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**Mississippi State University Extension Service**

Ruby Luncheon, 1998

When I learned that you had selected me as your prestigious Ruby Award winner for 1998, I thought first of my parents and my family. My parents were always proud of their children and encouraged us to work hard to be contributing adults. My family has always been very supportive. They would certainly smile on this program today.

With me today are some of my family: my brother Dr. Rod Paige, Sr., Superintendent, Houston Independent School District, Houston, TX; my sister Dr. Elaine Paige Witty, Dean Emeritus, College of Education, Norfolk State University, Norfolk, VA; and Eddie Butler my constant companion.

I thought also of the Extension administrators and co-workers who are like an extended family to me. It is hard to imagine how I could have been considered for this honor if it were not for the support and assistance given to me by all of the wonderful people who work with me. I'd like to acknowledge them at this time. Dr. Ron Brown, Director, Dr. Joe McGilberry, State Program Leader, ECRD; Dr. Susan Holder, State Program Leader, 4-H Youth Development; Dr. Michael Quart, State Program Leader, ANR; Dr. Beverly Howell, Administrative Intern, Family & Consumer Education; Dr. Shirley Hastings, Director, School of Human Sciences; Dr. Martha Ray Sartor, District Program Director; Walter Walker, 1999 Vice President, Rho Chapter; Dr. Dennis Reginelli co-worker; and Dr. Bernadette Watts friend and co-worker from North Carolina. I want you to know how humble I feel standing here addressing you.

This is an honor that I will always treasure.  
Thank you.

**HIGH TECH - HIGH TOUCH ---- HIGH TIME**

Let's face it - - life used to be simple. Prior to the Industrial Revolution most people worked simple lives in agriculture. They set off early in the morning to tend crops and care for animals and, although the work was hard, it was at least fulfilling. Most of the farmers saw that the food they took from the earth went straight into their mouths. Most of them knew that it was their own blood, sweat and tears that ensured they would see another day. Then came the machine. And with the machine came factories, smoke, pollution and sprawling cities.

Here we sit today in the glorious age of information, and while working conditions have improved dramatically, the problems remain the same. And so, rather than responding positively to High Tech methods, many of us sit stagnant behind stacks of faxes, e-mail and cellular phones. The wheels are always turning and yet sometimes we fail to see that there is no forward progress. You might ask whether all this new technology is

assisting in creating more time, or is it only making for more busywork and less time to accomplish anything of any real purpose. You might wonder about this. Then there was a gradual shift from the agrarian society to an industrial society. And now we are in the mists of yet another transformation in our society. This age is one wherein the creation, discovery and distribution of knowledge are fundamental. We are now a part of a highly competitive global economy.

The old way of moving information - which created Extension, is not relevant anymore. There are new demands upon individuals to learn and re-learn skills during their working years. New technologies will be an integral part of our everyday lives, new communication systems will create new working environments. The central theme in this new economy is that we must all learn how to learn and to keep on learning since knowledge will be the new currency. In their book Cooperative Extension Service A National Assessment, Paul Warner and James Christenson asked, "What will Extension look like in the year 2000?" Can an organization created in 1914 make the adjustment necessary to survive the rapid and pervasive changes occurring in the American society?

What should be the role of Extension in the information society of the 21st century? Our history is glorious. We can be proud of what has been accomplished through Extension. So from our humble beginning in a rural America, we are now spread to all of the 50 states in the nation and to more than 60 foreign countries.

Yes, our history is glorious and we are justly proud. But, our vineyards have changed a great deal. From the isolated rural setting of yesteryear we are now faced with new technologies, new ideas and new ways of living and new ways of making a living. Our past successes can be attributed to the fact that we stayed tuned to the people's needs and we have adjusted our programs to fit them. Thus, the importance of High Touch. Extension was like the popular song of the 1970's "Reach Out and Touch Someone". That's what we did and we were successful. But that is not enough for today's world. We cannot live on past glory. Those in Extension who try to preserve the past miss the big picture. Success today will depend on dedicated Extension faculty and staff empowered to step out and be innovators and risk takers. It will also require a clear vision, with careful attention to a market niche within our defined mission.

The challenge facing the Extension System in this highly competitive arena is to clearly communicate the value of its mission and its programs. We are facing a major challenge of relevance in a society that is encountering phenomenal change. I think it is High Time for the Extension System to adopt a public position of a competent and confident educational organization with an important job to perform in tune with today's needs and resources.

Because I feel very strongly about keeping pace and being relevant with the times I think it is High Time we embrace High Tech while we keep High Touch embedded in our Extension programming methods. I know of no other group of people anywhere in the world who have the opportunity to serve, the opportunity to lead, to guide and direct,

or the opportunity to influence the happiness and the economic and social well-being of the American people as you have.

We can bask in the sunlight of the successes of those that plowed the new ground before us and developed an organization, which holds prestige and has been a benefactor to mankind. We can, and we should, gain a lot of pride and satisfaction from the fact that we work for an organization, which has had tremendous influence for good over the years. But, if Extension is to meet the challenge of change in Balancing High Tech with High Touch, as a part of the complexities of Modern society, then we must gear-up our collective thinking and our programs to lead out more aggressively and to incorporate new methods and new ideas. The pace of change and expectations continue to accelerate for all of us.

Megatrends, an extremely popular and widely quoted book, spoke to the shift in programming that Extension would face. The main premise of Megatrends is that we are between two eras, we are in a transition from an old era, an industrial society, to a new era, an information society. Naisbitt said "We must now adjust to living and working in a world of interdependent communities." Global villages have been created by computers and satellite communications technology. In response to the High Tech all around us, the Extension System must learn to balance the material wonders of technologies with the spiritual demands of our human nature.

Technology and our human potential are the two great challenges and adventures facing us today. As we consider using High Tech and High Touch in our Extension programs it is High Time we realize that many changes bring with them temporary crises. I would share with you that the Chinese write the word crisis "with two characters, one of which means 'danger' and the other means 'opportunity'." We must recognize the dangers we will face as we move to High Tech delivery of programs, and we must take advantage of the opportunities that High Touch affords us in these endeavors.

The times we are living in are changing so rapidly that, like Alice in Wonderland, we must run just to keep even. This is not an easy order for us because people tend to change slowly. It is interesting that we work hard to identify needs, we prioritize them, we begin to tackle them, and we feel good about our accomplishments, only to look up and find several more opportunities staring us in the face.

There were two hunters who unexpectedly met a larger bear than they were ready to tackle. They dropped their rifles and ran. One hunter managed to get into a tree. The other hunter ran into a cave. The bear, being smarter than the average bear, sat down to wait between the tree and the cave. Suddenly, the hunter in the cave emerged and nearly ran into the waiting bear, screamed and ran back into the cave. A few minutes later, out he comes again, sees the bear, screams and run back into the cave. A few seconds later, he shows up for a third time. The hunter in the tree yells: For God sake, John, get back into the cave and stay there! The hunter on the ground yells, Its not that

easy, There is another bear in the cave. Yes, its true. Sometimes we are faced with challenges for change every way we look.

Today, the Extension System has a new challenge. Whether or not Extension will continue to have the broad public and political support of former years depends on its ability to communicate that we have institutionalized positive program changes. In an era of increasing demands and limited resources, the challenge is to effectively communicate with the public, private, and political decision-makers, as well as the internal university leadership, that Extension programs are still meeting the needs of people and are focusing on the priority issues which have significant impact on people and communities. One of the most important things all of us have to do, if we are to succeed in our work, is to communicate effectively with those around us, and this is not easy. There are many times when we are misunderstood for what we say. There are many times when we are misunderstood for what we do. But, it is most important that we all understand what has been done, why it was done, and what we have yet to do. New High Tech directions affects all of us and all the people we serve. Our organizations, and each of us as individuals, are accustomed to doing things in one pattern. We can be likened to new wine. And those of you familiar with the Biblical reference know men do not put new wine in old bottles, else the bottles break and the wine runneth out ... And the bottles perish. Our new wine will not burst our old bottles if we receive the new wine eagerly and willingly and pour it into our old bottles ourselves. You know, we live in a changing world. It is my sincere belief that as individuals and as an organization, community, country, state, or any unit, we must reach out and embrace High Tech - High Touch changes. We all know that we either go forward, or we go backward. It simply is not possible to stand still.

We can not rest on our accomplishment of yesterday. No organization of influence rests on its original plan. It was Woodrow Wilson who said, "We are not put into this world to sit still and know, we are put into the world to act". Its High Time we push away the clouds of legend and the opium of dreams in our approach to balance High Tech with High Touch.

Extension should build on its strong commitment to use the state of the art digital and communication technology for organizational commitment and management. These technologies should also be pursued for information and educational program delivery. As we create our new vision, it is important for us to be ever mindful of our heritage, our traditions, and our accomplishments. It is hard work to knock down the walls of We have always done it that way and other programming paradigms to rebuild for future vision. Acting on visions is a major risk. After all, visions are ambiguous and uncertain. They could even be wrong. With our rational and scientific mind set, how dare anyone challenge us to do thing differently, and change our course of action. Why must we adopt this High Tech - High Touch business? What is this new vision anyway? One thing we do know, and that is - if we keep doing things the way we have always done things, we will always have the same things we have today. We will be good, but we will not get better.

Once upon a time, a man was driving his fast sports car up a scenic and curving road in the mountains. As he was enjoying the scenery, another car came around the curve right at him at high speed and in the middle of the road. As the car swerved, the driver, a woman, rolled her window down and yelled, PIG! PIG! The man let all of his stereotypes of women drivers come to the forefront and he became angry. How dare she call him PIG - she was the one speeding! In anger, he gunned the accelerator, sped around the curve and hit two pigs in the middle of the road. Now those two drivers did not share the same vision as they communicated. And sometimes, we need to open our minds and ears, and listen to new visions being shared with us by our leaders.

The work of leadership to create an environment for change is, in and of itself, hard work. To create new paradigms requires a destruction of our old paradigms or at least, parts of them. Picasso stated that the act of creation requires an act of destruction. So our creativity also requires death or destruction of the way we operate at this time. Our programs cannot reflect today's structure and be effective in the new millennium. As we leave the information age and enter the communication age, trends are driving both the innovation and use of information technology. With the availability of new technologies and changes in information processing, it is imperative that Extension leaders look ahead and identify the role that we will play to reinvent our desired future. Leaders of transitional changes must maintain a balance between High Tech and High Touch while opening the organization to new ways of doing business and maintaining the controls necessary for continued efficiency. Today, the Extension System is finding itself shaken and redefined by a confluence of factors in the outside environment. We are facing significant shifts not just in one, but in several of these key variables:

- Increasing cultural diversity of employees and customers
- Radically new technologies
- Evolving social values
- Unexpected competition from unfamiliar angles
- Aggressive pressures from government or special interest groups

When faced with four or five of these challenges at the same time, most leaders realize that a controlled series of changes just will not move the organization fast enough. Rather than methodically implementing proven innovations, successful leaders choose to lead their organizations into unknown territory, reinventing the future for themselves and their organization. The success of these leaders depends more on vision than on analysis, more on learning than on knowing. In 1991, Pathways to Diversity, the Cooperative Extension System's strategic plan for diversity, was released. Valuing diversity human differences in all forms is essential if our organization is to remain effective. Workforce and audience diversity and a pluralistic attitude and approach are keys to organization success. Its High Time the Cooperative Extension System realize the enormous opportunity for using multiple perspectives in planning and problem solving. The challenge of creating a vital and responsive organization requires its leaders to do more than just recognize and value difference and diversity. Vision, commitment and leadership (by example) are essential for systemic change in the Extension System. Diversity and democracy challenges us to move beyond our

individual and institutional comfort zones of assimilation to engaging, understanding and respecting differences and similarities among people and cultures. An inclusive institutional vision encourages a nurturing and challenging intellectual and social climate for all members throughout the Extension System. Understanding and actively embracing diversity offers the Extension System an excellent opportunity to remain as relevant in the 21st Century as we have been in the past. Ladies and gentlemen, it's High Time we take positive action to actively embrace diversity.

Up to this point I have talked about the possibilities of including High Tech - High Touch information in our ongoing Extension programming. Now it's High Time we as Extension professionals decide what it is that each of us can and will do as individuals to prepare for the future. I propose the theme Power Through Commitment and Leadership. Commitment as an Extension employee to our profession, our organization, and to ourselves. This commitment involves five C's:

- **COMPETENCE** - Knowledge and skills in subject matter, communications, interpersonal relations, and leadership necessary for effectiveness in all roles.
- **CREATIVITY** - being a critical thinker, an innovator, and explorer of new directions, a problem solver, and a person with vision.
- **CHANGE** - Change is the single most compelling force driving America into the 21st Century. Creativity results in change. Our job is to help clients, consumers, and customers become better equipped for the uncertainties, ambiguities, and decisions that lie ahead and to focus positively the direction of change.
- **CARING AND CONCERN** - with computers and technology allowing for less interaction, it is very critical that we focus on maintaining our ability to keep High Touch as a major part of our programming efforts.
- **COMPREHENSIVENESS** - the problems and concerns of our customers requires a comprehensive, holistic view of the environment we operate in today. We must take steps to enhance our visibility and our credibility in the nation and state congressional and legislative halls, in the halls of ivy, and in the private halls of families and individuals if we are to make a significant difference in the new millennium.

One Thanksgiving Day, a mother decided to serve a more healthy fare than the family had come to expect. She served a turkey alright, but no potatoes and gravy. There was no stuffing. However, she did serve a green salad and there were peas and carrots, but no butter. There was no pumpkin pie, no mincemeat pie and, of course no dollop of ice cream. Instead, there was fruit salad. It was all very healthy, when the father asked the young son to say grace, the little guy surveyed the table, bowed his head, and said, "Lord, I don't like the looks of it, but I thank you for it, and I will eat it anyway." My challenge to you is for you to survey the opportunities for adopting High Tech - while keeping High Touch and realize that it is High Time to put it into practice, even if you do not like the looks of it. Times change and old solutions are no longer the answers to new problems.

There was a father who went back to Ole Miss for the big football weekend. When he found out his son was taking the same economics course under the same professor he had thirty years ago, he decided to pay a visit to the class. To his dismay, he found the same questions on a class test he had answered thirty years ago. On this he challenged the old professor. Oh yes said the professor, I give the same questions, but as the years go on I keep asking for different answers. This is where we are today. We have some of the same needs identified, but we have to change the answers we provide.

Ladies and gentlemen, I leave you where I started. Look around the room. You see outstanding professionals who played a major role in building a great organization and who have the power to reinvent the organization, keep it powerful and balance High Tech with High Touch. Ladies and gentlemen, its important for us to embrace High Tech while keeping High Touch embedded in our programming. Now its High Time you use your power!

Thank you!

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