

**Lunar New Year Luncheon
January 24, 2014
Professor Stephen Toope, President and Vice Chancellor
The University of British Columbia**

Thank you Carol and Leslie (Lee).

Good afternoon.

As always, it is a delight to be with you at this event.

Without hesitation, I can say that one of the most enjoyable aspects of my professional life for the past seven and a half years has been spending time with alumni and friends from our Asian communities.

Back in 2007 when I attended this event for the first time, it was immediately apparent that what I had been told about you was true.

Without question, you are among - if not the most - engaged, informed and committed members of our UBC community.

It is also a bittersweet occasion, as this will be the last time I will be joining you to celebrate the Lunar New Year, or at least the last time I will be here as a representative of UBC. I won't rule out being here again sometime in the future, but it will be solely for the purpose of catching up with some extraordinary people, and with friends.

One of the defining characteristics of a friend is an ability to understand you on an almost intuitive level. You rarely need to explain anything in any great detail. It's understood.

I'm not sure UBC could ask for better friends than you, people who always understood the inherent value of British Columbia being home to a world-leading university. It never took a great deal of explanation for you to understand the importance of wide-ranging learning and research to the future of British Columbians and of global humanity. You just got it.

And so it was always easy to explain our plans and strategies for the university's future, and why they were important. Whether it was

improving learning spaces, expanding research capabilities, developing new programs and institutes, fulfilling infrastructure needs or building bridges with partners in Asia, you always understood.

But you did more than understand; you took action. You connected us, you advocated for us, you supported us, you advised us, and you did all of this with a noticeable spirit of warmth and friendship.

I could stand here and speak a long time, but I will never adequately express my gratitude for the wisdom of your understanding and the effectiveness of your actions.

And not just during my time as president. In many cases, the direct involvement of our Asian communities in UBC affairs began decades ago, and is now intergenerational among families.

Having just been introduced by Carol and Leslie, naturally Bob and Lily Lee come to mind. A lot has been said about Bob's involvement in important matters at UBC, but something new occurred to me recently.

Bob's biggest contribution to UBC was not the thousands of hours he volunteered as chancellor, or as a board member or strategic advisor, nor was it the generosity of the family's gifts.

No. Bob's greatest contribution to UBC was this – he taught us to think differently.

Back when he helped to lay the foundations of UBC Properties Trust, Bob was the first person to use the word “billion” when discussing the future of the university. In short, Bob taught UBC's leaders to think a lot bigger than they ever had before.

25 years later, Bob's vision of a billion dollars through developing a residential campus community is nearing reality. As a further benefit, the campus has been transformed from an isolated un-serviced entity to a thriving 24-hour community that exemplifies the university's deep commitment to sustainability.

And, as you all know, UBC is now undergoing further transformation – evolutionary transformation. We are on track for similar success in one of the most transformative campaigns in Canadian university history.

With two years still to go in the campaign, we have already raised more than \$1.2billion toward our \$1.5 billion goal. And just as significantly, 45,000 UBC alumni are now actively engaged in the day-to-day life of the university, and we continue to move steadily toward a goal of 50,000 alumni annually – twice the number as when the campaign began.

Not surprisingly, a significant part of the campaign success is the result of the understanding of our Asian alumni and friends, and many an evolution has been started, including very recently.

Just this fall, a \$2M gift was made from brothers Alex and Chi Shum Watt in honour of their mother, Mrs. Yip So Man Wat, to establish Cantonese Language and Culture courses in the Department of Asian Studies. This generous gift will provide the foundation for a robust Cantonese Studies program.

UBC will now be among a handful of exceptional institutions in North America that teach Cantonese language and culture courses, a wonderful complement to our well-established Mandarin program which has the largest number of students studying Mandarin of any North American university.

Just last month when we were in Hong Kong, we learned of two significant contributions from Hong Kong based alumni to one of our flagship projects, the new Alumni Centre.

No doubt some of you know Raymond Lee and have already heard about Raymond's generous support of this project. Raymond recently made a further commitment to the building, bringing his total support for the Alumni Centre to \$5.25M.

We also learned while in Hong Kong that alumnus Sheldon Trainor and his wife Emelda Wong have made a \$1M gift to the Alumni Centre.

The result, I am thrilled to say, is that the Alumni Centre project is now two-thirds of the way to reaching the fundraising target of \$18.5M. We are seeing a long-time dream become a reality. Construction is now underway. We'll be using a short video to give you a preview of that reality in just a few moments.

Before I end, I want you to know – *please know* – that it has been a pleasure and an honour to interact with you and to have had your guidance and support in the evolution of our university over the last few years.

On behalf of UBC and on from me personally, thank you for your friendship.

Most of all, thank you for understanding... for “getting it”!

Best wishes for the new year...and always.