

Remarks at Installation of Kris Wobbe
as the
Metzger Professor of Chemistry at WPI

Dennis Berkey
President and CEO

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It is an honor for me to speak at the installation of such a deserving individual as Kristin Wobbe as the inaugural incumbent of a professorship created by, and named for, such an exceptional alumnus as John C. Metzger, Jr., Class of 1946.

Born in 1924 in Norristown, PA, John was raised there, graduating from Norristown Senior High and matriculating at WPI in that famous “Summer of ’42.” These were the war years, and John completed his B.S. in Chemical Engineering in three years as a member of the Navy’s V-12 Program, serving during World War II as a commissioned Navy officer.

While at WPI John was a member of the Phi Gamma Delta fraternity and of the Tau Beta Pi, Skull, and Sigma Xi honor societies. He thought sports were important in college, especially at an academically challenging school like WPI, and he participated in both the soccer and swimming teams, lettering and gaining membership in the Poly Club.

John married Jane Harris in 1948 and in 49 years of marriage raised three children: Susan Jane Ferrill, Sally Baker (who is with us today, together with her husband, Ron Baker), and Donna Lynn Machlan. Jane predeceased John in 1997 and he later married Jean Metzger, who is with us today and who joined John in making this wonderful gift. John had the pleasure of two grandchildren and Jean two as well. Jean’s daughter, Susan McCutcheon, is with us today also. We are so very pleased to be able to share this celebration with these family members.

When John’s Navy service concluded in 1946 he began a long and distinguished career with the chemical corporation now known as Dupont. Beginning as a practicing chemical engineer he worked in chemicals, atomic energy, fabrics and finishes, polymer products, and photosystems and electronics, rising through positions of increasing management responsibility. He was named a Vice President in 1978 and retired in 1986 as Group Vice President of the Photosystems and Electronic Products Division. Among John’s many notable corporate contributions was the launch of Dupont’s instruments business, which produced a line of automatic clinical analyzers used in thousands of hospitals and clinics worldwide.

John Metzger served as a Trustee of WPI from 1981 to 1989 and as a Trustee Emeritus thereafter. He served as Chair of his 40th Reunion Campaign, as a volunteer in the Alumni Admissions Program, as a gift solicitor for his 50th class reunion, and in many

other ways in service to WPI. He was awarded the Robert H. Goddard Alumni Award for Outstanding Professional Achievement at his 45th Class Reunion.

I believe it was John's pioneering work in the clinical instrumentation business for Dupont, together with his excellent education in chemical engineering, that allowed him to find some degree of merit in the vision brought to WPI by this president in our commitment to expanding our programs in the life sciences. I well remember my first and only meeting with John, on one of several lovely occasions hosted by Paul and Nancy Morgan to honor Cathy and me during our February visits with alumni and friends of WPI in Florida. These occasions follow a rigorous format. After providing his guests with their beverages of choice, Paul invites everyone to be seated and then invites the President of WPI "to give his report." The challenge here, of course, is to be informative, entertaining, and brief, because Paul and Nancy host a lovely dinner once the report and its consequences have concluded.

John was an engaging but supportive critic on that occasion, probing my thoughts on several issues that had come before the Board prior to my arrival, and commenting with approval on the idea of developing the life sciences and the necessary facilities at Gateway Park. It was clearly an examination by a thoughtful, concerned scientist and businessman who was passionate about his alma mater. I like to believe I passed the exam, or at least not received an NR, and Cathy and I thoroughly enjoyed the dinner that followed--a remarkably warm occasion with a group of close and committed friends.

Of course, it was the work of Steve Hebert, Paul Morgan, and Dexter Bailey to help John and Jean shape a plan for securing John's legacy at WPI in support of the science to which he had committed his career that resulted in this marvelous professorship. John and Jean's generosity, and that of the entire Metzger family, cannot be understated. There is no greater honor for a university to have alumni of the quality of John Metzger provide in perpetuity for the continuing presence of faculty of the quality of our Kris Wobbe. The research and teaching of our distinguished Department of Chemistry and Biochemistry has the potential to profoundly impact human health and disease literally around the world. Jean Metzger and John's extended family have our profound gratitude and appreciation.

I will conclude my remarks by sharing with you an excerpt from my address to our entering freshmen and their parents this past August. It is from a section of that speech having to do with personal responsibility and the importance of striving for fulfillment in life, not just achievement. I said the following.

"On this concern for fulfillment, I want to share with you a note and its attachment that I keep on my desk. Recently, a new professorship has been endowed in our Chemistry Department through the generosity of our alumnus John Metzger, now deceased. In a note to me, his widow Jean wrote, "In going over John's papers, I found a church bulletin from over a decade ago, which he had saved and highlighted in yellow. When I read it over, I couldn't help but think that John's life reflected these thoughts. I wanted to share them with you." This is

that passage, written the famous New Englander Ralph Waldo Emerson, and surely familiar to some of you:

“To laugh often and much; to win the respect of intelligent people and the affection of children; to earn the appreciation of honest critics and to endure the betrayal of false friends; to appreciate beauty; to find the best in others; to leave the world a little bit better, whether by a healthy child, a garden patch, or a redeemed social condition; to know even one life has breathed easier because you lived. This is to have succeeded.”

I don't know of another passage that so beautifully connects success with fulfillment in just the way we wish for all of you.”

We are surely in this ceremony celebrating the completion of the circle of the kind of life we hope for, for all of our graduates. We are humbled and greatly encouraged by it.