As many of you know, I came to Penn State eight years ago from the University of Wisconsin in Madison, and if you’re not aware, there is a 2,000-acre arboretum in Madison, right smack in the middle of the city, a city which is now around a quarter of a million people.

My family and many families there saw our children grow up in that arboretum, attending events at the educational center, canoeing on the lake, hiking on the trails in the summer, and cross-country skiing on those trails in the winter. And you know, the Madison arboretum even has its own version of the Eastern Inner Loop with a major five-lane highway just more or less bisecting it. So I was so pleased when I came here to Penn State in 1997 and we were in the midst of the campus master planning activity and in the midst of the arboretum planning activity. It was just a very, very smart move by the President, endorsed by the trustees, to combine these two—the arboretum project and the campus master plan project into one project.

As Anne has alluded, we are at a spot where most of the visible pieces of the Arboretum will eventually be appearing with the children’s garden, the education center, and conservatory more in this direction, and further gardens behind us to the north, and then over in this direction, the demonstration gardens and an outdoor educational center. With the endorsement of the trustees of the Dickinson law school building up here, we have already begun plans to begin to move the horticultural trial gardens across from Bigler over into what will become the new demonstration gardens. There is much already that is beginning to take shape.

What you may not be aware of is that there already are things going on in this Arboretum that you can’t see, so to speak, from this site—more to the north of us. To the far north is the hybrid chestnut seed orchard. I am told by our experts that if we were standing here a hundred years ago, the principal species that we would see among the trees in this area would have been the American chestnut. As we all know, that species was virtually eliminated by the chestnut blight in the early years of the twentieth-century. Researchers at Penn State and other universities, as well as the American Chestnut Foundation, have been working for decades to bring back a disease-resistant strain of the American chestnut and through that collaboration we have established one of the hybrid chestnut seed orchards at the far north of our Arboretum and we will be seeing in the years and decades ahead, the re-introduction of that species to the entire Appalachian range, stretching from the Carolinas all the way up to Maine. It is so pleasing to see The Arboretum at Penn State be a part of that.
Also to the north of us is the already-existing Air Quality Learning and Demonstration Center. This is a very innovative example of the combination of outreach, teaching, and research. Funding from private sources was used to build what I am told is the first such site of its kind in all of the world where we are bringing together teaching, research, and extension with air quality monitoring. Our monitoring here in central Pennsylvania is tied to our state-monitoring system and our national air quality monitoring system. We also have teaching and demonstration facilities there and we anticipate in the years ahead seeing the center continuing to grow.

Creating a world-class arboretum is going to require strong support from private donors since this is primarily a privately funded initiative. And we are hopeful that many alumni and friends of Penn State will be joining us in beginning to build this new legacy. Some people with us today have actually already made commitments, either directly or through your estates, to help us to continue to move this project forward. For a project of this size and scope, obviously we need more, and we need much more, and our time line for development is going to depend primarily on our ability to continue to raise funds from private sources.

With the dedication of this “witness tree” here today, we are witnessing the beginning of what will always be a work-in-progress, but today’s event is going to be looked back upon, I think, by future generations as a truly defining moment in the history of the University, but just as importantly, in the history of this community. So, I am pleased to be here today, not only representing the College of Agricultural Sciences, but also, representing my fellow campus deans, many of whom are here today. Thank you.