

Greg Moran remarks
April 7, 2009 Tribute dinner

Friends,

Tonight, we celebrate one of Canada's truly great university leaders. I had the singular pleasure of working with Paul as Provost and Vice-President (Academic) at Western for 10 years, beginning in 1995. From this entirely unbiased perspective - and with all due respect to the two speakers who preceded the main course (and me) - Paul Davenport is, quite simply, the best.

When invited to take on this pleasurable task, it was gently suggested that my comments should be crafted in the style of a "roast." This is a serious challenge for someone whose public speechifying has always been cast in the style of the plodding Provost and is entirely absent of the easy eloquence of Rob Pritchard, the energizing enthusiasm of Martha Piper, or the natural grace of Madeline Lennon. So, my plan was to forgo the "roasting" and stick to the facts - perhaps a series of carefully selected readings from Western's first Strategic Plan - "Leadership in Learning."

Upon reflection, however, I realized that, in fact, that no one could work for 10 years with Paul without being exposed to their share of "Davenportisms" that - if not exactly humourous - were certainly odd.

It is hard to know where to begin --- but for those of us who worked day-in, day-out with him, Paul's frugality had to be the richest source of such memories.

Coming as he does from the ranks of Canada's overpaid university presidents, only a deep-set pathology could account for his choice of cars. In much the way that his colleagues might be a bit awkward about revealing the purchase of a new 7-series BMW that might not fit into the garage with the Mercedes and the Aston Martin, Paul now speaks with guilty pleasure about the sub-compact, economy class Toyota Matrix that he and Josette will be taking to France this summer. It's true: compared to the 2 decrepit Toyota Corollas that more than adequately served his purposes over his 15 years at Western - the new car is indeed a rare indulgence. In fact, a systematic survey of Western's parking lots revealed that, at any point in time, 90% of students were driving a newer and more expensive vehicle than their President - and this was only among those who were maxed-out on OSAP!

And then there were the points in time and space when his frugality intersected with his well-known sartorial flair and his noted vanity about his clothes and appearance. None of us will ever forget, for example, the shoe whose sole threatened to abandon its upper as Paul walked to the podium during a convocation ceremony... At first the unfolding drama provided little more than a welcome

distraction for Roma Harris, Western's long-time Vice-Provost and Registrar. But once she had alerted others on the stage to the state of the President's footwear and began to accept healthy wagers on how the situation would resolve itself, the entire ceremony was put at risk. Thankfully, the shoe survived the afternoon and caused Paul only the odd stumble. He later admitted that he had forgotten that week to renew the glue to the sole of the shoe - one of a pair he had first purchased at Herbie's Bargain Shoe Basement in Edmonton to celebrate his installation as President at the University of Alberta some 15 years earlier...

And then there was that remarkable red tie that so fetchingly set off the less than form fitting grey suits that he also brought with him from his time at the University of Alberta - purchased from a thrift shop he highly recommend - but that is a story for another time. Somewhere along the line Paul acquired a bright red tie - perhaps as a door prize at a Liberal Party fundraiser. In any case, this tie became a predictable feature of his grey suit days. The problem was that this tie inevitably soaked up more than the conversation at the many dinners that Paul attended in the course of his duties. Here, once again, his colleagues in the Office of the President wagered serious dollars on when, if ever, Paul might notice the disgusting state of the cravate and get it cleaned or - who knows! - even replace it. After losing too many beers to count by betting that this interval would be measured in weeks or months rather than years, Ruban Chelladurai -

Western's long-suffering AVP Institutional Planning and Budgeting - was driven to purchase a similar tie as a gift for Paul. The truly charming aspect of this tale is that, first, Paul never had the slightest idea of what motivated the gift and, second, he put it away in a drawer for future use because he already had a perfectly serviceable red tie.

And then there is Paul's taste in wine. Paul and Josette - quite justifiably - never tire of singing the praises of their beloved Loire region of France. As much as I share their love of this area, no one but Paul would argue that the quality of its wimpy red wines should be listed among its greatest strengths. He is so deluded in this area that he shamelessly admits that the plonk served regularly at Gibbon's Lodge - the official residence of Western's President - originates in the Loire. I served as Acting-President when Paul was on two occasions playing the *flaneur* for a few months in France. Out of concern for the University's reputation, I demanded that we serve only Californian Merlot and Australian Shiraz - real red wines - at convocation dinners during these periods. Never - before or since during the Davenport epoch - have these dinners been such great successes. On his return, Paul insisted that the wine cellar at Gibbons be fumigated and scrubbed, floor to ceiling, with a disgusting mix of Bourgueil and Sancerre Rouge. If truth be known, however, Paul keeps a hidden stash of Wolf Blass Yellow Label in a closet in his guest room.

So how is it that someone with such bad taste in red wine could have been such a remarkably successful President and left such a huge mark on Western and on the province and country's universities??!!

The essence of the answer to this puzzle can be found in a sports metaphor that Paul was fond of using to describe the truly great, well-rounded member of faculty who - simultaneously - excelled at research, was a great classroom teacher, and played the part of an effective and popular academic leader - the "triple threat." Paul, in his 15 years as Western's President displayed this same rare capacity to fulfil all aspects of a complex role with enthusiasm, energy and breathtaking effectiveness. He did it all. He was simply the best.