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UAAD Founders' Day

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UAAD FOUNDERS' DAY
February 11, 2004
John C. Owens

Because today is "the birthday" of Thomas Edison who was born in 1847 in Ohio, I suppose that you would expect me as today's speaker to have a "special-obligation" to be inventive. "!"
Some of you probably know that for several years, Edison's birthday has been observed as National "Science-Youth" Day, which sounds to me like a rather interesting "invention" itself. Youth is not a science and science is certainly not a youth, but I am perfectly willing to go along with the national celebration and wish a "happy birthday" to any "science-youth" that I might happen to encounter. I would encourage you to do the same. It seems to me, however, that essentially Thomas A. Edison really was not so much a scientist as he was ^a man who was "forever" asking questions. And I think that because of the way he looked at things, he was most likely to be asking questions like "How can we ...?" I would like to suggest that today's awards ceremony ^{WAS} about people who have "adopted" that same attitude of "How can

we ...?" I say that because today's nominees and award winners are people who are focused on how to get things accomplished in the very best way possible.

Today's award presentation ceremony was "very simple" in its concept. It was meant to be, and certainly was, a formal recognition of excellence as determined by a process of selection that reflects the accomplishments of some "outstanding" University of Nebraska-Lincoln employees. I want to make the term "recognitions of accomplishments" absolutely clear, because we live in a time of so many different awards that one sometimes might be entitled to a "healthy-dose" of skepticism about the whole idea. Last year, for example, I had the privilege of nominating a truly distinguished person, an employee of the University of Nebraska, for a major award. My nominee was selected for the award because his work was so distinguished and his influence on Nebraska has been so profound that he was readily chosen to be the award winner. My friend thanked the organizers of the award and said that, "unfortunately," he was "unable" to attend on the day

of the awards ceremony because he had a long-standing obligation at a university in another state, and that many people were depending on his presence on that campus for three consecutive days. Then, amazingly, the representative of the organization selecting my friend said that, " in that case, we have to make the award to "another Nebraskan who might fit the qualifications and be able to attend." Suffice it to say that today's awards at the UAAD Founders' Day certainly were not determined by any person's ability to attend!

I also want to thank the UAAD members for "all" each of you do in support of our university's quest for excellence, and in making the University of Nebraska-Lincoln run in an efficient manner. Clearly, in the last two years, the entire university system and this particular campus have undergone some tremendous "budgetary-challenges" caused by the downturn of the Nebraska economy. These budget cutting times have taken their toll on students, staff, and faculty of the university, and we certainly all regret the trauma that our state's economy has had

on us and our constituents. With that said, it still speaks volumes to me that so many UNL professional people continue to work so hard and to help our university "advance ~~toward~~ its mission and to achieve some "remarkable-things" in all of the activities in which the university is involved.

On a personal note, it has been a "distinct-pleasure" for me to work with so many professional employees here at the university. "Professionalism", as you well know, is not granted to anyone ... it is earned. One earns it by virtue of job assignments, education, demeanor, role modeling, backbone, and a myriad of other good traits. Professionals are their own persons, decision makers, ethical employees, principled people who are part of this great university, yet who also "remain-distinctly" as unique individuals. Professionals provide service; they give back to the broader community what they have been given. Professionals feel a responsibility to keep informed, to contribute their expertise, and to be in charge of their destinies. In short, one could easily say that professionals are people "who do it" and who do not let it be done to them.

So that's my view of professionals or, as some might say, my view of those who ask the question, "How can we ...?" University of Nebraska-Lincoln professional employees are, indeed, those who are "excellent" in their professions and who make a difference in the lives of those with whom they come into contact.

So for each of our nominees and award winners ... "today" is your day. Enjoy it, and take our wishes that your nominations and your awards are but "one-part" of a rich and rewarding professional life for each of you.