Inauguration Address
September 17, 2010

As I begin, please allow me to thank all of you who have chosen to join us for today’s ceremony, for all who have joined us in community service opportunities during the days leading up to today, and to those who will join us tomorrow as we Treasure Savannah. We believe that these activities signify our commitment to one another and our recommitment to this wonderful community in which we are privileged to live and work.

So . . . welcome to all dignitaries, guests, family members, faculty, staff, students and friends. Thank you for those who joined in marching today as delegates and particularly to my colleague presidents from both the University System of Georgia and from our neighboring states of North and South Carolina.

Thank you to special guests who have made such a difference in my life: Dr. Stan Smits, Professor Emeritus of Management from Georgia State University. Stan was my major professor during my doctoral years who taught me the value of discipline–how would I ever have finished that dissertation without your gentle but steady insistence and guidance?

To Carl Gooding, former dean of the College of Business Administration at Georgia Southern University. Carl gave me my first job as an assistant professor, and he is one of the most straight up and honorable people I know.

Also special thanks to Bruce Grube, President Emeritus of Georgia Southern. I learned so much from you about what it takes to be a leader–why intelligence is important but why it must always be leavened with measures of humility and humor.

Finally, to my colleagues from Georgia Southern. You were my family for 19 years, and I owe so much to you for helping me to grow and to grow up.

Thank you to our Coastal Battalion, Armstrong Army ROTC unit.

My thanks to our wonderful musicians, to the Conductor of our Brass Choir, Professor Mark Johnson, and to Professor Robert Harris, Conductor of the Chorale, and all members of the Chorale. Later, we will have the pleasure of the musical premiere of an original composition by Vijay Singh, Proclaim the Day. The music is a Singh composition, but the appearance of it as part of today’s program is due to the planning and foresight of Dr. Harris.

Chancellor Davis, thank you for the confidence you have shown in me during the past year, for your wisdom, your compassion, and above all for your marvelous sense of humor. All of these have been appreciated more than you can possibly know.
Regent Jenkins: Your example of uncompromising integrity and your insistence on “doing it well”—whatever it is—are important models to me and to countless others in this great University System.

To Mayor Otis Johnson, we are so very glad that you altered your plans to be with us today. We are honored that you have joined us, and I am personally touched. Please know how grateful we are for the dedicated way in which you serve our city. You are an Armstrong alumnus of whom we are very proud.

To Dr. Janet Stone, Professor Emerita of History, whose labor of love, From the Mansion to the University, her painstaking and eminently readable history of Armstrong, helped me to better understand both Armstrong and Savannah. Janet, your history, derived from both your research and from your heart, joined with the stories of our alumni, students, faculty, and staff to create understanding and respect for this great institution that I call home.

To my parents—my mother, Ruth Hanson, and my father, the late Victor Hanson. Both of them—first-generation children of Swedish immigrants—believed in the promise of America and especially in the value of higher education. My father’s mantra, voiced from the days of my earliest memory, was “I will make sure that all of you children have the opportunity to earn a college education.” It was a source of great pride to him that my 6 sisters, my brother, and I had that opportunity. And what a difference it has made! Mother, I am so glad that you are here.

To our children—Ben, Scott, Matthew, and especially to Jeff who is here today to celebrate with us.

Most importantly, thank you to my husband, Carl. On so many occasions, you have picked me up, dusted me off, and encouraged me to get back in the game. It is impossible to tell you how much you mean to me/impossible to imagine that today could have happened without your ongoing love and support.

A special greeting as well to our 75th Notables . . . We recognized many of you last evening in a special way, but it is a pleasure to have the honor of your presence today.

As some of you know, I was pretty hesitant about the need to even hold this inauguration. It seemed—especially during the past year—that there were many more important ways to spend our valuable time. Ultimately, we compromised.

Armstrong’s 75th anniversary provided the ideal circumstance that allowed (or provide and allow) us to hold an inauguration while simultaneously celebrating an important milestone. Waiting until today also allowed me the great luxury of getting to know my campus a bit better. During the past year, I have been honored and privileged to hear the stories of many remarkable people—some of them from our earliest graduating class—who have honored me with their recollections of this wonderful place and what it has meant to
their lives. And so, ultimately, this day allows us to celebrate not simply an inauguration but rather the story of Armstrong.

You see, the story of Armstrong is as special—and appropriately framed by—the beautiful, exotic, and complex story of our own city. The history of Armstrong began during the Great Depression. It involved a visionary mayor and some generous citizens who collectively recognized that the promise of America—to gain an education . . . to better oneself—might be lost to a whole generation of young Savannahians UNLESS they did something.

So, with vision, spirit, and the understanding that HOPE was essential to the region’s young people, they started an institution of higher education!

This day, September 17, is the same date that in 1935 Mayor Thomas Gamble—that visionary mayor—stood before 168 entering freshmen, 10 faculty members, and numerous community supporters, at the opening Convocation of Armstrong. Appropriately, he directed his remarks to those new students and said to them: “You have the rare distinction of becoming the first class of Armstrong Junior College. You are to help mould it for those who come after you. You are to be the prime factors in creating its governing impulses and in establishing its traditions. It may well thrill you, as it thrills us older ones who will watch your onward march.”

Those days, which have been recounted by some of our earliest students, were challenging, but as envisioned by Mayor Gamble, they were thrilling. In the words of Alva Lines, Class of 1937, one of our 75th notables who joins us here today, Armstrong came along at “exactly the right time. We were looking for hope—a way we could live and enjoy living . . . It gave us the inspiration to do something/to be something/to make something of our lives.”

And they have made much of their lives . . . and along the way accomplished so many things that they bring pride to themselves, their families, their city, and their Alma Mater. Sitting among our 75th Notables are physicians, attorneys, artists, businessmen, teachers, nurses, a Mayor . . . people who were launched at Armstrong. With that push/that encouragement, they achieved things far beyond anything they may have ever dreamed.

You see, they benefitted—as the founders envisioned they would—from the fact that education is fundamental to an understanding of our world and of one another. As the promise of these students joined with the educational passion of a relatively young faculty, Armstrong was indeed moulded into a place that has continued for 75 years to be a beacon of promise and opportunity for thousands of students.

Because the stories of our 75th Notables continue to be written among today’s students. They come from backgrounds privileged and not. They come from across the street and from around the globe. They—like their colleagues before them—bring the hopes and dreams of our state, our nation, and our world.
Zerik Samples: Senior Health Sciences Major from Brunswick–honoring his leadership skills through his presidency of SGA.

Kristin Burton: Graduate Physical Therapy student from Ocala, FL, who brought honor to herself and to Armstrong–graduating w/honors and becoming the only player from the Peach Belt Conference to earn back-to-back Academic All American? recognition.

Guiliana Calvo: An honors pre-med student from Paraguay who has received the coveted Goizueta Foundation scholarship to assist her in attending school.

What do WE–no, what do I owe to them? How can our dreams for and our contributions to them be ANY LESS than those made by our founders?

Clearly, it is essential during these days of uncertainty that we continue to call upon those models of hope, optimism, and commitment that founded this wonderful university. As we all know, the last year has presented numerous fiscal challenges, but whenever I feel bowed by the enormity of these, I reflect on those early founders and say to myself, “If they could create AND sustain this college in the face of the Great Depression and through the dark years of WWII, I can certainly reach down and find the fortitude to help us through our current troubles.”

So I pledge this day–as many have throughout our 75-year history–to recommit myself to the ideals of our founders. To recommit myself to this great city which founded us. To recommit to the hopes and dreams of our nation which got up off its knees in the 1930s to become a powerhouse such as the world has seldom seen. Because those same hopes and dreams that existed 75 years ago still resound in the hearts and minds of all of us.

How am I–how are we–to do this? We must remind ourselves–especially during these days of economic uncertainty–that a legacy exists that must carry on. So . . . what will we be 75 years from now? I would be foolish to say that I can predict exactly what that will be. That said, it IS important to plan for the future–say 10-20 years. So . . . what I envision, especially based upon the strategic plan being finalized this fall, is first that Armstrong will continue to be built on the primacy of student success. As distinguished alumnus Dr. Irving Victor, Class of 1941, has said, “Of all the places that I ever attended, the learning exhilaration of Armstrong was far and away better than anywhere else. Or as current student, Ellen Evans has said: “Regardless of what your insecurities are, regardless of what everybody says you’re going to be, here is Armstrong–make yourself what YOU want yourself to be.”

Therefore, students who are admitted to Armstrong will be able to count on us to deliver the quality of instruction for which we’ve been known since our inception. So let us this day recommit to continuing and strengthening the learning environment that has created so many student successes over the last 75 years.

Let us also recognize that student success is directly related to the success of and our commitment to our faculty and our staff. Students cannot thrive unless our entire
community is invigorated on a regular basis—intellectually, inspirationally and, of course, fiscally! Doing this requires us to use our considerable intelligence and foresight to plan and execute in ways that are both intentional and innovative. We must be expansive in our views of what is to be, but we must always seek creative partnerships to make that future happen.

Second, what will we physically look like in 75 years? The optimism and hope of Mayor Gamble when he said in 1935: “Armstrong starts under exceptionally bright auspices, and on what we all believe will be a continuous and constantly expanding life . . .” has led to this lovely place that we call our home. Our trajectory suggests a continuation of expansion that requires innovation as we develop the new ways of delivering learning that our students and community demand.

The type and scope of our academic programs will continue to evolve in ways that meet both traditional and non-traditional student demand. This means—among other things—that the virtual world of delivering learning must be pursued much more aggressively.

For our physical campus, we will continue to use the models of our most-recently completed Student Union and Residence Hall, to create and update in a sustainable manner so the footprints we leave behind are in the minds and hearts of our students and our community—not on our precious environment.

Third, I envision a campus that continues its commitment to service. Believing this, I call on the entire Armstrong community to recommit itself to service. We must acknowledge that the needs of our community and our world are vitally connected to us. To the extent that we have linked ourselves to the progress of our great city, state, and nation, we have prospered. Those joining us tomorrow for Treasure Savannah, our community day of service, will have the chance to demonstrate in a tangible way that we understand our community’s needs and we are here to serve.

Finally, and most important, we will commit ourselves to one another. Our illustrious alumni have joined us today to remind us all of what happens when we commit to excellence in education but also to the promise within each of us. They are here to rejoice in our history; to acknowledge that Armstrong was built, not just on hopes and dreams, but also on the leadership, commitment, and the contributions of community leaders and educators who worked together to make it so. We invite all of you to plan the future with us so that in the coming years, all of us can take pride in the stories of success that we will create together for generations to come.

In summary, the vision for the future is one that draws mightily on the heritage of our past:

- A commitment to student success and to the success of all who share our time together
- A commitment to the health and well-being of this great community. As this city and region prosper, so will we—we are inextricably linked
• A commitment to the nurturing of partnerships that sustain and build for the future

In closing, please know how proud I am to be the seventh president of Armstrong. Also know how seriously I regard the vision that created us and how committed I am to continuing the legacy of service to our students and our community. The inspiring stories of our alumni will continue to be written in our current students and in the students of tomorrow.

I firmly believe that our BEST days are yet to come.