“Tradition & Transformation”
Text of President H. Fred Walker’s Inauguration Speech
March 23, 2017

Today is a special day in the life of Edinboro University. Thank you all for being here.

Thank you to Chairperson Shapira, Governor Shields, Chancellor Brogan, Chairman Frampton, Senator Brooks, Mayor Horne, Mr. Irlbacher, Reverend Kelly, Dr. Zimmerman, Dr. Hannan, Dr. Bucell, Ms. Behr, Ms. Jackson, members of the Edinboro University ROTC, members of the Edinboro University Pipes and Drums, Professor McGaughey and the Edinboro University Singers, and Mr. Blair. Your participation in today’s ceremony means a great deal to the Edinboro University community and to me.

Thank you, as well, to all of the distinguished and honored guests who have joined us today. Council of Trustees members, college and university delegates, Edinboro students, faculty, and staff. Your participation is deeply appreciated. And thank you to my colleagues who planned this ceremony. They are acknowledged in the program.

I would like to extend my sincere thanks for the opportunity that has been provided to me to serve this great university as its 18th President. It is a tremendous privilege to devote myself fully to responsible stewardship of the University’s traditions, resources and future.

Thank you to my family and friends who have traveled to be part of today’s special occasion. Special thanks to my wife, Susan, and my sons, Carl and George, for your tremendous support, as well as to Susan’s daughters, Elizabeth and McKenzie; her mother, Ann Howe; and her sisters, Beth Green and Janet Biuso, for joining us for this occasion. Thank you all.

[Pause]
This is our moment in history. Here, at this intersection of tradition and transformation, we step away from our daily work in classrooms and offices for an official and symbolic transfer of leadership. From this special vantage point, we can look back over the 160 years of history that brought us to today, and we can peer into the great future that we will shape.

A few minutes ago I took the oath of office and received the mace and medallion, which are symbols of presidential authority. I fully accept and embrace the authority and responsibilities of my office. This is the work I have prepared for throughout my professional career in higher education.

But, I also share these responsibilities with each of you. It is up to all of us together, as members of this academic community, along with members of our broader community, to transform the Edinboro University we have inherited. By rewriting the DNA of this institution, we will create a strong legacy for the future.

Throughout my remarks, you will hear references to the Edinboro Spirit and the Edinboro Experience. The Edinboro Spirit is a quality we have received from the past. It is the strength of our heritage. The Edinboro Experience is something we can create as part of our bold vision for the future.

Our Edinboro Spirit can best be described as resilience. It is strength in the face of adversity, and ingenuity in the face of need.

In 1857 when early Edinboro residents recognized a need to increase the educational level in the community, they came together to create an academy to train teachers. Through a century and a half of change and challenge – as a private academy, normal school, state teachers college, state college and today’s public, comprehensive, regional university – Edinboro Spirit has kept our institution strong and striving as it continually transformed to meet the needs of the day.

This Edinboro Spirit has great resonance for me personally. It is a common bond between me as a newcomer and longtime members of the Edinboro community.
Those of you who know my path through college know that I was a nontraditional student, a Navy enlisted man who came from a working-class background. I wanted to make contributions to society at a level that only higher education could make possible – and this is a point that should resonate with us all as we strive to create and sustain opportunity for first-generation and other students in this region.

The Navy was my path to college, just as Edinboro University creates a path for our students today. Like any journey worth taking, my path was not easy. After full days and 48-hour weeks of work on my Navy job in avionics, I commuted 45 miles each way to night classes at California State University – Fresno, often traveling through heavy fog. Three 6-month deployments at sea delayed my progress.

The obstacles were huge. At times they seemed insurmountable. With resolve and a commitment to education, I succeeded in overcoming those obstacles and achieved my goal, earning not only my undergraduate degree, but also an MBA by the time my nine-year enlistment ended.

That spirit of resolve and commitment is evident in the way that Edinboro University has advanced throughout its history. That resilient Edinboro Spirit has always carried this institution and this community forward, and I am convinced that Edinboro Spirit will enable us to do it once again.

At our moment in history, the challenges are well-defined. Nationwide, institutions of higher education are grappling with demographic shifts, financial pressures and the changing expectations of students and employers. For the last 8½ months, we have been engaged in measuring ourselves against those challenges.

We are confronting areas in which we have fallen short, but we also have discovered that we are strong. Our working groups and our discussions have tapped into the strength and resilience of the Edinboro University community. The process has highlighted our ability to work together and our great capacity for finding the best path forward for our students, our institution and this region.
The path forward is taking shape. Over the last several months, I have said a great deal about the need to bring expenses and revenues into balance, refresh the academic program array and enhance student success. Already we have raised our admission standards and are preparing for additional action to address these important priorities.

Today, I would like to raise our collective focus above the day-to-day work and talk about the Edinboro Experience. Many of you have heard me describe that experience as a three-dimensional cube consisting of six interlocking sides. Each side represents an aspect of the residential college experience, and together they create the complete experience, inside and outside the classroom, that fully prepares students for successful and fulfilling lives after graduation.

Let there be no doubt: We have very good academic programs, very good faculty and very good staff. Our academic program review will ensure that our programs are strong and relevant to today’s students and the economy of Pennsylvania without diminishing our commitment to producing well-rounded thinkers and citizens.

But academics alone are not what distinguish a university education. The complete experience – a rich academic culture that also includes experiential learning, varsity and intramural athletics, clubs and organizations, leadership development, and history and traditions – are what make an education exceptional, and they should be the hallmarks of an Edinboro education.

Nearly all of these pieces are present on our campus today. You can see the outlines of what is possible in the successful college careers of numerous individual Edinboro students.

- Biochemistry major Nicole Wagner earned a coveted spot last summer in the National Science Foundation’s Research Experience for Undergraduates at the University of Minnesota-Twin Cities. Through this experiential learning opportunity, Nicole spent 10 weeks doing research that focused on a type of protein domain that has proven to be significant in cancer
therapy and gained valuable experience to support her dream of working in research related to public health.

- When I think of athletics, I think of students like Ryan Stratton. Ryan is one of our football players, a large young man with an even larger heart. A sophomore dual-majoring in Middle Level Math and Special Education and a very strong student academically, he received the university’s inaugural Dr. Joseph Laythe Award last month in recognition of his dedication to championing individuals with physical and intellectual disabilities.

- Recently, when I met with the leaders of student clubs and organizations, I was impressed with the passion they demonstrated for their co-curricular activities and for their university. Many asked well-informed questions, and Rachel Walsh was one of several who had great ideas for improving the university and boosting recruitment. A computer animation major from northeastern Pennsylvania and an archer, she came to Edinboro for her academic program and the Shooting Sports Club. Rachel would like prospective students to have the same opportunities she has enjoyed.

- Thoughts of student leadership call to mind individuals like Becki Leonard, president of our Graduate Student Council and a member of the Budget and Planning Committee as well as our Working Groups. Becki, who is pursuing a Master of Arts in Counseling with a concentration in college counseling, prepared herself for her current leadership roles with a well-chosen portfolio of activities during her undergraduate years, including the Edinboro University Honors Program and Highland Ambassadors.

- As for history and traditions, history is all around us on our beautiful campus, but the traditions of this university are largely missing from the daily lives of Edinboro University students today. Last fall, we took a small but significant step toward filling this void by creating a more meaningful New Student Convocation for our Class of 2020. Together with commencement, it helps to frame the four-year college experience of the entire class.
So, you see, the components are here, but we must fill in the outlines, assemble the pieces of this holistic Edinboro Experience – academics, experiential learning, athletics, organizations, leadership, and history and traditions – and boldly proclaim a future in which the exceptional experience becomes the standard experience for all of our students.

The success of that work will lead to greater student success and enhance the post-college success of our alumni as they enter the workforce. EU graduates will be prepared not only with relevant skills and a well-rounded university education, but with leadership abilities, character and other qualities honed by the Edinboro Experience.

The Edinboro Experience will help to ensure the success of our university as well. It will make Edinboro stand out in a crowded and highly competitive higher education marketplace. It will make Edinboro a leader among State System universities.

This and other goals we are setting for ourselves are bold but achievable. They are achievable because our work toward this vision is in progress now. We have a strong university and a path forward to making it stronger. Our next steps are to define our measures of success and develop the plan to get there.

Rewriting the DNA of the institution is our historic opportunity. We cannot, we will not stand by and wait for others to write the story of Edinboro University in the 21st century. This is our moment in history.

As we stand at the intersection of tradition and transformation, the path forward is ours to choose, and I believe the way is clear. Please join me, friends and colleagues – my fellow Fighting Scots – in addressing the very surmountable challenges and tremendous opportunities of this moment with true Edinboro Spirit as we create an even brighter future for our students, our university, and our region.

Thank you.