



## **UBC VPRI – Research Awards Reception Dr. M. Piper - Tribute to David Strangway March 30, 2016**

I am delighted to have this opportunity to honour David Strangway, my predecessor as President of UBC. David Strangway is without question one of the most successful presidents in the history of Canadian universities. It is most appropriate at this particular moment in UBC's development, as we celebrate our Centennial, to stop and recognize one of UBC's truly great presidents, someone who has had a remarkable impact on UBC's development as a world renowned research university.

UBC has been fortunate in its leaders, and one can point to others who have had a great impact: our founding President, for example, Frank Wesbrook, who from the outset foresaw that UBC could become a great university, despite its unpromising beginnings, and who spoke in visionary terms of a Cambridge by the Pacific. Or John B. Macdonald, the dentist from Harvard whose report on higher education in the early 60's led to the creation of Simon Fraser University, the University of Victoria, and the BC college system.

David Strangway belongs to this very select group. His impact on UBC was transformative: he took a good provincial university and turned it into a research powerhouse that could compete with the great universities of North America—and one that began to play a role on the international stage.

David came to UBC in 1985, after a distinguished career as a research scientist and university administrator. In the early 1970s he established himself as one of the world's leading geophysicists: he was Chief of the Geophysics and Physics Branch at the Johnson Spacecraft Center, in Houston, Texas, and supervised the geophysical elements of the Apollo moon missions. For his sustained contribution to the field of Geology, David was awarded the 1984 Logan Medal, the highest award of the Geological Association of Canada.

After his stint as a rocket scientist, David was drawn back to his alma mater, the University of Toronto, first as chair of Geology, then as Provost, and finally President. It was from there that he came to the West coast and UBC: perhaps because he recognized the potential of UBC to rival the U of T—a potential that he began to develop from the moment of his arrival.



However, his arrival at UBC was not well-timed: the provincial government in 1985 began a series of cuts to university funding that threatened to undermine David's plans to raise UBC's research profile.

But reductions in public funding only spurred him on; and raise UBC's research profile, he did! First, he persuaded the government to support research with a program of "Funds for Excellence," and then in 1989 he led UBC into what was at the time the most successful fund-raising campaign in Canadian university history, the World of Opportunity Campaign that raised over \$260 million in only four years.

David was also responsible, with the aid of his good friend and colleague Bob Lee, to create another huge source of funding, a real estate corporation we now know as the UBC Properties Trust. This is the body that has so successfully developed the residential neighbourhoods at UBC, and transformed our campus into a vibrant and attractive community.

Between them, the World of Opportunity campaign and the expansion of residential development on the campus have had a huge impact, one that can be measured by one simple statistic: UBC's endowment went from \$85 million in 1985 to over \$500 million in 1997, the year David retired from UBC, and now sits at over \$1B. An endowment that has supported students and scholars alike, growing UBC's reputation for excellence in various fields and disciplines, solidifying UBC's recent ranking in the top 30-40 universities in the world. Not a bad legacy.

And that is not all. It's been calculated that through a combination of internal funding and provincial financing, UBC spent almost a billion dollars in new construction during David's presidency.

Just look at some of the buildings that went up between 1985 and 1997:

- the Biotechnology Lab that would later become the Michael Smith Laboratories;
- the Jack Bell Building that houses the School of Social Work;
- the David Lam Management Research Centre;
- the First Nations Longhouse;
- the Walter C. Koerner Library;
- Green College and St. John's College;
- the C. K. Choi Building for the Institute of Asian Research;
- the Centre for the Integrated Computer Systems Research;
- Advanced Materials and Process Engineering Laboratories;
- the Chan Centre for the Performing Arts;



--the Gerald McGavin Building;  
--the Belkin Art Gallery;  
--The Forest Sciences Centre.

This list is but a small selection of all the buildings that went up in David's time, and with them came many new programs in research and learning.

It was during David's term of office that we saw the creation of such centres as the Peter Wall Institute for Advanced Studies; the Sustainable Development Research Institute; and MAGIC, the Media and Graphics Interdisciplinary Centre; and the Liu Centre for the Study of Global Issues.

And we should acknowledge his incredible foresight in stressing the value of internationalization, especially the importance of building up UBC's links with Asia. Indeed, through his efforts, David has secured UBC's place as the Number One ranked international university in North America.

We know that when he left UBC in 1997, David's incredible energy and commitment did not fade: he went on to become President and CEO of the Canada Foundation for Innovation, Canada's multi-billion dollar investment in scientific and technological research.

At the same time, he helped found and run Quest University in Squamish, an enterprise that has succeeded to such a degree that it has received the highest rating in Canada by students participating in the National Survey of Student Engagement.

This is not the first time that UBC has signaled its respect for this remarkable man. In 1998 he was the recipient of a UBC Honorary degree, and the citation includes the observation that "Through his leadership, the university we see today is better-equipped, more inclusive, more efficient and offers a greater range of opportunities and support for advanced learning and research than at any time in its history."

David, the UBC that you see around you today is in many ways a different place from the one you left in 1997: bigger in enrolments, in research awards and contracts, in revenues and expenditures; but in many ways it is recognizably still the university that you built. Even though I am certain it has far exceeded your wildest expectations, I know that it is the university it is today because of your vision, foresight, and determination; and for that we are all immensely grateful.