

Kevin Reel's Installation Speech – September 29, 2007

President Gilbert, Mayor Rivera, Chancellor Shockley-Zalabak, President Celeste, members of the faculty and student body, distinguished alumni, parents, Trustees, and honored guests from the Colorado Springs community: Although it appears today as though we are celebrating a new head, we are really here to celebrate where we're going together. Thank you for coming, and honoring this moment with your presence.

It is my privilege to stand before you as the eighth head of school at The Colorado Springs School. If I think about what brought me here, to this school and this city, vibrant traits come to my mind. Traits that are reflected in this region's history, and that give me an enduring hope for a bright future.

My history first intersected with this community about ninety years ago, when my grandfather was born in El Paso County. As a young man, he left Colorado to homestead in Wyoming. Many of you know that the Homestead Act provided land to people, but they could only keep the land if they made it productive after five years of work, or "proved up" on the land. While growing up, I heard many stories that portrayed the ingenuity, courage, tenacity, and the willingness to write one's own life script that were hallmarks of homesteading the American West. Trucks were fixed with chewing gum. The value of a person was based on the courage they mustered, and by the care that they demonstrated for their neighbor and for the land. My was a son of the West who embodied the soul of the West, it is part of what has made America strong and free.

As a school, also born in El Paso County, CSS has some of these same traits. How do I know? While the Search Committee was checking out the other 48 candidates, I was checking in with alumni, students, parents, faculty, trustees, and the community. I visited members of the early classes of the school, read past commencement speeches, and sought the perspective of educational consultants. As the potential new headmaster, I wanted to see how close the collective soul of the school was to my heart. What I found should answer the question that some people ask, "What makes this school unique?" Not only is CSS the oldest and most established independent day school in Colorado Springs, but it has some special qualities.

We are a school where kindness and integrity are important, and where personal courage is as vital and everyday as it was when my grandfather was proving up on his homestead.

We are a school where relationships are important; where students and teachers value knowing each other, and where students of diverse backgrounds can forge lifelong friendships.

We are a school that values *uncommon* and *uncompromised* learning; where experiences in the classroom and outside the classroom help students to question, and become scholars of life. We are a school with a broad, global perspective; with the humility to learn from people and experiences outside of their comfort zone. We should be inspired by the courage of those CSS students who come to us from a foreign country, and whose national flags hang behind me. Tomorrow's leaders and change agents will come from the ranks of those who see through a global lens, and our students will be among them.

Given these traits, I have hopes that I would like to share to each group here, and examples of how we are already moving forward.

To the students: now is the time to begin to make a difference in the world by discovering and using your unique gifts. I don't expect you to be perfect, in fact I expect you to be courageous in

learning from your imperfections, and becoming a unique individual. And I challenge you to use this school to develop yourselves into people of character. Already, I am expecting the upper school students to participate in school decision making. It is a rare opportunity for young adults that all students here can look forward to in their upper school years.

Students, I know you've heard of the Baldwins, who built the Trianon. Blevins Davis was a wealthy dignitary who purchased the Trianon from the Baldwins. In an interview with the Denver Post in 1964 Mr. Davis reflected on his failed goal of the building:

“I had fervently hoped that the Trianon would have been a meeting place where leaders, regardless of race, creed, or color, could have the opportunity to gather and raise the dignity of man above the ashes of dogma, corruption, strife, and inhumanity.”

Students, you qualify as leaders and future leaders. I think that you can fulfill Mr. Davis' vision.

To the faculty: You occupy a most noble profession. To give substance to the belief that parents and I have in you, we have established a new fund to support your professional growth and encourage you in your good work. Among other things, this fund allows us to establish a new faculty award for a colleague who demonstrates excellence in teaching, mentoring young people, and *connects* our students to the world beyond. This year, at this moment, I would like to name the first recipient of this award, which is to be given at the start of each year hereafter. This person is mentor and an inspiration to students—even those who are no longer in her class, she connects her students to the broader world through her writing seminar and through her inter-school partnerships in learning. It is my great pleasure to give the first Excellence in Teaching award to Jen Gutierrez. Jen, would you please stand and accept our hearty congratulations.

To the parents: I welcome our walk together in not just preparing your children for college, but to build in them the character that brings success beyond college, and inspires those who come in contact with them throughout their lives. Thank you for vesting the school with your trust and believing in the future that we, together, can draw forth from your sons and daughters.

To the Alumni: I hope to help strengthen your relationship to the school and reconnect you to a meaningful part of your youth. Already, we are working to increase your involvement with the Board of Trustees, your networking with each other, and can both affirm the strides you have made in your lives—while giving wings to our current students.

To the Trustees: My goal is to have your service to the school bring you inspiration and purpose while assuring the long term well being of the school. Already we are working on plans that create a critical foundation upon which we will build this school's future.

To the community: Partnerships between different organizations will strengthen the future of the whole community. Already, we have been in conversation with surrounding school districts to form such partnerships. No longer do we work together to forge a *pioneer economy*, but we need to establish that same spirit of working toward a common goal to succeed in this *knowledge economy*. CSS can and will play a leading role in improving the quality of education in the Colorado Springs region.

It's taken two generations for my family to return to this area; Melanie joins me in our thanks for your kind welcome. While they may take a different form in this new generation, many traits that sustained the pioneers are still present nevertheless. Instead of fixing a truck with our wits and a wad of chewing gum, we teach our children to fix a needy world with collaboration and new

paradigms. Instead of using courage to prove up on our land, we use our courage to call out each person's unique attributes, protect those weaker than ourselves, and risk taking a stand of integrity. And just like those early homesteaders, people earn respect based on their hard work, and the care they offer the land and neighbors in the community. This school is a critical vehicle by which these traits pass on to our children. There is work to be done, but it is a rich, purposeful work of a shared intent that can bring us all great joy. Let us begin this good work together, and let us begin today. Thank you.