

**Gordon Sewall's Remarks at The Fessenden School Dinner
Honoring Lead Donors to its Character & Community Campaign**

May 28, 2013

Thank you Dave,

This is a great pleasure and an honor for me for me to speak to you this evening. When Dave invited me I told him, with all due modesty, that my ideal for this assignment was The Gettysburg Address, short, with words carefully chosen and passing on an important thought or two. Although my remarks will surely not rise to the stature of one of Lincoln's iconic moments in our history, they will be short.

When I was a new sophomore boarder at Lawrence Academy a million years ago, I recall hearing a story about the original School House burning to the ground 10 years earlier and that the trustees had "passed the hat" in order to construct the newish building we were sitting in that 1st evening after my parents dropped me off. There was a lot more pressing things to think about that evening so I filed that curious phrase away in a place where it might have been lost to me forever in my unfolding efforts to grow up in the years ahead. But it didn't stay filed away.

Becoming a development officer wasn't in my life plan or professional plan or anybody else's plan during the early days of my career. The business of asking others for money as in, "dad can I borrow \$10" was the extent of my fund raising acumen in those early years. Well, my experience has deepened over the years to a point where I have had the privilege of witnessing the power of philanthropy at a very high level, up close and personal. A real power it is too.

Elizabeth and I shared great respect and appreciation for the power of philanthropy. We thought a lot about why people make the gifts they do. At the most elemental level, the impulse to make a gift comes down to a deeply personal relationship between school leaders, generous donors, and the institutions they love. In our roles as development officers we help nurture those relationships and doing this well was hugely rewarding, especially for Elizabeth - she had so many caring relationships with those with whom she worked. In today's professionalized world, the shepherd for those relationships is often a development officer and it is in the intersection of caring relationships and bold philanthropy where Elizabeth found great satisfaction. She so loved working with all of you to help make Fessenden stronger.

We believe that it is important to keep in mind that Philanthropy should be fun. What did we see in the photos of Bill Gates at the time he created his foundation with tens of billions of dollars? And what did we see when Warren Buffet joined him with a multi-billion dollar gift of his own? Well, they were smiling from ear to ear.

Philanthropy is indeed fun, and not always prompted by obligation and responsibility - the primary motivation for those Lawrence trustees many years ago. If it was, we would give much

less than we do. Obligation and responsibility are not bad things, they are forces for a lot of good in the world and we all need to heed them but the amount we give is determined by the sheer pleasure of doing so of free will. There is an old adage that one should give to the institutions they care about until it hurts. We'll I'm OK with that guideline as long as we add, "until it hurts and leaves a smile on your face."

In 2012, Americans gave more than \$138 billion to charity – unlike any other country in the world. There are many remarkable parts to this but in the forefront is the strength of charitable support for independent schools and colleges. During the 2008 financial crisis, giving to education remained steady with trillions disappearing from corporate balance sheets and personal portfolios. We, as a nation, held steady in the support we gave to our schools. This growing level of support for education through thick or thin is a clear statement of the value we place on ensuring that the current generations of students continue to get the best education possible. The people in this room understand the value of Fessenden in the world of independent schools and beyond. They have affirmed that value by making leadership gifts in a timely fashion and we thank you.

Dave Stetler said this about Elizabeth's role in helping The Character and Community campaign to a successful conclusion, and I quote:

"I think that Elizabeth would be pleased that, as we celebrate the success of the Campaign, we also recognize that Fessenden's success is dependent on much more than just reaching financial goals. She truly believed in Fessenden's mission. She believed in the impact and importance of character education and in nurturing young men who go on to be active members of their communities and the world at large."

Dave sent this letter to me informing me about the honor bestowed on Elizabeth earlier today with the dedication of her bench outside this building. I recall reading these words and thinking Fessenden is so aligned with Character and Community, which are two of the core and foundational values of this remarkable school. That Elizabeth could be so fortunate to work with so many of you on the things you care about and to do it within a school that shares her own values, was a gift to her. She had great respect and affection for all who supported Fessenden during her years here and I know she would want me to pass along her profound appreciation.

So, this evening is a loud and proud signal of Fessenden's gratitude for your generous support. There is no metaphorical "hat" that has been passed to get us here but there have been wonderful gifts, freely given, that have helped accomplish our greatest aspirations - and that alone should put a smile on your face. Thank you and have a wonderful evening.