Thank you, Dean Wintersteen; President Geoffroy, Dan Saftig. Before I get into my usual 50-minute lecture, I, too, want to introduce and honor my dear wife, Darlene who is here today. She sat in front of me in study hall (her name was Harris, mine Harl) and since the end of our sophomore year in high school when we started dating, we have been a team. I am sure in those early years when she was helping put me through 10-years of higher education, she probably thought she was doing a lot of pulling on that team. I should point out that next Monday we will celebrate our 57th Anniversary. It is not well known but I married at the age of five. Our sons, James Brent of Denver and Rodney Scott, also of Denver, had conflicts today and could not be present but they send their best wishes. Both are in business with very demanding careers as CEOs.

Today, in the brief time together, I want to do three things. (1) I want to recognize a few of those here, for various reasons and to recognize others, many of whom are deceased, who contributed meaningfully to this day; (2) explain why Darlene and I feel so strongly about this gift; and (3) express our great appreciation to this institution for what it has meant to us.

Special recognitions

I want to recognize just a few in attendance today. First, my sister, Marjorie Sutter, of Ames, and my sister, Merna Marie Donald and her husband, Neil, of Traer, Iowa. They are dear friends as well as siblings. Next, my cousin, Don Bryant and his wife, Sue (who is an ISU alumnus) who drove all the way from Jackson, Tennessee to be here. Growing up we enjoyed a closely-knit family relationship, especially among the 23 cousins and we still enjoy their presence.

Maurice Stamps, one of my English teachers at Seymour High School and the football coach, is with us. Mr. Stamps, as I am still inclined to address him, along with Betty Friedmeyer, were singularly responsible for me testing out of Freshman English in 1951 (Freshman English was the bane of many students in the early 1950s). Mr. Stamps will be observing his 94th birthday in a few weeks and is still writing books.

Dean Jennings, a lawyer from Council Bluffs, who had planned to be here, was on the Seminar 70s Committee that sought, in the midst of the greatest turmoil this campus has known, to provide an outlet for students who were frustrated by the Viet Nam War, our environmental woes and racial conflict. I had served as the senior faculty advisor to Veishea Central Committee in that fateful week in early May of 1970 which was marked by closure of more than 200 campuses across the country, partly because of the Kent State killings, but not Iowa State. I proposed the Seminar 70s Program (involving one-credit hour seminars on important issues of the time) to President Parks on August 12, 1970, after observing that, during Veishea that spring, the students wanted above all to be heard, to talk, to debate the important concerns of the day. President Parks announced the implementation of the seminar series at the fall convocation about three weeks later. That is an example of the fact that crises are scarce resources to be handled with care. More can be accomplished than in more normal times. Had the idea of the seminar series been raised through regular channels it probably would have faced tough going through the various curriculum committees. The Seminar 70 series ran for about 15-years.
Dr. Frank Mitchell, retired from the University of Southern California in history. Frank and I were good friends in our undergraduate years. He now lives in his hometown of Chariton, Iowa.

Al Brennecke, with wife Jean, who live high up in the hills west of Denver (and occasionally visit their hometown of Marshalltown) have been good friends since our law school days.

In this moment of introspection and deep seated emotions, I also want to recognize some of those who helped shape my life significantly. Early in my career, I began to reflect upon the impact faculty at this institution had on my own development. Individuals such as Roy M. Kottman, associate dean of the Division of Agriculture; Louis A. Thompson, later associate dean for resident instruction; Darrell Metcalfe, an agronomy professor I came to respect deeply; R.J. Hildreth, who, as a graduate student in economics succeeded in getting me to see that economics is a powerful and useful discipline; Kenneth Hohenberger, also a graduate student, in agricultural engineering, whose insights into the subject matter and his patience in helping those who didn’t fully comprehend the significance of the courses, impressed me; Richard H. Kraemer, another graduate student who opened up the world of audio-visualization that lasted through my professional career and shaped my approaches to teaching to undergraduate and graduate students and also in my extension programs for lay persons and professionals alike. I should also mention Dr. John Bath of psychology, now nearing the century mark for his insights into educational psychology. Captain Walter Friesner and Major William Cover, both of the Army ROTC Department, helped me see more clearly my obligation to serve the country. And, of course, my major professor, Dr. John F. Timmons. I must also mention my beloved mentors at the University of Iowa College of Law – John C. O’Byrne and Marshall Harris. I could go on and on. And just because some of my dear professors have not been mentioned certainly does not mean that their influence was negligible.

While my long association with Iowa State University makes this place very special, I should also mention the other educational institutions that were responsible for helping to build the platform, namely the faculty at my high school at Seymour, Iowa and the six teachers at Hays School, a one-room country school in Appanoose County (where I was the only one in my class for the entire eight years). I want to give special credit to three of my high school teachers – Ermil Banning who reminded me daily in the spring of 1951 that I just had to complete the application for one of the three Iowa Centennial Memorial Scholarships (which, surprisingly, I won). Without that scholarship, I doubt that I would have gone to college. I was taught never to waste anything and a $300 scholarship would have been a gross violation of that admonition. Earl Berge, the Superintendent, provided strong encouragement to go on to college. And my English teacher, Maurice Stamps, who is here today, was a major supporter, also. To all of them, I owe a huge debt, more than I could ever repay.

Why this gift?

I must admit that this institution means a great deal to Darlene and me. It has shaped us, nurtured us and helped us to develop as individuals.

But this recognition is particularly dear to my heart because of the potential future impact of the Commons project on the students – providing a friendly environment for the new faces and those who have been around for an age and a half, as is my case. I think back to that day in late September of 1951. My parents had delivered me to 309 Lynn, to a small, basement apartment with a bunk bed for my roommate yet to arrive and myself. It was a lonely place. And so, as my parents drove away, I started the walk down Lynn Avenue to the Memorial Union, sadly noting that I was not sure that I really wanted to be here. My parents had made it clear that they would have vastly preferred that I remain in
Appanoose County to farm the rented land I loved so much.

I crossed over Lincolnway walked to the north side of the Union where I sat on the low bench surrounding the fountain. The emotions welled up within me as I realized that I had no choice – I had no automobile and no way to return home even if I decided to do so. It was one of the sadder days of my young life. There would be 7,500 students on the campus in a few days, I was told and I knew only three – and they were upperclassmen who were yet to arrive on the campus for the fall quarter. Even if I had an automobile, returning home was not an option. That would brand me as a quitter and that was unacceptable to me. So I vowed that evening as the shadows lengthened, to stick it out – maybe for a year. As it turned out, I was here only for two quarters that year. My brother was drafted for service in Korea that autumn and my father had surgery in January of 1952 that made farm work impossible for him. So I gleefully, and I mean gleefully, left the campus at the end of winter quarter, 1952, thinking I was unlikely to return. But that summer involved many long days in the seat of my favorite tractor, a nearly new John Deere A, enough that I became convinced that I should return to Iowa State that autumn. And I did.

The Harl Commons project, when it was initially proposed by President Geoffroy and Dan Saftig, seemed like the ideal place to stake one’s identity – to provide a warm and caring place for students who, like me in 1951, needed such a warm and caring place on the side of the campus that I already recognized would be my principal habitat.

The Commons project was also appealing because my first love as a faculty member was teaching. I have often said that teaching is one of life’s greatest, and most rewarding and enduring, pleasures. It is a high calling to be entrusted with helping to shape, developmentally, the hearts and minds of students. The value of this great university to the State of Iowa, to the nation and the world is incalculable in helping generation after generation of students in their quest to be more fully developed members of a global society. And yet that part of the university’s mission is carried out by individual professors and staff who work individually, but collectively provide that opportunity to every generation of students.

First as students, and later in our faculty service, Darlene and I came to believe firmly that Iowa State University is one of the finest institutions in the country in helping students build their educational and personal platforms for life. We want to be part of that process in the future.

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To close, it is a great privilege to be granted the right to be memorialized in the manner contemplated with the Commons project. Darlene and I are pleased to be a part of the campus in this manner over the coming decades. I am humbled as I look out over this storied campus and think of those highly distinguished individuals who contributed so much to this institution – individuals such as Dean Robert E. Buchanan, Dr. Pammel, Dr. Spedding, Dean Marston, Dean Curtiss, Dean Kildee. The list could go on and on.

Finally, we are awed to be honored by a timeless recognition that will literally transcend the ages and will stand as evidence that the university genuinely cares about students, that the university remains committed to focusing on the problems of Iowa and beyond with a strong emphasis on international work and that the university remains committed for all time to the great land-grant tradition.

Neil E. Harl