NOTES ABOUT DRAMA DEPARTMENT’S 50TH ANNIVERSARY YEAR

I’d like to begin by saying thank you to Dr. Coon for giving me some of his time this evening and to the Board for their time and attention. I am here today to introduce myself and to share with you some of the recent activity in the Drama Program as well as our plans for the coming year. The 2014-2015 season marks the 50th Anniversary of the Drama Department and in honor of this momentous occasion, we are taking stock in our past, present and future.

We start 2014 by looking at the wonderfully successful and talented students who emerged from our program. What better way to rekindle our connection with our past alumni than to re-stage one of the most successful productions performed here at the college: the Wild West version of Taming of the Shrew? Shrew was performed in the small Studio Theatre as an experiment in 1970 and went on to play a command performance for Princess Margaret at the famed Edinburg festival in Scotland in 1971. We wondered if we re-staged this unique production, would we be able to attract some of the earliest drama students back to the James Dunn Theatre. With the use of social media and the help of a team of local alumni, we reached out to the original cast members and to our surprise we heard back from almost all of them! We had over 20 Shrew alumni fly in from all over the United States to attend our opening night. In fact, one performer from the original production reprised his role and is the actual age of the character in our show which runs for one more weekend. Combined with a post-show party for 300, it was truly a homecoming and a warm celebration.

Coupled with the production and party was the launch of our 50th Anniversary Fundraising Campaign. We are asking patrons to donate $50 or more, and the first 90 people to do so will receive this fabulous Anniversary Tote Bag. It has been a tremendous undertaking to initiate a Fundraising Campaign along with our usual duties in the classroom and the department but we, and I mean students, staff, and faculty, recognize the budgetary constraints effecting the state and have stepped forward to aide our own program in ensuring the next 50 years are as strong as the first 50. Students volunteer their time as Student Ambassadors at parties and meet with donors and patrons. Staff and faculty meet on the weekends to work with Alumni in the orchestration of outside events and sit at a Donor table every evening during the run of Shrew to connect with our audience. We are working very hard at a grassroots level, to build our future.

On an Academic Level, we are awaiting final approval on our Associate in Arts Transfer degree in Theatre which should come on line in the Fall of 2014 and will soon provide a second degree option for students which is certainly something to celebrate!

So what are we planning for the future? We have received great interest from alumni willing to participate in a Professional Speakers Series on campus where they can discuss their transition into the professional world and giving sound advice to our students. We are organizing panelists of 3 working professionals once a month.
in the various Production and Performance areas of theatre beginning in April and will continue this throughout the following year.

We have included two Family Friendly productions to our 2014-2015 season (Little Women and Comedy of Errors) to broaden our audience base. We are coordinating with Anna Pilloton in the Outreach Office to connect with Middle schools and High Schools in the local area, offering free Friday morning matinees. The Drama Department works closely with Outreach on a number of other projects as well, recognizing the importance of engaging with and preparing students for the college experience. Our main stage and studio theatres are frequent stops for school tours. In fact, our students often volunteer to meet with middle school and high school groups to play improvisation games and talk about their experience at College of Marin.

One other important event I would like to mention is our current collaboration with the Art Department on a 50 Year Retrospective Exhibit which will be on display during the run of Comedy of Errors. No, we did not realize the irony of that when we chose the play... Please save the date of March 6th which is the opening night of the exhibit and the production, followed by an informal reception. In this exhibit we will feature photos, programs, reviews, production models, sketches, audio and video media from the last 50 years. Set Designer Ron Krempetz will lead the charge on this massive undertaking which requires consultation with digital archivists and the literal transferring of 50 year old pictures into digital format. Some of our fundraising will no doubt be absorbed by this undertaking, but we feel it is critical that we preserve our archive, and do it quickly, as much of the material is currently stored in either metal cabinets or Rubbermaid tubs in a garage. It would truly be a shame to lose such an important part of our history. If you would like to learn more about the Theatre Archive Project and how you might be able to help, I would be happy to speak with you about it at another time.

Let me wrap up my time by inviting you to be a participant in our 50th year. Become a subscriber, a donor, a patron of the arts! Tell your family and friends to come! Join us for our Kick-off party at the beginning of the year with Little Women or our Gallery Opening in the Spring. If you attend only two Drama Events next year, please make it our season kick-off party on September 26th and the gallery exhibit March 6th to celebrate with us after our opening night performances where you can meet the faculty and students whose hard work and dedication have added so greatly to the reputation of the College of Marin.

Thank you.