Vice Chancellor’s Welcome to 25th Birthday Gala Dinner

Time: 6:30pm – 10:30pm
Date: Friday 29 July, 2016
Place: Convention Centre
• Ngangkirna, Miyurna! Naa marni Ngai nari David

• Ngai yarta-nungku yaku, ngai kunturrkinthi taakanthi ngaityu wardli

• Ngai pudlunthi naa-itya, ngai wangkanthi warra Kaurna meyurna, miipudlunthi ngaityu kuinyuntapinthi

• For those of you who are not fluent in opening sentences, what I just said is that my name is David; that I'm not originally from this country but I am proud to call this my home.

• And I'm telling you this in the language of the Kaurna people as a mark of respect.

• The meeting this evening is taking place on Kaurna land.
• The Kaurna people have performed ceremonies on this land for many centuries, and we pay respect to their living culture and the unique role they continue to play in the life of the Adelaide region.

PAUSE

• Ladies and gentlemen, I’m afraid I ‘borrowed’ the bulk of my speech this evening from Michele Obama, so apologies if it sounds familiar.

• Or did I borrow it from Melania? It’s confusing.

• There’s a great line in Jaws, delivered by Robert Shaw as Quint which I will also borrow –

• ‘you all know me, know what I do for a living’.

• So hello to you, the friends and family of the University of South Australia.
• I’m so very pleased to be able to spend this special
evening with you.

• Looking back with the 20/20 hindsight of history enables
us to properly take stock of events – and to place them
in context as we assess their impact on the trousers of
time.

• The trousers of time is a metaphor borrowed from Terry
Pratchett

• - the choices you make at any given time bring you
down one leg or another –

• sometimes you try to get both feet down one leg and
have to start over.

• If you’ve never read the book – *One Summer – America,
1927* by Bill Bryson, I would encourage you to do so.

• I’m not on commission, it’s a good read.
• It’s the second of Bryson’s books to look at a singular coalescence of coincidences or turning points in a particular year – in this case 1927 - which he explores as the tipping point between the roaring twenties and the great depression.

• His premise is that sometimes, amazing things happen all at the same time, and the world changes.

• 1991 was another year replete with a coalescence of coincidences or turning points – a year where amazing things happened all at the same time, and the world changed.

  o The Soviet Union collapsed;
  o Operation Desert Storm kicked off the first Gulf War;
  o Legislative apartheid ended in South Africa;
  o The first Clinton announced that he would run for president of the United States;
Scientists created carbon nanotubes for the first time, ushering in the nanotech era;

The World Wide Web was switched on for the first time – imagine that – can we remember what life was like without it?

Nirvana exploded onto the scene with Smells Like Teen Spirit; and

Seattle grunge changed music forever.

• In Dublin, Ireland, a 17 year old schoolboy filled in the equivalent of his SATAC form and made choices that would ultimately bring him down an antipodean leg of his personal trousers of time.

• Closer to home, the Adelaide Crows played their first AFL season; and

• a newly minted university opened its doors for the first time,

• the University of South Australia.
• I’ve been reading Emeritus Prof Alison Mackinnon’s wonderful new book – ‘A New Kid on the Block’ The University of South Australia in the Unified National System – a book that looks at both the background to the establishment and the first 5 years of operation of UniSA.

• The merger that created the University of South Australia almost didn’t happen.

• In 1989 the South Australian Institute of Technology was planning to merge with Flinders University,

• and the South Australian College of Advanced Education (which back in the 1970s had already incorporated the South Australian School of Art to its ranks) had its sights set on a merger with the University of Adelaide.
• Within months all of those plans had fallen through, the result, some say, of academic snobbery and elitism, an unwillingness by the established universities to accept the newcomer’s differentiated world view and values.

• The vocational nature of these aspiring institutions was another major influencing factor.

• (Funny that – people never remember that Stanford University was established to provide vocational education).

• But elitism wasn’t just present in the other two universities:

• our own School of Pharmacy and Medical Laboratory Science wanted to split from SAIT and to merge with Adelaide, where they felt the schools of medicine and dentistry would give them a welcome that was better suited to their status.
• It was their conclusion that the merged entities of SAIT and SACAE, while being the largest in the state, would be the worst funded, the least active in research and scholarship, the least coherent physically and the least regarded and respected by both the academic and general communities.

• Fast forward 25 years and that particular school is very much part of our University, is very well funded, hugely active in research and scholarship and highly regarded by the academic and general communities.

• And they’re scheduled to move into the $230 million purpose-built Health Innovation Building, under construction just across the street.

• The trousers of time have been kind.

PAUSE

• Ours was a University of Enterprise from the outset.
• From the very beginning UniSA differentiated itself from the other two universities in South Australia by stressing access and equity, links to the community and links with the workplace.

• We had a long history, through the South Australian Institute of Technology, of working in partnership with industry and the professions;

• the Institute was also home to one of the best examples of Aboriginal education programs in Australia, the Aboriginal Task Force;

• the South Australian College of Advanced Education had the largest number of Aboriginal enrolments in higher education in Australia;

• the fledgling UniSA offered the first Masters degree in the world in distance education;
and we had, in Professor Eleanor Ramsay, one of Australia’s first Pro Vice Chancellors whose only focus was on Equity.

We were also extraordinarily lucky to have people of the calibre of John McDonald and Professor Alan Mead as Foundation Chancellor and Vice Chancellor, to get us started as a University.

They were followed by the Honourable Dr Basil Hetzel and Professor David Robinson in those roles - who stabilised and solidified our beginnings and began the process of building the university by expanding our real estate footprint into City West – the wild west of Adelaide at that time.

Then came the formidable Professor Denise Bradley who, as Principal of the CAE, had been instrumental in guiding the merger in the first place.
• As Vice Chancellor, Denise was joined two years later by David Klingberg as Chancellor.

• These pioneers of UniSA’s early years were an extraordinary group of people who managed to pull together two large and vastly different organisations, each with different aims and cultures and each spread over a variety of campuses, and somehow make them work.

• Their groundwork created the organisation that their successors Professor Peter Hoj and then me, along with Dr Ian Gould and now Jim McDowell, steered safely into the 21st century.

• Now in our 25th year we’re stronger than ever.

• We’re considered one of the world’s very best young universities by all the rankings that matter;
• 97% of our research is assessed as world class or above in ERA – the national research assessment exercise, where we rank 8th in the country on our performance;

• we are Australia’s Number 1 University for Industry derived Income;

• we are Australia’s youngest university to receive 5 stars in research;

• we attract the lion’s share of first preferences in the State - and that includes the most students with 70+ ATARs;

• we’re Number 1 in South Australia for student satisfaction;

• we are Number 1 in South Australia for Graduate Careers;
• We are the highest ranked university in Australia for the international diversity of our academic staff which has major benefits for our students;

• we give our students an education that prepares them to take their places in a global career environment;

• and just yesterday we were named among the top 25 Rising Stars in research of the Asia Pacific region by the Nature Index – we’re number 4 on that prestigious list;

• And we are only 25 years young.

• There is so very much more to come.

PAUSE

• Because they’ve given me a microphone and not read my speech in advance,
• I can exclusively hint tonight at a future where UniSA’s long history of innovation in education will be translated into that other 25 year old domain, the internet – to expand our footprint and reach a new generation of learners.

• At a future where, from tomorrow, we begin an exciting partnership with the Calvary Hospital Group to advance a new and ground-breaking UniSA Clinical School.

• At a future where, from 2017, we will be bringing our students dedicated UniSA @ Urban Nest accommodation through a new and exciting partnership on North Terrace; and

• At a future where we are proudly partnering with Santos and University College London to support new and dedicated funded research fellowships in our Future Industries Institute.
• You who have joined us here tonight are our partners in more ways than you perhaps know.

• So many of you are our staff and our supporters, your knowledge and expertise shared freely with students and colleagues alike.

• It is because of you that we can make those commitments to creating new knowledge, to educating modern professionals, and to offer equity and access to all those who want the benefits and opportunities that education brings.

• I personally want to thank you for your support throughout the 25 year history of this university and

• for the past 3 and a half years in particular when I have benefitted so greatly from knowing you.

• You have helped create an institution where excellence is assured and access is universal.
• Very few institutions can boast this:

• An academic cohort who create and disseminate new knowledge and inspire new generations; and

• a professional workforce which toils hard to support them.

• Also here are members of government, industry and the professions who we are proud to call partners and with whom we are working on new knowledge to build a better State, a better nation.

• And so many of you are our graduates of whom we are so justifiably proud – your success is our joy.

• UniSA’s 150,000th graduate crossed the stage this year and our alumni base is tipping on 200,000 strong.
• And the most generous of all, our donors and scholarship supporters who join us in making access and equity a reality for hundreds of students to share the wealth and opportunities that knowledge brings them.

• I am proud to know all of you and I thank you for your minds, your hearts and your benevolence.

• It is my pleasure to lead what I believe to be the most cohesive senior management team working in Australian higher education.

• We work together to harness a start-up university’s potential and convert it to measurable achievement, success and excellence.

• We are very proud that the University of South Australia leads the way in realising potential – the potential inherent in our students, our research and our ability to catalyse social and economic growth and development in this State and beyond.
• The trousers of time have brought us to this point – the choices of a generation made manifest in a truly wonderful institution.

• As we look to the next 25 years, allow me to borrow one final time, again from Jaws:

• If past behaviour is a predictor of future success,

• ‘we’re going to need a bigger boat’.

• Thank you.