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Superintendent
VMI Keydet Club Scholarship Dinner
Saturday, 23 September 2017

Tonight's Scholarship Recognition Dinner is one of the highlights of the year, because it gives us the opportunity to thank very generous individuals whose sponsoring is so critical to our cadets and to the programs in which they compete. It also is an opportunity to remind ourselves of the true place of athletics in a college environment.

Events such as this annual dinner are also especially rewarding, because they bring cadets, parents, alumni, faculty, staff, and Institute donors together in celebration. We all can take pride in what our combined hard work accomplishes: making certain that VMI's mission is sustained for years and generations of cadets to come. Because of your generosity of time and talent, because of your tireless support of your cadets as parents and faculty and coaches, because of your commitment to be the best cadet-athlete you can be – you have ensured VMI's position among the finest colleges in the nation. You have safeguarded access as well– so that deserving students have the scholarship aid and opportunity to attend VMI regardless of their financial circumstances. Your efforts have also contributed to “transformational change” in athletics at VMI, and I'll say more about that in a moment.

First, though, I offer my deepest thanks to you for all you have done, do, and will do for VMI. I continue to be humbled by the breadth and depth of the passion that the VMI Family shares on behalf of the Institute, year in and year out. Tonight, though, I have reason to be particularly grateful. Tonight we are celebrating something historic that will impact VMI – and VMI athletics – in perpetuity.

Many of you may know that VMI was engaged in a comprehensive campaign that officially started in July 2011 – six years ago. This effort was aptly called *An Uncommon Purpose: A Glorious Past; A Brilliant Future: The Campaign for VMI*. We kicked off the public phase of that campaign in November 2014, and this year on June 30th, we formally ended the campaign. As of that conclusion, VMI had raised \$344.1 million in support of its mission. This accomplishment exceeded our public goal of \$225 million and is the largest campaign objective ever reached in the history of the Institute. More than 15,000 donors were part of this effort, including nearly 1,500 alumni who made their first gift ever to VMI in this campaign.

The An Uncommon Purpose Campaign focused on securing the resources necessary to ensure that the Institute will continue to prepare cadets for lives of service, honor, integrity, and purpose. The funding priorities in this comprehensive campaign revolved around five key areas: (1) enhancing academic excellence and

scholarship support; (2) strengthening our athletics programs; (3) fostering robust Corps Life opportunities and our military tradition; (4) preserving and celebrating the Institute's legacy through its museum programs; and (5) ensuring greater unrestricted support to provide needed resource flexibility. The campaign was superbly led by Don Wilkinson, Class of '61 as Campaign Chair, and he was ably assisted by Conrad Hall'65 and Jim Rogers'67 as Vice Chairs, along with John Jumper'66, Walt Perrin'62, Tom Slater'66 - and finally, a name I know you all recognize and respect, Bill Paulette'69. That Campaign Cabinet has my sincere appreciation for their incredible dedication and hard work.

The Alumni Agencies (thru-out these six years) played a critical role, of course, in making all the campaign efforts come to fruition. Brian Crockett, Buddy Bryan, and Greg Cavallaro along with the Alumni Association leadership were all instrumental in assuring that a highly successful campaign would be realized. I also want to acknowledge Dr. Dave Diles, our splendid Athletic Director, who joined VMI in 2013 as this fundraising effort was really ramping up. He jumped right on board in his advocacy of the campaign and in reinforcing and articulating the "vision" of a VMI athletics program that upholds the historic tradition of winning "the VMI Way." And, what is that "VMI Way? It starts with a "One Corps - One Team" philosophy with a solid underpinning of leadership, academics, honor, and discipline. It means: no easy degrees; the very best of sportsmanship and respect as confirmed by our competitors; limited sports and the right sports; being NCAA and Southern Conference compliant; reasonable expectations, satisfied by a balanced performance; and, graduating useful citizens.

For 150 years, intercollegiate athletics have been integral to the Institute's life and culture. Therefore, strengthening VMI's athletic program was a "principal" objective of *An Uncommon Purpose*. And the VMI Family responded. Alumni and friends committed \$75.1 million in support of the Institute's cadet-athletes, coaches, and staff members. This includes nearly \$24 million in current support establishing 64 new athletic scholarships. Today, the market value of endowments for athletics has doubled and stands at \$65 million, thanks to campaign efforts, and we project that the Keydet Club will provide the Institute with nearly \$4.7 million this school year.

This phenomenal support is, to use some athletic jargon, a "game-changer" for VMI. It has significantly increased the endowment funding to assure greater long-term resources for our athletic programs. The expanded scholarship funding makes a VMI education available to more of the finest student-athletes who ultimately seek citizen-soldier development - and it provides more NCAA scholarships to build more competitive programs. In essence, the resources this campaign has made available will write another chapter in the "Institute's ascendancy" as a consistently successful,

and always honorable athletics program. Your generosity and this campaign has placed us on that trajectory, I am certain. On behalf of all of the Institute family...a sincere and most appreciative “thanks”.

The Institute will be heard from today...and... “Never Say Die”!

The record of former athletes among VMI alumni who have made significant contributions to their communities, states, and to the nation is inspiring. ... Which brings me to our guest speaker this evening.

You’ve heard of the “slam-dunk” shot, the basketball shot where a player jumps so high that he can put the ball directly through the rim. Well, our speaker tonight, when he played for the Keydets, was known for his “*monster dunk*.” He would literally fly through the air, reach well above the rim, and perform, with regularity, powerful dunk shots...to the amazement and joy of the Corps.

The “monster dunk” was one of Keith Gabriel’s signature shots...the other, being his 3-point accuracy from great distances. If you never saw it in person, you can still see a whole series of them on Youtube, presented by VMI Sports Videos.

Keith, whose biography is printed in your program, graduated from VMI as a Psychology major. From Charlotte, North Carolina, he came to VMI on a full basketball scholarship and, from his Rat year, was a remarkable player on our basketball team. As his biography points out, he finished his career ranked 6th in scoring with 1,925 points, 2nd all-time in 3-point field goals made, and 4th all-time in steals. And, as you can see, he played professional basketball in Europe for three years after graduating from the Institute.

Today, he is an Economic Development Specialist with Duke Energy in his home-town of Charlotte. In addition, you will read that he is a volunteer with a number of programs helping young men and women in the Charlotte area.

In his accomplishments at VMI and after graduation, he has demonstrated the qualities that we “cherish” in VMI graduates: integrity, professional competence, and a commitment to public service. He is a role model for young people wherever his life-story is told. This is Keith Gabriel. A young man who faced adversity, looked deep within himself to find the strength to persevere, and to become a responsible man contributing in a positive way to society.

Please welcome Keith Gabriel, VMI Class 2012: monster dunker; inspiring alumnus; talented professional and outstanding citizen.