George Bugliarello Memorial Service Remarks
April 27, 2011
Polytechnic Institute of NYU
Dibner Library, Pfizer Auditorium

Good morning. It is my honor as the 10th president of the Polytechnic Institute of NYU to welcome you to this memorial service for the 8th president of Polytechnic, Dr. George Bugliarello. In addition to serving as president of Polytechnic for 21 years, George led an admirable life before taking on that post, and certainly for the many years following including as president emeritus, institute professor, and formerly, chancellor.

Because his infectious energy and charm grew stronger every year, I often introduced George as “Poly's teenage chancellor.”

First, let me welcome and again express my sincerest condolences to Virginia Bugliarello, George's loving wife of 51 years. I thank Virginia for her years of friendship to me and to Poly, and for allowing us the privilege of convening this service in George’s memory here at Poly, where George has had such a profound impact on the community, the faculty, the staff, and the many, many students who have gone on to lead wonderful and productive lives under his tutelage and leadership. You will hear from one such faculty member, Dr. Thorsen, and one former student, Mr. McKenzie.

I also welcome George’s sons, David Bugliarello-Wondrich, and Nicholas Bugliarello-Wondrich. Speaking from experience, I know that losing one’s father, a man as great as George, can’t be easy at any age, and I especially share my condolences with you. We are honored to also
welcome Karen, David’s wife, and their daughter Marina, and Elizabeth, Nicholas’ wife, and their son, Daniel, and daughter, Adrianna.

I welcome Laura and Giorgio Wondrich, George’s cousins who join us from Italy.

And a special acknowledgement to Rose Emma, George’s executive assistant for 22 years and the efficient organizer of his writings and travels. We know this is a tremendous loss for you too, and I thank you for your continued service to Poly including your help in organizing today’s memorial program.

In addition to George’s family and many close friends who join us today, I welcome our faculty, staff, students, and all of you, our special guests who share in turning the great loss of George on February 18th, into a celebration today of the life he led as a visionary—internationally acclaimed engineer, author, and humanitarian.

I’d like to take a moment to thank Dr. Charles Vest, president of the National Academy of Engineering, for being with us today—both as a scholar and engineer and as the president of the most esteemed engineering association where George had been a member since 1987 and served two terms as foreign secretary—to share his reflections. We are also joined by colleagues and friends including Dr. Efi Foufoula-Georgiou and Paul (Mickey) Pohl who you will hear from this morning.

This gathering is a testament to the effect George had on all of us personally, professionally, and institutionally.

First, as a scholar. Many of us know that George received his baccalaureate degree in engineering from the University of Padua; his master’s degree in civil engineering from the University of Minnesota—Dr. Foufoula-Georgiou joins us from University of Minnesota; and his
doctorate in civil engineering and hydrodynamics from MIT—Dr. Vest is president emeritus of MIT.

George’s 60 years of scholarship and research ranged from stochastic simulations of hydrodynamics, to sustainable urban environments in both developed and developing countries, to the role of technology and innovation in society. It shouldn’t surprise you that his scientific work is reflected in more than 300 professional publications, a fact recently noted in a tribute in Science Magazine from George’s Poly faculty colleagues, Ilan Juran and John Falcocchio.

George was one to seize the future. A March 2011 McKinsey Global Institute report: “Urban world: mapping the economic power of cities” cites George’s article “Megacities and the developing world” of 1999…talk about staying power!

In the years since I joined Poly in 2005, I frequently sought out George to ask his advice and get his guidance on our burgeoning initiatives, especially our urban focus. Indeed, George’s prophetic views on the role of education and scientific innovation, coupled with partnerships with community, city, and state actors to collectively promote economic growth while understanding how the natural, mechanical, and information and energy systems—the system of systems—affect society, was a visionary approach and view: the “biosoma.” As we see today, in the mass migrations into cities across the world, and the consequences which often ensued, George was a pioneer in thinking through the systematic impacts urbanization could have on our overall well-being. I am pleased to say today, that George’s expertise in the future of cities will continue and actually deepen as Poly and New York University create a new Center for Urban Sustainability and Programs.

Second, as a president of a higher education institution. When George joined Polytechnic in 1973, Poly was a little worse for wear. As the New York Times profile of George on February 22nd noted, Poly was ‘...in dire straits from a combination of cuts in federal aid and a dearth of
students.” As president, one of his first acts was to consummate the merger of New York University’s School of Engineering and Science with Poly. Over 35 years later, we are now rejoining NYU to create a global networked university and Polytechnic is at the heart of NYU’s global science and technology agenda.

As president, George increased enrollments and worked tirelessly to create budget surpluses. George partnered with faculty to create lasting centers of excellence and distinction to Poly. One of his lasting legacies is seen in the establishment of the Center for Advanced Telecommunications and Technology, which 29 years later, is still a vital source of new technologies for companies in New York state. He oversaw the creation of the Center for Technology and Financial Services at Poly in 1994 which led to the master’s program in Financial Risk and Engineering, one of our most successful programs today. This department now boasts Nassim Taleb, author behind Black Swan, among its faculty. And Charles Tapiero, our department head of Financial Risk and Engineering, sat here on a panel with Nobel Laureate and Stanford professor, Myron Scholes, the Scholes behind Black-Scholes, just last week.

Where we sit today—our immediate surroundings—this meeting place of academia, private sector development (Forest City Ratner), finance (JP Morgan Chase and others), utilities (our neighbor is National Grid), and technology (the city’s 911 center, Fire Department command post, and Department of Information Technology and Telecommunications), as examples, exists because of George’s vision and tenacity. George’s audacious dream to see the creation of an urban research park—where industry, technology, and an institute of higher education could intersect and collaborate—was realized in 1989 with the ground-breaking of MetroTech. Last year, MetroTech was acknowledged by Crain’s New York Business as one of the dozen New York City projects which reshaped New York City over the past 25 years. And now it is ringed by new residential towers and hotels, the jewel buildings of BAM, and the audacious Atlantic Yards and new Arena. Projects that spring from MetroTech’s success and George’s vision.
We will pay tribute to his many accomplishments as president of Poly later this morning in a video tribute which was created to honor him when he stepped down as president in 1994. It encapsulates his contributions more than I can say in a mere few words.

Third, as an i²e engineer. Here at Poly, we encourage our students and faculty to approach their studies and work with an i²e angle—invention, innovation, and entrepreneurship. Long before we coined i²e, George was the embodiment of this philosophy. George invented Hydro, a computer language for water resources including hydraulic engineering. He also founded, and served as co-editor of Technology in Society published by Elsevier. The grapevine has it that George was recently planning to co-author a new book on entrepreneurship.

Fourth, as a humanitarian. George’s compassion for the world and furthering engineering education for the greater good is evident through his service whether on assignment as a specialist for the U.S. Department of State in Central Africa, his NATO faculty fellowship at the Technical University of Berlin, or on the Science for Peace Steering Committee of the Scientific Affairs Division of NATO. He has served on varied and many committees of the National Academies of Science and NSF as well as other esteemed agencies and organizations including the Council on Foreign Relations and served as a Trustee on the Board of Directors of The Paul and Daisy Soros Fellowships for New Americans.

In one of my recent hallway conversations with George, we talked about his October 2010 report, “Emerging and future areas of engineering” for UNESCO and his recent visit to Argentina.

Finally, as a visionary. In contemplating our ambitions in the urban arena, a formative article for me was George’s “The engineering challenges of urban sustainability” published in the 2008 Journal of Urban Technology. While the article explicates approaches to urbanization and sustainability, and details the components of high-performance design as well as other factors such as the “biosoma paradigm” of cities, one resonating theme threaded through the article is
the need for the identification and understanding of the linkages across these systems and the impact engineers could have on them. George concludes his article with, and I quote:

“But how engineering will address these new challenges and offer choices will be an essential ingredient in striving toward global sustainability and in determining whether cities will have a sustainable future and continue to be the spark plugs of human advancement, as they have for the past 10,000 years.”

For 83 years, George Bugliarello was a spark plug of human advancement. We will miss him and his expertise, enthusiasm, and advocacy. In his memory, I encourage you to match George’s expertise, enthusiasm, and advocacy—and be your own spark plug of human advancement. George would like that.

Thank you.