

Honorary Degree Luncheon

University of Missouri

Stotler Lounge Memorial Union

Friday, December 19, 2014, 11:30 AM

Darwin Hindman

Welcome. It is wonderful of you to come. Needless to say it is a pleasure for me to be here.

But what a surprise. I can assure you that I never imagined such a thing as my being awarded an honorary degree.

But it is happening and it is humbling. In thinking about what to talk about at this luncheon, I have to ask myself what is that I have done that justifies this prestigious award. I am not certain, but I can tell you that whatever it is results from the many people and institutions that helped and influenced me along the way. This truly is an award for them; I am just their stand in. That being so, I will talk about some, certainly not all, of the most important people and institutions and experiences in my life and maybe a little bit of my philosophy.

My wife and children and parents mean everything to me, and their influence has been enormous.

They were and are the best. Axie, my wife, Ellen Thomas our daughter, and her husband Ian and our grandson Jack Thomas, please stand. The others in our immediate family could not make it today for good reasons...

This institution, the University Missouri, played a major role in my life and thinking. It provided my entire formal education. I like to say that I attended school on the Red Campus for 21 years. Let me explain. It began in 1937 when I entered 4 year old kindergarten at the University Lab School and continued in the same school and same building through high school for a total of 14 years.

The lab school was an amazing experience. It was free to experiment with new teaching ideas (in other words we students were the guinea pigs) and its supervising teachers were some of the nation's greatest experts in such areas as teaching math and reading. It was a good education and was probably very progressive for its time.

My graduating class at U-High was about 35. Many went on to great things; some examples include, Walt Melton, who is here, was one of the inventors of GPS, another was one of the developers of Color Xerox and another, Frank Conley, who is here, became one of Missouri's youngest, longest serving and best Circuit Judges, right here in Boone County.

Another U High graduate (not in our class – he is older) who is here is Hank Waters, famous for his editorials trying to persuade Coach Norm Stewart to adopt the old U High Zip Around for his basketball teams. Norm never did. One wonder what his record might have been had he followed Hanks advice.

Not all the students who started at the Lab school stayed, especially the girls. When it came time to choose a high school, many of the girls in our class looked around and decided the pickings among the boys were pretty slim and left for Hickman for better prospects.

After 14 years at the Lab School, I attended MU, again on the red campus, for seven more years to earn BA and JD degrees and an Air Force Commission as a 2nd Lt. The University's excellent, even outstanding teachers and provided a high quality education. Our excellent law school prepared me well for satisfying career as a practicing attorney. I still couldn't leave the Red Campus altogether, so I taught for several years at different times as an adjunct at the law school and business school, again on the Red Campus.

In addition to formal education, there are many other ways the University has impacted me.

The best, and most important, is that I met Axie, my wonderful wife of 54 years, on a blind date. She is an outstanding graduate of the MU College of Education and holds a Masters in Library Science from MU. She means everything to me and I can assure you that I would not be standing here without her. Thanks, Axie.

By the way, Axie did her student teaching at, guess where? The lab school. Her supervisor was third and fourth grade teacher, who kept telling Axie stories about my third and fourth grade student exploits. Wonder of wonders, Axie married me anyway.

To add to the MU legacy, our daughter, Ellen Thomas, graduated from Mizzou with dual degrees in English and biology.

Like Tim Wolf, I grew up in a Mizzou faculty family. My dad, Skippy Hindman, came to the University from Ohio State in 1935 to succeed Chester Brewer as chair of the Physical Education Department and for some years served in a dual capacity as Dean of Men. He retired thirty years later.

He told about his arrival in 1935, one of the hottest and driest summers on record. Arrived in Centralia on an un-air-conditioned train. The hot dusty wind was blowing, everything looked shriveled and sad from the drought. He thought was in Columbia and thought that this is not for me. He learned that he still had a leg to go so he came on to Columbia. He liked what he saw and we have lived here ever since. This story impressed me with the idea that people who have a choice will always chose the best place to live. The town you live in makes a difference.

Growing up in Columbia was a positive experience for me. The population was 18,399 in 1940. It was a classic leafy town; its streets were lined with overarching stately American Elms. The town was generally laid out in blocks with sidewalks so it was efficient to travel by foot. Rationing limited most families to 3 gallons of gas a week. Thus for most of us the primary means of transportation were walking, cycling and taking the city bus for a nickel a ride. (It came every 20 minutes in those days) Those forms of transportation worked and were fun and healthful and taught me those options should be available to everyone.

We lived in the “Old Southwest” as it is now called, near beautiful woods, a working rock quarry, a city sewage plant, the city dump and the MKT railroad with d tracks (where the MKT Trail is today). My neighborhood friends and I made them all our playgrounds.

Some of our greatest exploits were on the MKT tracks where we were always tempted to keep going to see around the next bend, no matter how many times we had already rounded it. We were in trouble more than once when we went too far to get back home on time. Once, it was so late that our fathers set out down the tracks to find us after dark. Needless to say there were some unpleasant consequences to us.

It was easy to get downtown to the movies or our great public library and to campus with my parents for lectures, concerts, plays, and exhibits and athletic events.

We attended football games with Knot Hole Gang game tickets tied to our shirts.

Columbia was by no means perfect. For example it had no parks. We played our games on vacant lots. The University Campus served as a huge park. Sometimes we could sneak into Brewer Filed House during vacations.

I remember riding my bicycle on campus using the sidewalks as bike trails and thinking how much fun that was.

I was lucky to have many outdoor experiences from sailing on the Lake of the Ozarks with the Good Sea Scout Ship Tribune, float trips in Missouri to hiking vacations in Colorado and canoe trips in Minnesota. Enjoying the outdoors was a major influence on me.

Through my parents, I knew many brilliant and interesting University faculty members and the various coaches. Watching them and listening to their discussions made appreciate how important it is to people to be able to be with their peers. Their interactions benefit each other.

My dad never complained about the low salaries University faculty were paid. He loved his job. He thought teaching and research and working with students was the best job in the world. He needed money of course for his family, but money was not the major motivator. I learned that satisfying work can be more important than more money.

By the way, I think Don Faurot, the football coach at the time, was making about the same amount as my dad... My some things do change.

Now for some of my philosophy.

Every individual has the goal of a satisfactory life and is entitled to the opportunity to have one. I think that in general that the best way to achieve that goal is through collaboration; people gathering and working together. That is why people have formed and organized democracies, cities and Universities. They are among human kind's greatest achievements in advancing widespread opportunities for satisfactory lives.

Here we have the City of Columbia and the University of Missouri, sharing the same ultimate goal of helping as many people as possible have satisfactory lives. The city benefits enormously from the University, its largest employer. The city provides necessary municipal services, and is the off campus opportunities for a satisfactory life.

As my Dad's experience in arriving in Missouri in 1935 points out to me that people who the University wants for its faculty or as students care about where they live and they often have a choice. They do not have to come here or to stay here. The city they will live in matters.

Many factors make a city the place people want to live. Good schools, infrastructure, public safety, and transportation are fundamentally important. They are inclusive; they help all citizens, rich or poor, in pursuing their goal of a satisfactory life.

But coming from my background, I believe that having wide ranging recreational opportunities available to everyone makes a significant difference in people's lives.

Columbia, now a small city of about 120,000 population, has come a long way from the days of no park to more than 60 parks and miles of trails today. I am not the first mayor to see this value. Former Mayor Bob Smith, who is here, pushed for the acquisition and establishment of the Grindstone Nature Area. Former Mayor Mary Ann McCollum, our first and only female mayor, and who was my immediate predecessor, succeeded in establishing the Forum Wetlands area.

Columbia is a national leader in parks and recreation. Nearly every citizen lives near a public park or trail. They are used by thousands. They are inclusive. Trails serve as parks and as transportation. There is something for everyone, from the disabled to the highly able and using them is free. They pay back by adding satisfaction to citizen's lives, promoting health and just plain fun.

They are an important economic development tool because they attract and retain productive people. If you add our parks and trails to the wide range of job opportunities in Columbia you see how we are building the critical mass of creative peers needed to push Columbia ahead.

The University is a partner; it built a significant part of the Hinson Creek Trail on its property. I hope that partnership continues with last missing segment of the same trail which needs access to University property.

We would not have the parks and trails that we have today without the excellent, dedicated parks and recreation staff now headed by Director Mike Griggs.

I must acknowledge my debt to the two city managers I had the privilege to work with, and learn from Ray Beck and Bill Watkins. They were masters at their difficult craft and remain great friends. Kruse.

I must thank my former law partners including Janice Harder, who is here, for their support and the many citizen leaders who have made so many good things happen, including Chip Cooper and Karl Kruse.

Some people will pass Columbia by and some will leave, but very few will do so because they will find a better quality of life elsewhere. Some will come to Columbia and some who are here will stay because of the outstanding quality of life Columbia offers, including its parks and trails.

This is a great town with a great University and that is hard to beat. We are lucky that we have chosen to be here.

Thank you for this honor.