



**Randolph-Macon  
College**

Ashland, Virginia

**Remarks by John A. Luke, Jr.  
Chairman and CEO, MeadWestvaco Corporation  
Randolph-Macon College Presidential Inauguration**

**October 27, 2006  
Ashland, Virginia**

Thank you to the entire Randolph-Macon community – especially President Lindgren – for inviting me to share this special evening with you and to offer some thoughts on this memorable occasion. While pleased to do so, I've been told that graduation speakers here at Randolph-Macon have to contend with the train. I'm glad this event is inside, but I will still try to be brief and be off stage before the next train comes through.

Visiting this campus reminds me, in many ways, of my own college days at Lawrence University. It's a liberal arts school in the same mold as Randolph-Macon, and I suspect that the memories I have are similar in nature to the rich thoughts each of you carry for this special place.

These uniquely emotional snapshots – an engaging professor, a corner of campus, an academic adventure – they stay in our consciousness forever, much like the liberal education we received continues to color and contour the way we view and react to the world around us.

Bob, I know that you proudly say that liberal arts colleges provide students with the best educational opportunity in the country, and maybe the world. That's high praise from a graduate of the University of Florida...and I couldn't agree more!

In the business world, you hear a lot of companies talk about “their way.” The GE way. The Google way. And, I’m sure, there’s the Randolph-Macon way. A liberal education is a way of thinking – a way of learning to learn...a way of preparing for careers, not jobs...a way of understanding and applying your knowledge to the real world. It’s about education, not just training.

I am acutely aware that the influence of my education still guides me today – even as my training evolves in business or manufacturing, it’s my liberal arts foundation that most affects the way I see events, make choices or decisions and evaluate opportunities. Over the past few weeks, in anticipation of this evening, I’ve been collecting snapshots from my liberal arts perspective – storing them away like a shoebox full of postcards. I’d like to share a few of them with you.

The first says: “Greetings from Sweden.” Of the six Nobel Prizes awarded this year, four went to Americans – each of them in the science disciplines. This isn’t simply good news for those who continually lament that we’re falling behind other countries in applied sciences.

Two of the six individuals honored for economics, medicine, chemistry and physics received undergraduate degrees from liberal arts colleges – Edmund Phelps at Amherst and John Mather at Swarthmore.

It’s reasonable to think that a future Nobel laureate might be sitting in David Brat’s course on International Economic Development or Serge Schreiner’s inorganic chemistry class, with knowledge and perspective further shaped by the outstanding SURF program he and Kelly Lambert created.

My second snapshot comes from a recent parent’s weekend visit with my daughter, who is a freshman at Bowdoin College in Maine. It’s a frayed and yellowed postcard dated 1889 by student, professor and visionary president of Bowdoin: Joshua Lawrence Chamberlain. In memorializing the sons of Maine who died under his charge during the battle of Gettysburg, Chamberlain said “The inspiration of a noble cause involving human interests wide and far enables men to do things they did not dream themselves capable of before, and which they were not capable of alone.” He could have been speaking about the “hand-cultivation” of students here at Randolph-Macon and other liberal arts settings – students who are shaped and shaken and sharpened into citizens of the world.

To that very point, the last postcard could be delivered by bicycle, emailed from Beijing, or overnighted from Bangalore. When I graduated from college where I studied Far Eastern History and Government with a great deal of interest, I had no idea that there would ever be such a thing as “business trips” to China and India.

More than thirty years later, both are now vibrant elements of MeadWestvaco’s strategy and our company’s future. Understanding how to think about these countries – and the rest of the world – with the perspective uniquely provided by a liberal arts education is a useful – if not necessary – point of reference for today’s flattened global marketplace.

The liberal arts education is alive and well – from Stockholm to Maine to “the center of the universe” in Ashland, Virginia. It is indeed timeless and very relevant in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century.

Henry Wriston, a former President of my alma mater, wrote in a book titled *The Nature of a Liberal College* – “One of the most stubborn obstacles to a proper appreciation of a liberal education is the latent suspicion that it is impractical.” Whether you’re a Nobel laureate, an army general, a businessman or a college freshman – you know he’s correct. The elegance of its true practicality is its ideal foundation for a lifetime of learning and growth!

In looking back through Wriston’s book before coming tonight, I was disappointed to find that he didn’t include any advice for incoming presidents of liberal arts colleges. So I have fashioned my own.

As a graduate of a state university and a product of mega-research, Bob, you’re now the born-again evangelist who has come from the bottle. Begin to collect your own postcards here at Randolph-Macon. From your conversations with students, faculty and alumni, I suspect you already have compiled quite a few.

Don’t put them away in a shoebox. Use them as a platform for leadership – not only on this campus and in the Richmond area, but also as a promoter and spokesperson for liberal education more broadly. It is a great but fragile model, one much like our democracy, that needs to be actively nurtured and sustained by leaders such as you.

Lawrence's President Henry Wriston did outline the fundamental goal of a liberal college, it's "the individual, developed to his highest potentialities and ready to turn to a wide range of activities."

In the pursuit of this fundamental goal, Bob, our interests are firmly aligned. One of the many reasons MeadWestvaco relocated to Virginia is the special commitment to higher education in the Commonwealth. Randolph-Macon offers something other schools don't – and corporations like ours need the kind of graduates produced here...who can think and adapt, who are analytical and creative, who can write well and listen better, who are ready to be educated instead of trained – young women and men who are truly prepared to become citizens of this exciting new world!

They have a leader who can take them there – along with the support of so many alumni, faculty and staff – and in doing so, a leader who will help carry forward Randolph-Macon's banner and that of a lively, timeless, current and practical liberal arts education.

Thank you and Good Luck!