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2-22-2003

## Neal Harlan Eulogy

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NEAL HARLAN EULOGY  
Church of the Cross, Omaha  
John C. Owens  
NU Vice President and IANR Harlan Vice Chancellor  
Saturday, February 22, 2003

Several evenings this week I have watched the luminous glow of Nebraska sunsets just before the dark of night encompasses fields, farms, and Nebraska's communities, and I have thought of Neal Harlan. I have thought of just how deeply the roots of this Nebraska farm boy have stretched across the rich, fertile soil of our state. I have thought of how those roots helped grow the man whose life we honor and celebrate here today.

As I've watched yellows change to golds and oranges, and seen the vivid pinks and reds soften to lavenders and rose as the darkness deepens, I've thought about how all the colors in that sunset – each perfectly glorious in its own right – grow even more magnificent when combined into the whole. I've thought about how each remarkable attribute Neal Harlan possessed – honor, intelligence, compassion, faith, humility, honesty, enthusiasm, humor, energy, gratitude, and so many others I know you can join me in naming – was, each by itself, a cause for celebration. Combined, as Neal Harlan combined them in his wonderful life, they created a remarkable man of good and generous spirit.

It is Neal's generous and positive spirit, his kindness, his integrity, his vision, his "deep interest" in the welfare of others, that "we" remember this afternoon as we honor and celebrate his exceptional life. I feel honored to be asked to speak here because "I know" the great love Neal had for Nebraska's land-grant university, and I "so appreciate" the many ways he contributed to it over the years. It is a privilege to "share-with-you" just a few of the "good memories" those of us at the University of Nebraska have of Neal Harlan.

Just last year Neal and Lee were honored at the May commencement ceremonies with the university's "most-prestigious" award, the Nebraska Builders Award, the citation of which read: "*In recognition of outstanding service to the University of Nebraska; in gratitude for their generous support of numerous NU programs representing a wide variety of disciplines and interests; and in acknowledgment of their friendship for the institution and leadership in forwarding its progress, the University of Nebraska Board of Regents confers upon Neal and Leone Harlan the 2002 Builders Award.*"

For nearly 20 years now, the "generous-gifts" of Neal and Lee have helped build the university, as well as the state it serves. Neal, both personally and professionally while with the Scouler Company, "supported" scholarships in the College of Agricultural Sciences and Natural Resources. Because "Neal and Lee"

" shared such a clear vision of the university's far-reaching effects throughout Nebraska and beyond, they chose leadership-development and faculty-support as key-areas to be strengthened. They established the Neal and Leone Harlan Vice Chancellorship in the Institute of Agriculture and Natural Resources, and I am privileged and proud to be the first-occupant of that Chair. They established this Chair and the Irv Omtvedt Faculty Innovation Awards Program to honor Dr. Irv Omtvedt when Irv retired after a highly-productive-career as Vice Chancellor of the Institute.

Neal was blessed with the marvelous and all-too-rare gift of being genuinely - pleased for other people when good-things happened for them. You had to *work* to shine a spotlight on Neal, because he was always so busy turning it someone else's direction, highlighting the other person! Dr. Ron Hanson, who holds the Neal E. Harlan Professorship of Agribusiness in the Institute, notes that even last May, when Neal and Lee received that Nebraska Builder Award, and had every-right to bask that day in the compliments and congratulations coming their way, Neal greeted everyone with his customary "How are things going with you?", focusing on those with whom he visited. His genuine-interest and true-belief in others was one of the very real gifts of his generous spirit that many, many people will carry with them always."

*which is the first and only endowed Omtvedt Chair in the university.*

Neal and Lee also have supported the Lied Center for the Performing Arts at UNL, and the Nebraska LEAD – Leadership Education/Action Development – program. Neal served on the board of the LEAD program because he firmly believed in developing strong leadership for Nebraska’s food and agricultural industry. Much of the impressive success of the Nebraska LEAD program can be attributed to the firm foundation established while Neal was on the board and, in my opinion, Neal Harlan rescued the LEAD program and placed it on the strong foundation on which it sits today.

“The auditorium of the Agricultural Research and Development Center headquarters at Mead, a focal point of learning at that university location, is named for Neal and Lee. Their generous gifts support the Harlan Professorship of Agribusiness and the Spencer Professorship of Law, which honors Lee’s remarkable father, who is a University of Nebraska alumnus and Nebraska Supreme Court Judge emeritus. And, when the new addition to the law college is dedicated in April, it will feature the Judge Harry A. Spencer Room, a gift from the Harlan family.

Neal, who graduated from the university with a baccalaureate degree in agriculture, served very effectively as a member of the Alumni Association Board where his analytical reasoning and clear thinking proved to be most helpful to the

association and its business-practices.

Neal and Lee have, through the years, done "so-much-good" for the university and for the Institute of Agriculture and Natural Resources, in particular. They have established gifts that will benefit "coming-generations" in perpetuity and do much, much good for Nebraska, its citizens, and the agricultural-and-agribusiness "enterprises" that Neal loved so much.

The Harlan family's "generosity" is apparent in so many other people and places "besides" the university, of course – including the "magnificent" pipe-organ "gracing" this lovely church today.

Dr. Ron Hanson, who "I mentioned" earlier holds the Harlan Professorship of Agribusiness, tells a wonderful story that I think "illustrates" Neal's generous-spirit. It was "a dinner" for UNL students and Nebraska agribusiness people, and in walked this "extremely-successful-man" we remember with such "thanksgiving" here today. At the time, Neal was President and CEO of the Scoular Company, and easily could have spent his time with "other" industry people, as well as with university professors and administrators "present" who were eager to talk with him. But no, that's not what happened.

Ron watched as Neal "circulated" throughout the room, "again-and-again" stretching-out his hand and with an engaging smile and handshake introducing

himself to the students present.

“Hi, I’m Neal Harlan with Scoular Grain,” he’d say. “Who are you? Where are you from? Oh, I think I know your uncle – doesn’t he farm out by Geneva? What’s your major? What are you taking this semester? That’s important. I had a class like that when I was in school. It was a good class.”

Students were overwhelmed that this exceptional man, this industry leader, sought them out and spoke directly with them, Ron says, but Neal put them totally at ease with his genuine interest in who they were, where they were going, and who they would be when they got there. “Give me a call,” he’d tell them, and all of us present here this afternoon need to know that a lot of university students went to Scoular over the years, some on internships, some as visitors. Neal always had time for them. He always had time, also, when Dr. Hanson asked him to speak to students groups on the university campus. Neal never said, “I’ll see if I can work it into my schedule.” Neal always said, “When would you like me to come?” – and he was there.

Irv Omtvedt recalls that on his first day of retirement from the university, as Irv was working in the yard that afternoon, he got a telephone call from Neal, who was on his way back from the family farm in Hickman. When Irv answered and heard Neal’s voice he said, “How are you, Neal?” The reply to his question was,

"I'm much more interested in how you are, and in learning what a retired Vice Chancellor does on his first day in retirement." Neal Harlan, a man of kind and generous spirit and tremendous professional accomplishments, was just checking in on a friend.

I don't imagine anyone who ever worked with Neal or even carried on a conversation with him would forget the penetrating questions Neal asked; questions that showed his keen intellect and his total interest in the world around him. I know I surely have valued those questions in the years I knew Neal, and I will miss them greatly in the days to come. I also will miss, as I know many, many others will, the generosity of time with which Neal followed up his financial gifts. He was not a man to "make a gift and forget it;" he was a man who checked in to see how things were going. He was a man who encouraged and supported, and who, through this encouragement and support, helped others dream big dreams, and accomplish great goals.

As I watched each of those sunsets grow and then fade this past week, I thought of what all of us here today, and those throughout Nebraska and Arizona, and beyond, have lost in our friend's passing. I thought about all he did, and about all he was, and about how he encouraged each of us to be all we possibly can. And all these attributes of a remarkable man color our memories of him just as brightly



as a Nebraska sunset. I thought of how very-fortunate I am to have known Neal Harlan, and how grateful I am for all he added to my life, and to the lives of so many others. I thought of how his kindness, his compassion, and his generosity have influenced so many lives, and how those lives in turn will influence others, and on and on, just because one-man-cared, and possessed the vision and the courage to act on his convictions. What a wonderful-legacy Neal has left us. And finally, I thought of how each of us will honor him, every-time we further Neal's legacy through our-own actions.

Thank you for allowing me to be with you today to celebrate with thanksgiving the life of a truly remarkable man.