

A Gift that Keeps on Giving



Annette and Troy VanAken present President Robert C. Olson with the first installment of their \$100,000 commitment to Thiel College.

When Dr. Troy D. VanAken came to campus on March 13 for the first time as president-elect, he brought with him not only his family, but also a pledge of \$100,000 for his new employers.

The announcement was made at a reception for VanAken and his family in the Lutheran Heritage Room of the Howard Miller Student Center. According to VanAken and wife, Annette, the gift will be directed toward three purposes: first, an endowment to provide student scholarships; second, an endowment to fund faculty and staff professional development activities; and third, the Thiel Annual Fund, Blue-Gold Club or other campus initiatives.

“I am so honored that I was chosen as the next leader of this great Lutheran college,” said VanAken. “Annette and I are very moved by the commitment that everyone at Thiel has for its mission and this gift is a way for us to show that we also are committed to the success of our students and the success of the institution as a whole.”

While in Greenville, the VanAken family wasted no time in getting to know their new home. After the gift announcement and meetings during the afternoon, the family took in the Thiel Choir’s home concert and had dinner with some current Thiel students.

VanAken is expected to take office in early July. For more about VanAken, visit www.thiel.edu.

DR. TROY D. VANAKEN BIOGRAPHY IN BRIEF

1994

Becomes an assistant professor of mathematics at the University of Evansville, Evansville, Ind. Helps to construct the university’s first comprehensive Web site.

1996

Promoted to assistant vice president for instructional technology at the University of Evansville.

1999

Becomes vice president for information technology at Albion College in Albion, Mich.

2002

Becomes an American Council on Education Fellow and is placed at San Jose State University in California, shadowing the president and senior administrators for one year. Maintains employment at Albion.

2003

Named athletic and executive to the president of the college. Supervises and coaches for the Division III team and coaches for the equestrian and campus recreation fitness center.

Q & A With Dr. Troy VanAken

What initially attracted you to Thiel?

I was especially drawn to the innovative academic programs and student experience provided by the College. I also felt my background would be a good fit for leading a residential, Lutheran liberal arts college. As I learned more about the students, staff, alumni and Greenville community, the attraction just grew.

What strengths and challenges will your presidency face?

Thiel is blessed with a strong mission, dedicated faculty, staff, alumni and supporters. Greenville is a lovely town that I see willing to work with the College in mutually beneficial ways to enhance the comprehensive student experience. As we find ways to weave these individual strengths together we will position Thiel for a prosperous future. The recent economic downturn combined with declining high school graduation projections in the region will put enrollment, finances and fundraising at the forefront for the next several years. However, if we can all work together to enhance the student experience while creating a distinctive academic environment, Thiel will emerge a stronger institution.

What will be your first area of focus?

My first area of focus will be enhancing the student experience, which I believe is key to invigorating residential liberal arts colleges like Thiel as it directly influences student retention and enrollment. I want to promote an environment where academics, athletics, religious life, the arts, service learning opportunities, and student clubs and organizations can be simultaneously strengthened in a synergistic and complimentary way.

What are your long-term goals for the College?

My goals are to create a stable and sustainable financial future through enrollment, endowment and resource growth; work with the faculty to continually strengthen Thiel's academic programs and position Thiel as a distinctive learning environment; be a tireless advocate for the student experience; leverage strong partnerships with Greenville, Lutheran churches, local schools, surrounding

communities and other key organizations; and enhance connections to Thiel alumni and friends.

You describe yourself as a “student champion,” what does that mean? How will you be a student champion at Thiel?

Being a “student champion” is an approach that emphasizes programs and experiences that prepare students for successful lives after graduation. My view is that all matriculated students are future graduates and we must help them develop the diverse leadership skills that will allow them to contribute in meaningful ways to society. You will see me regularly supporting students in academic, co-curricular and extracurricular activities. I'll be available, along with all Thiel staff, to help students with advice should they need another perspective as they move through their collegiate journey.

How will your past experiences in higher education influence your presidency?

I feel that my enthusiasm and ability to interact with a broad range of constituents will help Thiel develop prominence throughout northwestern Pennsylvania on the way toward the national recognition that it deserves. Further, I have been given the opportunity to lead or participate on successful teams in many areas of higher education leadership, including academics, athletics, finance, fundraising and technology. I know that these skills, combined with private business experience, will allow me to develop initiatives that will take Thiel to the next level of excellence.

What are you most looking forward to?

The opportunity to lead an institution that holds such a special position in American higher education, western Pennsylvania and eastern Ohio, and the Lutheran Church is an unbelievable honor for my family and me. I am looking forward to working with everyone here to develop and implement a plan to position Thiel for the future. On a purely personal side, I am a lifelong Pittsburgh Steelers fan, as is my son, Trey. I am looking forward to being able to easily attend several games with him.

	2005	2006	2007	2009
ic director assistant nt at Albion rvised staff for 18 NCAA ms, an nter and the ation and	Named vice president for finance and management at Albion, serving as chief financial officer. Completes Harvard University's Institute for Educational Management.	Promoted to executive vice president with a multitude of responsibilities including budget planning and oversight, facilities management, information technology and conference services, among others.	Named acting head of institutional advancement, overseeing fundraising and advancement operations, including a staff of 24.	Named 19th president of Thiel College.