduate students. In this regard, we must address our need to sustain quality and selectively expand our graduate programs without creating financial impediments to a balanced budget.

We must consider the matter of tuition at our community college. These Western students have a tuition and fee structure different from that which is charged in the Kentucky Community and Technical College System—which does not have a community college in Bowling Green. Our community college, however, is an important point of access to Western and very important to many of our nontraditional and underprepared students.

We will also need to come to terms with the multiple and varied rates now paid by students in our extended campus programs. Some are enrolled in distance-learning courses. Most are part-time. Some are enrolled in programs of other universities or community or technical colleges. A given student in Glasgow, Elizabethtown, or Owensboro may have to pay as many as five different rates for the courses they take. We must remove this complexity for our extended-campus students.

We will also need to assess the status of our out-of-state grants for sons and daughters of alumni. This is a wonderful financial incentive for our legacy students but we must be politically and financially prudent.

We must also consider fee structures for unique disciplines and programs for which there is considerable demand and which are particularly expensive to deliver. I also expect us to give careful thought to what I believe will be a growing trend in Kentucky to charge by the credit hour as opposed to full-time/part-time status. Refined tuition and fee decisions need to be made this year for our own financial and marketing purposes. They also must be provided to the Council on Postsecondary Education by this time next year in order to plan the state budget for the 2002 legislative session.

Western fared well this last legislative session. I have included some of this data in the handout you received this morning. Our success, however, is among the factors which have caused some of the other campuses to become confrontational and to question the funding model utilized by CPE for this biennium. There is a state committee on postsecondary education called the SCOPE committee. This group includes legislators, members of the executive branch, and CPE board members. They are charged with CPE oversight. Scope will work with CPE this coming year to make adjustments in the funding model and the budgeting process. You can be assured that we continue to be supportive of CPE, and that we will be diligent and fully involved over the course of the coming year as modifications to the higher ed budget model are defined and implemented. One of the points we made last spring was demonstrating the degree to which Western is underfunded as compared to benchmarks. We made some corrective progress, but much more is needed in future sessions.

The one area where we took aggressive exception with CPE this past year was in the area of engineering education. We worked very hard to collect valid data to demonstrate the lack of engineering education in Kentucky, the lack of engineers, and the manner in which states that surround us are taking our young engineering students and producing jobs for them in places
other than Kentucky. It was necessary to fight this battle because the production of engineers is a fundamental and critical factor in economic development for any state. We cannot achieve our vision at Western without shaping our curriculum to provide what Kentucky needs and what our students need to be successful. Our emphasis on engineering was and is necessary but only because Kentucky needs it, and Western is positioned well to provide it.

This effort on our part has not and will not in any way diminish the value of our other disciplines. We simply have a void to fill. There may be other disciplines where we devote similar attention in the future.

Earlier, I mentioned some factors which lead to a growing applicant pool and a stable enrollment. One of the things I did not mention but which is absolutely critical in this equation is the quality of our physical surroundings. As I move throughout our community, the single most frequent compliment I receive relates to the improving attractiveness of our campus. We have a treasure on this hill, and while some of the luster has worn from that treasure in recent years, we can all take pride in the renewal currently under way. Members of our physical plant are working extremely hard to improve our grounds, to restore the park-like atmosphere for which this campus was once known, and to improve the infrastructure of roofs, heating and cooling systems, building interiors, walks, and streets. People who care deeply about this place are beginning to take notice. Prospective students have noticed, benefactors have noticed, and I believe many of you have begun to appreciate the improvements to our living and working environment. We will continue this progress with the help of a few benefactors and some investments of our own.

While we improve our grounds and reduce our deferred maintenance inventory, we are also focused on several major capital projects which will temporarily disrupt our campus tranquility but will dramatically facilitate the physical transformation of our campus. The first phase of our residence hall renovation project is under way. McLean Hall will set the pace. Next summer, fences will go up around North, South, East, and West halls. Bates-Runner and Keen Hall will follow, and more modest renovations will occur throughout our other halls. A central chiller plant will be under way this fall to provide cooling to six dorms heretofore unairconditioned, plus the new journalism building, Tate Page Hall, and the Academic Complex. Over the next five years, some $5 million in furnishings will also appear in our residence halls. I am also pleased that buildings in Glasgow and Elizabethtown are well under way and will be substantially completed this year.

The postponed construction last April of our Journalism and Technology Building is a major disappointment. All of the construction bids came in well over budget. The architect heard our strong displeasure and has worked closely with David Lee, Jo-Ann Albers, Dick Kirchmeyer, and Ed West to scale back and redesign the building. This blip in our progress cost us one year in the construction of what will officially be called the Center for Communications and Instructional Technology. Construction will get under way next April.

The new science buildings, for which we received $25 million in funding from this last General Assembly, are in the conceptualization stages. We would like to achieve some additional funding for these two science buildings, but we know we will at least have a $20 million science building on the main campus and a $5 million applied research building on our south campus. The selection of architects and engineers will be completed this fiscal year.
Finally, the Guthrie Tower, to be located on our south lawn, will be built this academic year. This privately funded structure will be a tribute to our students and alumni killed in service to our country, and it will bring the unique Western architecture on top of the hill to the south end of the campus. We hope to dedicate it late next spring.

All totaled, Western is building or has confirmation to build more than $100 million in new capital projects. This does not include decisions which will need to be made soon regarding the renovation of Diddle Arena or the building of an alternative multi-purpose venue. We will be meeting with officials from the city and county in the weeks ahead to zero in on what’s possible and how it might be financed.

A moment ago, I spoke about the networking of our society and our responsibility to facilitate economic development in Kentucky. It is in this context that I want to compliment all of our faculty for our progress in sponsored research. I know that not all of our sponsored research is applied in nature or applicable to the market place, but I do know much of our growth in sponsored research does have commercial value. I encourage our faculty to continue to seek ways to move your intellectual capacity into the work place. Western created some new patents this past year—patents that will affect real quality of life factors, that will create jobs and produce financial returns for the sponsoring vendors, the principal investigators, and for Western. We can all take pride in the fact that our cumulative grants and contracts exceeded $21 million this past year—an 11 percent increase over the previous year. This phenomenon, created and perpetuated by our faculty, is among the most significant ways in which Western is emerging from the pack of comprehensive universities in Kentucky. No other comprehensive university in Kentucky can compare with the quantity and quality of our sponsored research. To all of you who create and submit proposals whether or not they are funded, I thank you and I encourage you to keep up the good work.

The other financial growth factor for Western also relates to external sources. On April 27, we announced a $78 million capital campaign called Investing in the Spirit. We also announced we were $42 million toward that goal. With a couple of recent announcements, we are now at the $50 million mark and well on our way toward achieving our $78 million goal by June 30, 2003. Our cash deposits from gifts was over $8 million this past year, an increase of nearly 50 percent over 1999, and our combined university endowment is now over $40 million. These numbers may be modest in some circles, but in Kentucky and among our benchmarks they are significant measures of our progress and our emergence.

But not all of our financial variables are as positive. We must balance our self-insured health insurance program, and we must achieve a balanced budget with our athletic program.

Since we began our self-insurance program 19 ½ months ago, we have for the first time been able to unequivocally account for every claim and define every dollar spent to pay for claims submitted by our employees. We accepted some assumptions from our consultants two years ago in preparation for our transition to self-insurance. Unfortunately, our premium schedule was based on some assumptions which fell short of accurately predicting what our claims would be. Our claims exceeded $6 million for the 1999 plan year, and the same is projected for 2000. That’s the bad news. The good news is faculty and staff throughout this campus have received considerable health care—over $4,000 paid by Western in 1999 for every full-time employee. We now have precise data on which to base future plans and premium structures. On January 1, we will likely reduce the number of package plans available to our
employees to three plans, each continuing the provisions for singles, couples, employees with one child, and families. The university contribution to health insurance is being increased from $170 per employee to $215 per employee, but employee premiums, co-pays, and deductibles will also go up. Plan designs will continue to offer quality coverage, but premiums must be structured to support them. We will likely use the entire university fund balance and draw on lapsed salary dollars to pay for the medical costs incurred by our employees during the current year. You can expect considerable communication from our Department of Human Resources over the next few months. The Health Insurance Advisory Committee is extensively involved in solving this problem. We must work together to make our new health insurance program successful and to resolve the complex challenges of providing quality health care services to our university family. I might also add for those who might suggest that we do away with self-insurance and once again become fully insured that, because of the rising cost of medical care and prescriptions, any premium structure under a fully insured program would exceed any premium structure we might create to insure our own medical costs. The bottom line is when we in the Western family submit a claim, we in the Western family will pay for it. We will do what is best for our collective faculty and staff. Let me again assure you that any funds collected from insurance premiums will be used only to pay for present or future health costs incurred by our employees.

We have a timeline to address this matter. We are seeking reinsurance cost quotes this month. We will analyze these quotes and review the total projected plan costs in early September, approve health plan elements and final premium structure for 2001 in late September, engage in extensive employee education sessions in September and October, conduct an open enrollment period for employees in October and November, and implement a new package and rate structure on January 1.

The other pressing financial challenge we face relates to our athletic program. A combination of factors, including less than effective historical business practices and the alarming rate at which fixed costs have exceeded revenues in recent years, creates a financial problem that must be solved. I continue to expect the Athletic Department to operate more efficiently and market itself more aggressively. Several staff members have been replaced, and some positions have been cut. More private dollars are being raised, ticket sales are on the rise, and fees will have to be reviewed.

I will recommend to the Board of Regents in October that the 3.4 percent annual increment to athletics be eliminated and that we treat the Athletic Department like every other department on campus in two aspects: its employees receive pay raises consistent with employees in other departments, and inflationary growth in scholarships be funded consistent with scholarships throughout the campus. All departments in each budget cycle will be treated with a consistent budgeting philosophy. This won't solve or even positively impact the Athletic Department's financial dilemma, but it will remove a point of confusion and contention on our campus. The Board of Regents is fully aware of the problems and the opportunities inherent in a nationally competitive Division I intercollegiate athletic program and is taking a direct and immediate role in addressing the issues.

A final area of university interest where uncertainty exceeds stability has to do with our Student Health Clinic. Collegiate Health Care, the company with whom we have a contract for student health services, was to initiate construction of a new clinic building nearly a year ago. We came to the conclusion that construction of a building was not in the University's best
interest at this time. Two primary factors led to this conclusion. First, the scale back in the Journalism and Technology Building removed the urgency to relocate our campus health clinic. The space in the Academic Complex, which was to serve as the connector to the new building, was the first cost-saving measure to be implemented in the scale-back plan. This meant the clinic could remain in its current location, and we did not have an immediate need for a new building. Secondly, Collegiate Health Care provided information to us that related to changes in corporate structures and a possible merger or sale. Given this uncertainty, we chose to exercise prudence about any involvement in a new building. We are not going to risk in any way any of Western’s resources on this project. We have adopted a position to be patient, sustain our expectations that they operate the existing clinic efficiently and effectively, establish the necessary billings and collections capacity, and await the decision on who the new corporate owner or partner might be. In the meantime, a new doctor has been hired, and staff in the clinic is meeting our students’ health care needs with distinction. We also intend, by January 1, to include our campus clinic in the provider network for university employees, thus allowing you to access our own on-campus clinic for your personal health needs should you choose to do so.

I will continue to seek ways to improve the quality of life on our campus, to see my role as helping to enhance a university environment which inspires you, the faculty and staff, to motivate, to create, to teach, to experiment, and to serve. It is my intention to sustain a vision which helps move us forward, to seek the resources to expand our capacity, and to manage as effectively as possible the resources which we are given and which we generate ourselves. I trust the University Senate will join me and the Board of Regents in contemplating the performance indicators in our Strategic Plan as we approach each decision. How will each action move us closer to our goals?

It is satisfying to achieve the improbable. It is satisfying to cause the skeptics to grow quiet, to listen as people who once said “no way” begin to say “how did they do that?” The uneasiness among some with Western’s emergence is nullified by the profound encouragement continually being thrust our way particularly by the executive and legislative branches of state government and our state delegation in Washington. We will sustain our momentum. We will address those challenges and curves that are sure to surface in the administration of a complex $170 million budget. But we will make progress on the opportunities and initiatives I mentioned this morning, and we will continue our pursuit to be a university in which all of our faculty, staff, students, alumni, and friends can take great pride.

Finally, I want to wish Patti Minter and all of our newly elected representatives on the University Senate the best of success this year. The new University Senate marks a fundamental element in the continuing transformation of Western. The ability to deal with matters germane to our academic community and to our overall campus climate is extremely important. I hope that each and everyone of you join me in pledging our collective and individual support to the University Senate and our positive and constructive input. Thank you all for your service on our campus committees and your extra efforts across our campus community.

Last year at this time, I said I wanted to be talking less in the coming year about what we are going to do and more about what we are becoming. I believe we are now talking about specific examples of progress rather than specific things we seek. This will be an important year for all of us. Because of your efforts, I am inspired. I feel great anticipation and excitement as we welcome our students to campus this week; as we add significant value to the degrees they are pursuing. Thank you all for your individual and collective efforts. Let’s have a great year.
Thank you.

One of the most important reasons that Western is moving forward is the support and encouragement we are fortunate to receive from state government.

With us this morning is Bowling Green’s own Speaker of the House of Representatives, the Honorable Jody Richards. I have asked Speaker Richards to join us today so that we can thank him for all that he is doing to support Western. The Speaker of the House of Representatives is in a position to have great influence on the well being of our state but particularly our leading universities. The speaker understands Western. He understands our vision and is absolutely dedicated to helping higher education, generally, and Western, specifically. He is working daily to improve the quality of life for all of us, and Mr. Speaker, you have our pledge of support when there are ways this learned community can help you. The speaker has some comments he would like to share with you and together we want to make an important announcement which will have significant implications for Western. Mr. Speaker.

(Speaker Richards to talk for five minutes about Western's perspective in Frankfort.)

Speaker Richards played a fundamental and critical role in helping to get our new engineering programs through the political process in Frankfort. Few days passed this last legislative session when we did not talk about engineering. We now have approval to create joint programs between Western and either the University of Kentucky or the University of Louisville in electrical, mechanical, and civil engineering, and we are pursuing those joint degrees. The good news is that we now have the green light, even with a joint degree, to allow students to enter Western and complete their entire engineering education on this campus with our faculty and receive an engineering degree. This will allow our students to sit for the state licensing exam. The accreditation process will take four to five years as the program must produce its first graduates before it can become accredited, and accreditation rests solely on the experience of the home campus, in this case, Western Kentucky University.

I must also tell you how important the manufacturing and corporate community was and continues to be in the creation of these programs at Western. Not only did numerous corporate leaders communicate aggressively with the CPE board, but the corporate community has also contributed over $600,000 for equipment needed to make the curriculum transition. With the announcement we make this morning, we will be devoting more than $4 million to endowed faculty positions in engineering. These programs represent classic, public-private partnerships which will jump start economic development in southcentral Kentucky.

With us this morning is a pillar in the Bowling Green community, a corporate equivalent to E. F. Hutton. When he speaks, people in business circles in Bowling Green, listen. Jim Scott has built numerous businesses in the paving, contracting, and service industries in Bowling Green. He has the ear of political leaders of both parties, and I am proud to say that he has embraced Western’s vision, has expressed enthusiasm for our progress, and is particularly interested in our emerging engineering programs. Jim and Rita Scott have consequently pledged $1 million to create the University’s first fully-endowed chair. Their $1 million will be matched dollar-for-dollar by the state Endowment Incentive Trust Fund, thus reaching our University minimum of $2 million for a fully-endowed chair. The $1 million in state matching money will be immediately deposited into the Jim Scott Endowment Fund, and Scotty’s gift will
be paid at the rate of $200,000 a year for five years. Please join the Speaker and me in welcoming James D. Scott. Scotty, please come forward and accept our genuine appreciation.

(Jim Scott will deliver remarks.)

(Jody Richards will return to the podium to announce that this gift allows us to complete the $4.6 million match as defined by the General Assembly for the two-year biennium and present a check to Western for $4.6 million in matching funds.)

Don Vitale, Co-Chair of the Investing in the Spirit campaign, John Russell, the Head of our Department of Engineering, Tom Hiles, and the Scott family will conduct a media briefing immediately following the convocation.

As we close, I call to your attention the fact that the eyes of the world will be on distinguished Western graduate and Russellville native, Terry Wilcutt who, at 8:31 a.m. EDT on September 8, from launch pad 39-b at Kennedy Space Center, will command an 11-day U.S./Russian space shuttle mission. The seven-man crew will finish construction and prepare for the arrival of the first permanent crew for the international space station. This is Colonel Wilcutt’s fourth space shuttle mission. He has logged over 700 hours in space. The thoughts of the Western family will be with Commander Wilcutt and his crew on September 8.

Thank you for coming this morning. Let’s have a smooth opening this week and a terrific year. Thank you.

Gary A. Ransdell