

**The Inaugural Address
of
Dr. Karen M. Whitney
April 15, 2011**

Good afternoon.

I would like to first recognize and personally thank all of the members of the platform party for their presence and participation in our ceremony today. I must acknowledge the leadership of this great university, the Provost, the Vice Presidents, the Deans, Chairs, and Directors. Each of you contributes in extraordinary ways to higher education in general and to Clarion University specifically. You are important and today I wish to acknowledge my deep appreciation for your efforts in service to our students and the community.

To all of you who represent learned societies, colleges, and universities throughout the commonwealth, the region and the nation, welcome and thank you for being present today. I am most appreciative of the delegates from the universities that have shaped my life and my career and those are the University of Houston, the University of Texas, and Indiana University-Purdue University Indianapolis.

I am clearly aware that I stand upon the shoulders of presidential giants. Today we are fortunate to have our three most recent presidents with representing nearly 30 years of presidential leadership and accomplishments. It is a testament to their commitment as educators and leaders of the academy and love for Clarion that they are with us today. Thank you, Drs. Bond, Reinhard, and Grunenwald.

I must also briefly recognize my family and friends who traveled from around the country to join in this celebration. First, my mother, Anita Whitney, who has throughout my life supported me in ways I can say that were pivotal in contributing to who I am today—Hi, Mom! Next I wish to express my thanks and appreciation to my partner of 16 years, Peggy Apple. She is my best friend, my compass, and my partner in life. I also want to acknowledge my brother and sister, my aunt, uncle and cousins who are here as well. Also I am appreciative of the many friends who have joined us today. These are dear friendships of over 10, 25, and 30 years. Finally, I want to recognize the first mentor in my life, my grandmother Romaine Campbell Greathouse, who was born in Kittanning, PA, in 1899 and, although she is no longer with us in body, is always with me in spirit. She has been a tremendous influence in my life. She was a teacher, a community leader, a five foot-two inch force of nature and the person most responsible for inspiring me to a life of public service.

I am here before you today to let you know that this week, this presidential inaugural has been most eagletastic!

Let me stop here for a minute just to warn you that when you become the president of a university with a bird as a mascot, you tend to relate much of life from a bird perspective. It also doesn't hurt that one of my favorite pastimes is birding, that is to spend time looking at and appreciating birds. Back to eagletastic.

If some of you have never heard this word before it is no surprise because this word was created here at Clarion University this year. Being a university that values inquiry and engagement, the Eagle Ambassadors, a group of outstanding students who are very committed to the success of their university, surveyed their fellow students to learn what one word they would construct to sum up their Clarion University experience. This is the word they picked as a word to singularly describe Golden Eagle pride. This word, “eagletastic,” is one of those unique family words. You know the ones I mean, those special words that have meaning just to the family. I bet each of you has special made-up words that are only known by members of your family. Well, for the Clarion University family our word is “eagletastic.”

Since all of you are students, faculty, staff, alumni, or friends of the university, it’s ok for me to let you in on what this family word means. An eagle, as you know, is a large bird of prey having broad wings and a strong soaring flight. The second part of our family word, “tastic,” comes from the informal use of “fantastic,” which according to the scholarly source [dictionary.com](https://www.dictionary.com), often means “exceptionally good.” Therefore, “eagletastic” can refer to individuals, groups, or experiences that possess exceptionally good ability (the large wing span) and exceptionally good focus and strength (the strong soaring flight).

This week has been “eagletastic” in that this has been a week of exceptionally good activities celebrating the university and this new presidency. This week is also our annual Academic Excellence celebration highlighting what we do best through our teaching, research, and public service.

It is our exceptionally good teaching, research, and service that I believe our region, state, and nation need from us now more than ever in order to do what many call, “deliver America’s promise.” The promise of quality undergraduate and graduate academic programs, the promise of applying our teaching and research in ways that meaningfully respond to the great social and economic issues facing our country, state, region, and community.

I further believe that our exceptionally good teaching, research, and service – our focus, strength and abilities – advance a common good that provides significant benefits to both individuals and society as a whole. While the personal gains from higher education are widely acknowledged, the societal benefits are even more significant and lasting. Participation in our democracy and preparation to lead a civic life in our communities, economic productivity, increased wages and the increased opportunity to pay taxes over a lifetime of work are both individual and societal benefits from a college degree.

I ask each of you to join me this 16 Presidency as we eagletastically deliver on Clarion University’s promise. I ask that you join me in a Presidency that no doubt will have both great and challenging times. Today is not simply about putting on regalia, agreeing to an oath of office, and enjoying punch and cookies on a Friday afternoon. It is a day for all of us to come together and affirm our extraordinarily good ability, focus, and strength in advancing Clarion University and its mission of teaching, research and service.

I ask that you join me in this 16th Presidency in that together we can move Clarion University forward by:

- Increasing the number of people with college degrees in our region and community through faculty-driven programs, services, and facilities that are of interest to students and employers;
- Cultivating a campus culture of civility, listening, entrepreneurialism, achievement, and relationships;
- Becoming a civically engaged public university;
- Working to ensure the future fiscal capacity of the university;
- Achieving our goals in a clear and purposeful way.

Today there is a feeling that all things are possible and that the future of this wonderful 144-year old university is able, focused, and strong. And now this eagle takes her place with her 15 predecessors. This eagle has landed.

Thank you for sharing in this eagletastic moment. Fly eagles fly!