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9-14-2018

### Lender Center Dedication

Kent Syverud  
*Syracuse University*

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#### Recommended Citation

Syverud, Kent, "Lender Center Dedication" (2018). *Chancellor's Office (2004 - 2013)*. 191.  
<https://surface.syr.edu/chancellor/191>

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# Syracuse University

Remarks by Chancellor Kent Syverud  
Delivered on Thursday, September 14, 2018  
Location: Heroy Auditorium  
Remarks: Thonis Professorship Dedication

*The Chancellor was introduced by Dean, College of Arts and Sciences,  
Karin Ruhlandt*

I am honored today, as Chancellor of Syracuse University to join in celebrating our College of Arts and Sciences, our Department of Earth Sciences, and outstanding scholars who are receiving endowed professorships. I also celebrate and thank all alumni and friends who, like Mike and Susan Thonis, have a legacy for all future generations by establishing these endowments.

Mike and Susan Thonis are great citizens of Syracuse University. Mike Thonis is a polymath vice chair of the Board of Trustees at Syracuse University, co-founder of Charlesbank Capital Partners in Boston and serves as senior advisor. He has many passions and espouses them cheerfully and evangelistically. He earned his bachelor's degree in geology from Syracuse, a master's degree in geology from the Massachusetts Institute of Technology and an MBA from Harvard University. Mike's career path has gone through the financial world and he has retained his deep intellectual engagement with earth sciences, and exercise, and the outdoors, and music. Mike and Susan's second endowed professorship here will, like the first – help Syracuse and earth sciences attract and retain top scholars who drive discovery, spark intellectual and practical inquiry in our students, and help us achieve the core mission of this University.

Thank you, Mike and Susan, for your leadership, for your generosity, and for continuing to care about knowledge, arts and sciences, and earth sciences.

Thank you Professor Lautz. Geology is about the long term. Rocks last a long time. But an endowment is as close to forever as we get in human institutions in this world – except for geology. Rocks last a long time. As long as there is a Syracuse University, there will be a Mike and Susan Thonis Chair in earth science.

The permanence of an endowed professorship deserves an equally permanent recognition for the scholarship and teaching that the recipient brings to the university.

Ruth and I have a very old rare book to give to Professor Bhattacharya. Our point is to demonstrate that fine scholarship, like endowed chairs, endures.

Finding the right timeless book to present to Dr. Tripti Bhattacharya as we welcome her to campus was important to us. With help from Dean of the Libraries and University Librarian David Seaman and Professor and Dean Emeriti Cathryn Newton, the book selected was sourced, evaluated and boxed to present to you today by Nicolette Dobrowolski and David Stokoe.

The book we settled is in German, by the notable Prussian polymath geographer, explorer and naturalist Alexander von Humboldt. The title translates as “Smaller writings on geognostic and physical memories. Stuttgart and Tubingen, 1853.” Von Humboldt was a real Indiana Jones like figure of the 19th century, except he was a naturalist and geologist not an archeologist and he really was a scholar.

This humble title belies the importance of von Humboldt’s work and the impact his findings had on the field of geology and earth science. This volume contains a collection of his own geological and travel memoirs,

covering his time spent studying volcanoes in South America at the turn of the nineteenth century. It is very likely that the recipients of the first two Syracuse University doctoral degrees in earth sciences, awarded in 1879, were familiar with this work.

Von Humbolt has been called “The Forgotten Father of Environmentalism” and Charles Darwin once complained, “His Geology is Funny Stuff.” His findings revealed the volcanic origin of the Andes – previously all rock formations were assumed to be sedimentary – and revolutionized how Western civilization conceives of nature. His own words, “In this great chain of causes and effects, no single fact can be considered in isolation,” express his pioneering conceptualization of nature and our environment as a fully interconnected living web.

While not well known in the English speaking world, his work inspired that of Charles Darwin, Henry David Thoreau, Walt Whitman, John Muir and Ralph Waldo Emerson. Born an aristocrat and educated to be a civil servant, von Humbolt risked his life in the pursuit of discovery in Latin America and the furthest corners of Russia.

We concluded this book was right for you, Professor Bhattacharya because your work in some ways like von Humboldt’s work recognizes the interconnectedness of geophysical phenomena in rainfall, climate change, paleoclimatology and climate physics. We are so glad you have come to Syracuse University to bring your insights to the world.

Michael and Susan Thonis, Professor Tripti Bhattacharya, with this book we welcome you to Syracuse University.

Thank you.

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