

Hillenbrand 25th Anniversary

First of all I would to express my appreciation to Elizabeth for being asked to provide remarks to you today on behalf of the many, many staff and students who made Hillenbrand Hall a reality 25 years ago. It was such a major undertaking at the time, and for me personally consumed a lot of my life for several years, so much so that much of what I will talk about today seems to be just like yesterday. As we celebrate 150 years of Purdue history, Hillenbrand without a doubt represents one of those “Great Leaps” at Purdue.

Let's set the scene in the last decade of the 20th century. Purdue had not built a new residence hall in over 20 years, that being Shreve Hall completed in 1970. The residence hall system continued to operate ageing facilities, two of the more prominent of which were Terry Courts and Fowler Courts with straddled State Street on land that is now Discovery Park and First Street Towers. Built in the late 1950's, these housing communities were home to over 1100 students annually, and although they were not highly desirable by incoming freshmen, they nonetheless served themselves very well through the years.

Fowler was originally called State Street Courts and construction was completed in 1955. Fowler House built in 1924, was the former Poultry Building and it served as the center of student dining, activities and socializing. Fowler had a very active student club, the Courtiers. Fowler House exists even today where it serves as the CDFS Child Development Laboratory School.

Terry Courts, which was across the street from Fowler was built in 1956. 36 individual buildings built in 113 days. I am not sure anyone anticipated that it would be housing Purdue students for 38 years, but that is what happened! Terry also had a lively student club, the Gables club, and centered its dining and activities around Terry House, which is now the home of the Purdue University Police Department.

After all of these years of use, these facilities had seen their better days. Ultimately, in 1989, the decision was made to replace Fowler and Terry, which set in motion the birth of a new residence hall. One thing for sure, Hillenbrand was not going to be built in 113 days. No, in fact the construction window for Hillenbrand was originally to be about 20 months. But as we found out, even that wasn't enough time. And that added to the lore regarding Hillenbrand as I will explain in a bit.

20 years since the previous construction of a residence hall is long time. To say the least, student expectations had changed! We needed a lot of information and input from constituent groups in order to get the right plan in place. So, we put together 2 committees, a Steering Committee and an Input Committee. These committees were made up of members of our residence hall community: administrative staff, hourly staff, business office and

physical plant staff, the university architect and of course, residence hall students. Together, they came up with the Hillenbrand plan. They dreamed Big! And what they got was very Big!

They came up with a plan that incorporated the best aspects of our existing halls, while dreaming what the needs of the 21st Century student would be. What they envisioned, became the new and exciting things that became Hillenbrand Hall. Larger student rooms than were the norm on campus at that time, more electrical outlets, durable materials such as plastered walls and Corian countertops, more recreational and lounge spaces than any hall on campus, suite-type student rooms with semi-private baths. Individually controlled heating and air conditioning units in each room, which was certainly a “great leap” at that time. Multiple rooms which would meet ADA requirements to help create a more inclusive environment for our students. Specially designed student room furniture. And of course, meeting all of the tech needs for our students, set up not just in a room, but for each student in a room.

More new and exciting things developed into a reality. Normally very blah spaces like laundry rooms, were combined with vending into bright and colorful and cheerful activity areas. Kitchenettes on each floor were combined with floor lounges. Dreaming Big, Shreve had 1 kitchenette for 850 residents, but Hillenbrand had 16 kitchenettes for 800 residents.

Back in 1992 and 1993 we were busy behind the scenes putting our dreams into reality. We were also busy putting our staff together. We were able to name a hall manager, a food manager, and a facilities manager. Many staff members came to us from Fowler, which was to be deactivated in the summer of 1993.

We also put our counseling staff together, with the idea that they would be Pioneers. Here are a couple of quotes from an Exponent article written back in August 1993. One of our counselors, Jill Fuller, said that the hall manager was “looking for a group of pioneers for an adventure into new areas.” And, I like this one, Matt Szolwinski, one of our staff residents said “We have one of the foremost facilities in the nation! What we need to do is transform it into one of the foremost living communities!”

Now, you might think that with all of the careful planning, things would simply go like clockwork, and we would have sent our service and food service teams into the building after 20 months to easily start prepping for our new students to arrive in August 1993.

But wait! Not so fast! There was a Teamsters strike that delayed the concrete trucks from rolling for weeks; they couldn’t find enough skilled plaster workers to fill the needs, and there were other delays. Things were not going like clockwork and we were getting really concerned we might not be ready for August.

The tricky part for us was to promote the wonderful benefits of the new hall to prospective students during the contract signing period in the spring of 1993, while also

prepping contingency plans in case some of the building was not ready, particularly the dining rooms and the student laundry. So, Dreaming Big again, we made numerous presentations in the residence halls, recruiting students. We were looking for Pioneers! You can be the first students to experience all these new features, but you have to be adventurous! We also started putting together our student club, by having callouts for students interested in being charter members of what was to become the Phoenix Club. We formed an organizing committee, who constructed a constitution, and an orientation committee, and after the fall semester had started held elections and a naming contest for the club. Brian Tohill was our first club president and did a great job. The Phoenix Club was the winning name, signifying the mythical bird who rose from the ashes of what was Fowler, and later, Terry.

When we finally did get the building turned over to us in Mayish of 1993, our staff did a whale of a job getting the building ready. Since the dining rooms were not ready, our food staff worked side by side with our service staff in first moving equipment from Fowler, then helping to unload 40 semi-loads of furniture and equipment off of the back dock, cleaning floors and rooms, hanging drapery and many, many other tasks. It was remarkable and unforgettable. The rooms were ready to go. But, alas, the dining rooms and student laundry were not.

Again, we had to Dream Big. This time it was all about managing “unfulfilled” expectations. So, we arranged for students to use other dining facilities and do their laundry in other halls and we handed out “bonus offerings”, the main component of which was \$25 of “bonus bucks” which they could use in our cash operations. May not seem like so much today, but remember this was 25 years ago.

More things happened. Here are a couple of examples. 25 years ago having a telephone in a student room was a big deal. We found out in the summer that there was a goof up at the phone office, and all the phone numbers in the hall were wrong. So we had to send out a special mailing to our students to get them the right phone number.

When we started our move in process in August, the fire alarms kept going off inadvertently - the security doors shut and the elevators automatically returned to the first floor no matter where they were at the time - modern safety standards at work that we weren't familiar with. We fixed that with new smoke detectors that handled the wind and the dust much better.

We started our exterior door access in February of that first year. Wayne Hilt, the card office manager said “Hey John, we can get you all kind of reports on student access.” So I initially said, why not, until I realized how many students were coming into the building at 2 or 3 in the morning and I gave that up in a hurry. I decided to follow the old adage “nothing good ever happens after midnight.”

Most of all I will remember the staff and the students and their spirit of adventure. We had terrific and hardworking food, facilities and main office staffs. I will remember the great guidance we had from our administrative team at Smalley Center, John Sautter, Lanny Wilson, Sarah Johnson and Tim Gennett. I will remember the wonderful guidance and support from our university architect Mike Warden. And of course Hillenbrand could not have become a reality without the design teams at Scholer Brothers Architects, with Steve Ford, Steve Gloyeske and many others. Rowland Associates was wonderful, with Sarah Marr and Heather Wilson. Ricca's was our dining consultant. Hagerman was the general contractor, and although they took a lot of grief over not getting things done completely on time, there were many dedicated staff on their team that did their very best.

I recall some unique tie-ins with the old Fowler and Terry. Wilma Kay, a longtime food manager at Fowler had a grandson, Marty Eckart, on our first counseling staff at Hillenbrand. And more recently, the granddaughter of Beba Karpick, longtime food manager at Terry, was named the outstanding floor senator of the year for the Phoenix Club.

So, way back then, on a hot night in early August, I recall driving back up McCormack hill, gazing back on a well-lit Hillenbrand Hall, ready for our first students to check in and thinking of Dr. Seuss. "Oh, the places You'll Go, You'll be on your way up! You'll be seeing great sights! You'll join the high fliers, who soar to high heights!"

Thank you. Enjoy your afternoon. Soar to high heights and Boiler Up!