

**The Installation of Chancellor Robin Gary Cummings**  
**The University of North Carolina at Pembroke**  
**April 8, 2016**  
**3:00 p.m.**  
**Givens Performing Arts Center**

What a day.

It is said the two most important days in your life are the day you are born and the day you discover why.

As a child, I attended Pembroke Elementary School, which stood on the very spot where we're gathered today.

And every day on my way to school and on my way back home, I'd look out the window of Bus 315 and see this university — the big classroom buildings, the dorms, the students walking across campus.

My young classmates and I didn't realize it at the time, but this place was shaping us — shaping the way we thought about education, the way we thought about our community, the way we imagined our future.

And now, all these years later, it is an indescribable honor to lead The University of North Carolina at Pembroke.

If someone would have told me just a few years ago that I would become chancellor and share the stage with a congressman, a state Supreme Court justice, the Chair of the UNC system and its new president — not to mention the rest of this distinguished platform party — and to stand before this audience, I wouldn't have believed it.

This happens only in a great country of opportunity.

Please know that every person here today is special, and Rebecca and I and the university thank you for the gift of time today.

Kathryn, we send our wishes to the Governor. It was my privilege to serve in his administration and have the opportunity to share in a small way in North Carolina's future in healthcare.

Congressman Hudson, thank you for your strong advocacy for this region and UNC Pembroke and the extremely kind words you entered into the congressional record. It is truly an honor.

Thank you, Chairman Bissette and the members of the Board of Governors who are here today. I appreciate your strong leadership of our university system and your continued support of UNC Pembroke.

President Spellings, I am pleased to serve under your leadership, and I share your vision for making North Carolina the nation's leader in affordability, accessibility, accountability and quality in higher education.

Your visit three weeks ago was a high-water mark for this campus. And your blog about your UNCP observations following your visit, was greeted by many with a feeling of, "Hey, she heard us; she gets UNCP." Thank you for your service.

Justice Newby, thank you for administering my oath of office. UNCP is honored to have a member of North Carolina's highest court on campus. Thank you.

Reverend Mangum, your presence here means so much to me. Through your ministry and civic involvement, you have touched countless lives in this community and far beyond. I have looked up to you and admired your life of sacrifice and commitment for as long as I can remember, and I consider you the quintessential public servant.

Chairwoman Blue and members of the UNCP Board of Trustees, and to the members of the Search Committee, this institution has no finer advocates. I know how committed you all are to ensuring UNC Pembroke meets its full potential.

Please know I respect and cherish your confidence in my ability to lead UNCP into its future.

Rudy, thank you for your leadership of our alumni association. Support from our more than 24,000 alumni across the world allows UNCP to fulfill its promise of education for future generations.

Thank you to everyone who sent such warm greetings by video. I was especially touched by the words of my cousin and lifelong friend, Ruth Revels, who passed away three weeks after recording her remarks. Ruth was a leader in the movement to save Old Main four decades ago. And as she fought to protect and honor the university's heritage, she became an important part of its history.

Ruth invested her life well, she discovered her "why" in life, and she went home a hero.

Also important to this university's history are the chancellors who came before me. I am honored that former Chancellors Joe Oxendine, Allen Meadors and Charles Jenkins are here for this special day. Each of you implemented your vision in unique ways, laying the great foundation in place today.

Joe, you led the discussion to change the name of our beloved Pembroke State University to the University of North Carolina at Pembroke.

Allen, your vision brought football back to UNCP after 50 years. This year, we opened our home season with over 7,000 in attendance, in a stadium built for less than half that number.

Dr. Jenkins, you have poured your life into this university for decades and have always been willing to serve in many capacities, including chancellor.

I also want to recognize and thank Randall Jones, son of the late Chancellor English E. Jones, who represents the Jones family.

And I'd like to recognize Dr. Gregg Givens, son of the late Paul R. Givens, for whom this wonderful facility is named.

Our university has been blessed to have had great leaders over the years.

I ask these men to please stand while you join me in acknowledging their service.

To Scott, Robert and Candace, thank you for serving as committed representatives of your respective organizations, and for your willingness to act not just in the best interest of your constituents, but more importantly, for the best interest of our university.

And to our faculty and staff, thank you for the warm welcome to UNCP. You are among the most talented, exceptional and hardworking people I know. Because of you, I wake up every day grateful to be a part of BraveNation.

To the students, you are why I get up every morning with excitement for the day. It's all about you and your success.

I want to thank the amazing student and faculty musicians who have contributed to this ceremony.

Will you please join me in giving all our musicians a round of applause?

And finally, I want to recognize my family. I'm pleased to have so many of my extended family members here. Thank you, thank you, for all the support and encouragement over the years. And of course, my children and their families, my daughter, Dr. Amy Davidian, her husband, Dr. Dave Davidian, and their daughter Ava; my son, Dr. Mark Simeon Cummings, his wife, Caitlin, and their daughter, Sophia; and my sons, David Gary and Adam Jeremiah.

You all make me so proud, and you are my greatest blessings in life. Would you please stand? And, of course, I especially want to thank my wife, Rebecca. Quite simply, I could not do this without you. Having also grown up in this community, Rebecca is equally passionate about UNCP. The university got a deal when they hired me because not only did they get a chancellor, but in Rebecca, they received someone who bleeds black and gold to serve as the first lady. Rebecca, you are my very heart, my best friend. We've been in love since middle school, and I treasure the day we first met. I appreciate so much your support. Rebecca, will you please stand?

And I want to acknowledge two people who are not here but who had the greatest impact on my life.

This installation is dedicated to the memory of my parents, Reverend Simeon Cummings and Mrs. Maude Cummings, Ms. Maude and Brother Sim.

At an early age, they instilled in their children the power of faith and an appreciation and respect for education. My father was a trailblazer for American Indians in the United Methodist Church, and his civic contributions benefited people of all races and backgrounds in Robeson County and beyond.

Throughout that service, my mother was always by his side as a strong partner while also raising nine kids on our 25-acre farm about three miles from here in the Union Chapel community.

Because of everything my parents did for us, I thought we were rich. After all, we had plenty of food to eat, clean clothes to wear, a good home.

But I look back on it now, and I realize we were pretty poor as the world might look at it. But we were so rich, so very rich, in the ways that really matter.

We honor their memory.

I literally could go through this audience and spend the next hour thanking so many of you. Again, please know you are each special, and Rebecca and I are so grateful you chose to spend this time with us.

Allow me to shift now and talk for a few minutes about this great university — its past, its present and, most importantly, its future.

I believe the culture of education that has been so strong for so long in this community can be traced to this campus: a culture that is centered on the power, the promise, the potential of education in a person's life — the strongly held belief that your present circumstances don't determine your future, only the point from where you start.

In the early 1880s, a group of seven American Indian men, with the assistance of a state legislator from nearby Red Springs, went to Raleigh and asked for the right to build a school in their community to train teachers to teach their children.

True to the native wisdom that decisions should be made with the next seven generations in mind, these men knew education was important to the survival of their children and their children's children.

With legislative permission and \$500, they returned and built a one-room school and opened the doors on March 7, 1887, with one teacher and 15 students.

You are sitting on the campus of the third-oldest public university in North Carolina. Actually, North Carolina State's charter was signed on the same day as UNCP's, but we claim the ink was dry on our document first.

For an entire race of people, formal education was not an option. This institution put education within reach. And for many years, it was the only option for higher education for American Indians in the South.

In fact, UNCP is still recognized as the only four-year accredited university in the United States that was established by American Indians, for the education of American Indians.

The state of North Carolina recognizes the University of North Carolina at Pembroke as its historically American Indian university.

Several years back, when the NCAA was examining the use of American Indian imagery, UNCP was the only school in the original study given permission to continue using its athletic logo.

Our past is important, and we will honor it proudly, but it does not completely define our future.

Today, from that humble beginning, and because of its mission of access to education, UNCP is recognized by U.S. News & World Report as the most diverse campus in the South, and among the most diverse universities in the United States.

And we continue to lead the way in providing access to students who historically haven't had as much opportunity to get ahead — racial minorities; students who grow up in poverty, in rural areas, in families where no one has attended college; and active duty service members, veterans and members of military families.

Forty percent of last spring's class of over 650 graduates were first generation college students, the first in their family to obtain a college degree. That is transformative education!

Together, our students create what is proudly the most diverse campus in the UNC system. UNC Pembroke is the very picture of access, from our beginning and today, 129 years later.

Now since July, this campus has been involved in a conversation: How do we build on the strong foundation in place to position UNCP for the future?

We said that every decision we made would be based on the responses to three questions:

- Is it good for the students?
- Is it the best option for the university?
- Does it prepare UNCP for the future?

We examined the roots of our past, the purpose of our present and the potential for our future, and restated our mission as simply: “Changing Lives Through Education.”

I remember when we first adopted this phrase as our mission, and we were sharing it. I spoke to our facility and maintenance staff. I relayed to them the story told of President John Kennedy back in the 1960s during the moon shot program, to put a man on the moon.

During a photo op, President Kennedy was walking around Cape Canaveral, and he walked over to a gentleman who was sweeping. He touched the gentleman on the shoulder and asked, “Sir, what do you do here?”

Without looking up, the man replied, “I’m putting a man on the moon, Mr President.”

And I explained to all our folks: Everyone on our campus, no matter the job, must be committed to our mission. If anyone asks, we are changing lives through education.

The following morning, I was at the residence and ran into Brian, who keeps the residence grounds looking great. I walked up to Brian and said, “Brian, what’s going on?” Without hesitation, he replied, “I’m changing lives through education, Doc!”

We adopted a set of values we thought important to our institution as we move forward:

Communication: Talk to one another;

Collaboration: Work with one another;

Accountability: Own your work;

Innovation: Do more with less, and do it better;

Integrity: Always, always do the right thing; and

Service: Serve others, and try to leave things better than you found them.

Roy Disney said, “When your values are clear, making decisions becomes easier.”

You will see our values and mission across the campus displayed so our students, staff and faculty can see them as constant reminders. In fact, the last two banners as you enter and leave our campus read “make an impact” and “serve others.”

Finally, we made the decision to not change the Strategic Plan put in place in 2013. There are four main goals in our Strategic Plan. I am proud to note these goals are areas of emphasis I hear

more and more as General Administration, the Board of Governors and our legislators look to the future of our UNC system.

First, UNC Pembroke will enhance its efficient and effective use of our resources.

Having served in leadership positions in healthcare for the past two decades, I have witnessed and participated in the discussion to match ever-tightening resources to ever-increasing demands.

Now, we as educators must likewise respond to the reality of limited resources and competing needs.

As in healthcare, where we are working to associate patient outcomes to resources invested, we in education must look at student outcomes in comparison to resources expended and maximize both.

UNCP has worked, and will continue to work, to develop a business model that manages enrollment and meets performance expectations. We will continue to utilize and expand dashboards of key performance indicators.

We recently re-established an Office of Grants and Sponsored Research to expand external funding through grants, research and scholarship opportunities.

And our Advancement Team is preparing to launch the first major capital campaign in our history.

So, UNCP will continue and expand upon, its goal to maximize efficient and effective use of resources, and to look for additional sources of support.

Our next main strategic goal is regional engagement.

UNC Pembroke is asking the question now more than ever: What is our role in the success of this region?

Yes, we have a state and national presence and even students from 21 countries, and we will expand in these areas, but what is our responsibility to this region, to Robeson, Hoke, Scotland, Bladen, Richmond and other counties in our region?

The challenges are daunting, complicated, interconnected issues that will not be easily solved. But each challenge is an opportunity for service.

And UNCP is ready to serve.

Many members of our campus community are serving already, like faculty who promote literacy in area public schools, the staff who donate food and clothing to our CARE Resource Center and the more than 2,300 students who volunteered almost 18,000 hours last year across southeastern North Carolina.

From Tabor City to Tar Heel, from Laurinburg to Leland, from Rockingham to Roseboro — it is our job, it is our duty, to step up and make a difference!

UNC Pembroke has the potential to not only change the lives of our students, but also to change the lives of their families and the lives of people throughout this region and this state.

Faculty in our Thomas Family Center for Entrepreneurship provides consultation and expert guidance to help local small businesses grow and create jobs.

And UNCP's new Entrepreneurship Incubator in downtown Pembroke offers workspace and resources to take businesses, from the Sandhills to the coast, from the idea stage to reality, from a dream to a fully functioning business, hiring staff and producing a product.

In southeastern North Carolina, there is no shortage of people with good ideas, a strong work ethic and a determination to succeed. They simply need help making their dreams come to life.

UNCP is ready to serve.

Our fully accredited School of Business is one area that will continue taking the lead.

And thanks to the visionary voters of North Carolina, UNCP's ability to provide business leadership and to educate the next generation of entrepreneurs and executives will be enhanced by our new School of Business facility, which will be largely funded by the recently passed Connect NC bond! That is great news!

As a local legislator said, "What better place to put a new School of Business building than in southeastern North Carolina?"

When it comes to regional engagement, one of our most important partners is the Lumbee Tribe of North Carolina.

A new collaboration with the tribe — along with President Pam Hilbert and Robeson Community College, and Superintendent Tommy Lowry and the Public Schools of Robeson County — is a 2.4 million dollar federal grant to improve access to higher education and career opportunities for American Indian youth.

The tribe will also play an important role as we advance our vision of growing our Southeast American Indian Studies Program into its own school, alongside our schools of Business, Education and Graduate Studies.

UNC Pembroke will become the national resource on social, political, economic and cultural attributes of southeastern American Indians!

We will collaborate with the Lumbee and other tribes in North Carolina and throughout this region of the country to make this vision a reality.

We are so honored to have representatives of many of our North Carolina tribes here today.

I could go on and talk about our expanding online programs, several of which are recognized as top programs and all of which address needs in our region, like nursing, and our master's programs in social work and public administration, elementary education, finance and so on.

Expansion of distance education is a priority for UNC Pembroke.

And we have robust articulation agreements in place with 14 community colleges in our region.

So strong, meaningful, impactful regional engagement is a strategic goal we will emphasize.

Our third strategic goal is to become the institution of choice for students in southeastern North Carolina by emphasizing and branding an affordable, personalized, unique and quality academic experience.

At UNC Pembroke, we say that learning gets personal. It's relationship-based education.

Ask our students, and they will tell you UNCP feels like home, feels like family.

I spoke to a group of 20 or so students last week who were being inducted into the Honor Society for Biology. They are amazing young people with passion and vision for their future.

To a person, they noted their academic success was in no small way due to the personal relationships they enjoyed with their faculty.

Many noted they came to UNCP because "I wanted to be in a place where I'm known by my name and not a number. I wanted to go to a place that feels like home. UNCP feels like home."

Earlier in my time on campus, I recall a very bright student studying to become a pediatrician who said something that really stuck with me. She said, "I know wherever I want to land, I can get there from here." We have seen it time and time again.

Over the past months, I've spoken to a new provost at Florida State University, an NCAA Division I basketball coach, a member of President Obama's Secret Service team, and a multitude of doctors, dentists, lawyers, veterinarians, engineers, accomplished musicians, teachers and professors of all fields — UNCP alums who are excelling in their chosen careers.

We are seeing there are academic and athletic superstars looking for the kind of experience we offer: a school with a distinctive heritage, one of the most diverse campuses in the nation, small class sizes with personalized education, an Honors College, study abroad opportunities, a strong undergraduate research program and a region rich with opportunities for public service.

"Wherever I want to land, I can get there from here."

And last, our fourth strategic goal is to maximize student success.

Last fall, UNCP admitted the largest freshman class in its history — 1,233 students. And their academic credentials were among the highest in admitted classes.

Notably, thirty three percent of this class were first generation students!

We had a record number of transfer students, of military-associated students and students returning to continue their education following a time away from school.

Our School of Business alone had a 10 percent increase in enrollment.

Students are finding value in a UNC Pembroke education.

Ninety percent of our students are employed or attending graduate school within 12 months of graduation. Ninety percent.

And we are committed to continuing to serve as a role model for diversity and accessibility.

But simply opening our doors to students isn't enough. We must do, and we will do, more to help them succeed when they get here.

We continue to see too many of our students struggle academically, drop out and never come back.

We can't blame it on their backgrounds. We can't point to socioeconomic factors. We are in the age of accountability in higher education.

We must act responsibly in our admissions decisions. And we must detect the first signs that students are struggling and provide support to get them on the right track.

This is already happening thanks to our HAWK Alert Program. It not only identifies students who are having difficulty, but also offers us an opportunity to congratulate students who are doing well.

The idea of UNCP preparing students for wherever they want to land in life is guiding our focus to expand our academic opportunities.

We are seeking opportunities to grow strategically, to meet changing workforce needs and to position our graduates for emerging careers.

UNCP must, as Wayne Gretzky said, skate to where the puck is going. That means, where our economy is growing, and where the needs are mounting.

With that in mind, we see potential for new programs in areas like cybersecurity and allied health.

This university has had a highly successful nursing program for years. But our region's aging population and North Carolina's chronic health problems present opportunities in other fields of allied health as well.

We are already taking steps to seize these opportunities and address the needs in our communities.

UNC Pembroke has an assurance agreement in place, guaranteeing selected, vetted students acceptance to East Carolina University's Brody School of Medicine once they graduate from UNCP.

As someone who went through the med school application process, I can tell you, the assurance program is an incredible opportunity for our students.

We signed a similar agreement last year with ECU's Doctor of Physical Therapy Program.

And today, I am excited to announce a new partnership with North Carolina State University's College of Engineering. As part of the "3-Plus-2, dual degree program," students will complete three years of coursework here followed by two years at NC State. Upon graduation, they will earn a Bachelor of Science degree in applied physics from UNCP and a Bachelor of Science degree in electrical or mechanical engineering from NC State.

That is great news for this area!

Employers tell us they struggle to fill these engineering positions. This partnership will help fill that need and provide an excellent opportunity for our students to prepare for rewarding careers.

And we are concluding similar agreements with the NC State and Tuskegee schools of veterinary medicine to allow qualified UNCP students access to these programs.

Like hospitals that join together to offer patients a full range of healthcare options, collaboration among universities and community colleges — working together to offer our students the most options for their educational journey — is a wise and effective use of limited resources.

Thus, our strategic plan goals are centered around the use of our limited resources, regional engagement, becoming an institution of choice, and maximizing student success.

There is no doubt our vision will continue to evolve as we live out our mission and our core values, and as our strategic goals are fully realized.

I want to close by addressing our faculty and staff.

As President Spellings has said, not one student is educated in our administrative offices or in our boardrooms.

The real work of the university happens in your classrooms, research labs and offices.

Don't lose sight of the fact that regardless of your job title on this campus, you are in the business of changing lives through education.

It is our common bond, our collective mission, our shared purpose.

I see a beautiful campus and I know there's a dedicated staff who gets it.

I hear students' stories of a life-changing relationship with a faculty member, and I know we are preparing our students not only for success in life, but for a life of significance.

Like you, I am blessed to know what it's like to have a lasting impact on someone's life and to be recognized for it when you least expect it.

I'll be out to eat in a restaurant, or shopping in a store, and someone will approach me, unbuttoning their shirt. This has happened over and over.

They want to show me their scar. They say, "You operated on me 20 years ago. You saved my life."

That is the power of education.

That is the promise you hold for the lives of the students who we are given for a period of time.

You are having that same type of impact.

But while I intervened when people were often in their worse condition, you get them when they are full of hope, full of excitement, full of promise.

Harnessing that promise is what UNC Pembroke has been about from the very beginning.

All we are, all we hope to do, is for our students. If our students succeed, then we are successful.

If any of you are asked what you do here, I hope that just as quickly as Brian responded, you will say, "I'm changing lives through education."

T.C. Henderson, a principal for the Croatan Normal School, UNCP's original name, wrote in the local paper on September, 24, 1900:

“The day has come when all who would make the most of life, who desire to accomplish something for themselves and for their country, must be educated. No one can hope to accomplish much in life, in the future, without an education. ...

I believe that where men and women are properly trained — have beauty of person combined with brightness of intellect and excellent health — they will lead useful lives and the blessings of liberty will be secure.

Never before, has the necessity of education been so great...when intelligence must rule more absolutely; for (education) is the best safeguard of liberty. ”

Those words are perhaps more relevant to today than 116 years ago.

When a university is literally the center of your community, it has a powerful effect.

It leads people to embrace the power of education to change lives.

Earlier, I said the two most important days in your life are the day you are born and the day you discover why.

I have discovered my “why” in life. And I am in awe and honored and humbled to be on this journey at this time in the life of this great university as together we change lives through education. Thank you, and may God continue to bless and guide the University of North Carolina at Pembroke.