

Silver Spur, March 7, 2009

Comments by Dr. Dianne Van Hook

Good evening. It is a pleasure to be here with you and to have shared in learning about the great love story of this wonderful couple, and their family.

Seeing those pictures of Council Bluffs took me back to my own childhood in rural Minnesota. There certainly is something to working on a farm that shapes a person's character. Among other things, it makes you humble, and keeps you true to your roots. Which is why, despite having lived in L.A. – the epicenter of celebrity and fame – for more than 40 years, Harold and Jacquie were so nervous about tonight. They are Midwesterners at heart, willing to help when needed, but uncomfortable with the spotlight and receiving credit for their generosity.

For me, Harold and Jacquie's story brings to mind the words of William Menninger, who said this: "Six essential qualities are the key to success: Sincerity, personal integrity, humility, courtesy, wisdom, charity." As we've already seen tonight, Harold and Jacquie individually exhibit these qualities, and together, they are the epitome of success.

Of course Harold is well-recognized and highly regarded in the insurance industry. He is also an author, having penned numerous books related to his field. My personal favorite is "Life is Just a Cash Flow."

That's a catchy title, but it hardly reflects the reality of the busy lives Harold and Jacquie have been kind enough to share with all of us. As I reflect on the Petersens, and their impact on our community, I am impressed by their commitment to making our valley a better place to live, and more importantly, their commitment to people. Especially each other.

Their enduring marriage is a story of romance and devotion spanning six decades, with love reaching through three generations. Those all-important family bonds extend into their business too. As president of Petersen International Underwriters, the company he founded more than 40 years ago, Harold has welcomed three sons and four grandsons into the firm.

Given all he has accomplished, you might think Harold would slow down a little. But taking it easy is not part of who Harold is. He worked the family farm, and hired out to other farms close to home in order to help support his family. And while at UCLA, he gave up the track team and fraternity life to work his way through school. So it's no surprise that he's still in the office everyday. Given his passion for helping people, it's also not surprising that he still makes time to talk with individual clients.

Speaking of talking with people, Jacquie doesn't know any strangers – just friends she hasn't met yet. She connects with people wherever she goes, like our Performing Arts Center, where she attended a concert recently by the Air Force Band of the Golden West. By the end of the show, she had made a new best friend in the woman sitting next to her.

I can't imagine how many lives Jacquie has touched through her devoted service to so many organizations. The hundreds of thousands of dollars she has helped to raise have undoubtedly made a difference for countless men and women who have no idea how hard she has worked on their behalf.

Together, Harold and Jacquie have also established an enduring legacy of service. A complete record of the organizations they have helped through the years is too numerous to mention here. But whether it was the Junior League, or the Junior Chamber of Commerce, the American Heart Fund, the American Cancer Society, or the American Red Cross, the Boy Scouts, Girl Scouts, or the Boys and Girls Club, Harold and Jacquie have demonstrated their willingness to serve and lend a helping hand time and again. In their service, they bring to mind this proverb:

Watch your thoughts; they become words.

Watch your words; they become actions.

Watch your actions; they become habits.

Watch your habits; they become character.

Watch your character; it becomes your destiny.

We are blessed that College of the Canyons is a beneficiary of the Petersens' energy, devotion, generosity and character, as they are helping shape our college's destiny. They share our passion for education and the way it can change lives, as it did theirs. When Harold joined Mutual of Omaha, he augmented his pre-legal studies from UCLA with business courses at Omaha University and found great satisfaction with his classes at what was then a modest sized community university. Jacquie also took classes there at the urging of her supervisor, Mrs. Mable Criss, whose husband founded Mutual of Omaha. The couple respected and appreciated the quality of the education that Omaha University made available to the young people of Omaha and nearby communities. So, when their friends Cathy and Bill Kennedy asked them to support the COC foundation, Harold said, "It was not hard to transfer this affection and these memories into a desire to support College of the Canyons. Another love affair was under way."

We hold Harold and Jacquie in the utmost regard, and I personally appreciate their early and enthusiastic support of our University Center project. When College of the Canyons decided to make higher education beyond the associate's degree level more accessible to the Santa Clarita Valley, the Petersens were there. They were early supporters of the Create Our University Center Campaign. They led by

example, showing their commitment to this concept, and inspiring others to do their part and help College of the Canyons make bachelor's, master's and doctoral degrees available from leading colleges and universities available in our Valley. To date, more than 1,100 people have earned degrees and credentials from seven partners who offer more than 25 programs in the 7,500-square-foot Interim University Center. Imagine what we can do when we open the 110,000-square-foot permanent facility!

We will celebrate the culmination of the University Center dream later this year when we finish building the new facility and unveil it to Santa Clarita. That will be a special occasion indeed as we recognize everyone who shared in the power of that dream, including Harold and Jacquie, and many of you here tonight.

The Petersens have also been longtime President's Circle members, and generous supporters of our Silver Spur award. They have joined us for many of our past celebrations to honor their friends who have received the award. So tonight it is a special joy to acknowledge their service, their support, and their dedication to College of the Canyons and our students by bestowing on them this special award.

Please join me in honoring two special friends of College of the Canyons, Harold and Jacquie Petersen.