Remarks (slightly edited) – CASE Awards Luncheon – 7/19/2010 – Tom Wilfrid

Thank you very much, Cassie. I want to give special thanks to Anita Miller of Gannon University for initiating the Foundation's nomination for this award. Thanks also to the thirty-seven representatives of twenty-three Newcombe-funded colleges and universities who adjusted their summer plans to be with us today.

Mrs. Newcombe was a kind, humble, generous woman who never went to college because of a visual disability. She set aside half of her estate, when she died in 1979, to help students in need to complete degrees in higher education. She designated five Trustees to translate her intent into a Foundation with an appropriate program. Her $16 million bequest has since provided over $50 million for scholarships and fellowships, with about $2 million additional being distributed each year.

I'm joined here by Janet Fearon, one of those five charter Trustees, who served as the Foundation's first Executive Director for 28 years. Also here are Trustees Betty Frank, a retired investment firm executive, and Bart Luedeke, President Emeritus of Rider University. The other two Trustees, Robert Adams and Aaron Gast, both charter Trustees, could not be with us today.

Thirty years ago, the Trustees conducted an extensive study of student needs in higher education and identified three particular groups of students they wished to help: mature women (25 and older), students with disabilities, and doctoral students in the humanities who showed great promise for enhancing scholarship related to ethics and/or religion. They created the Charlotte W. Newcombe Doctoral Dissertation Fellowships program, for which the Woodrow Wilson National Fellowship Foundation has administered a first-rate national competition each year for thirty years. Since 1981, over 1,000 Newcombe Fellows have spent their final year of doctoral work concentrating on completing an excellent thesis. Many Newcombe Fellows have become important contributors to the academic community. Last year, 670 graduate students applied for 20 available Newcombe Fellowships. We wish we could fund more.

For scholarships, the Trustees decided to award grants each year to colleges and universities that would demonstrate a special commitment to the success of students in the designated group, asking each funded institution to select the scholarship amounts and recipients and to report back periodically. Although much has changed in higher education, we marvel each year at the wisdom of that initial focus; students need scholarships more than ever, and institutions benefit when donors are both faithfully supportive and attentive. Since 1981, over 30,000 Newcombe Scholarships have helped students complete degrees at one of 98 colleges and universities that have received Foundation grants – 39 in the coming year. Several hundred Newcombe Scholars write to us each year, telling us how the scholarship made a difference in each one's path to program completion and career. Beyond the money, they thank us for the encouragement that comes from knowing that someone appreciates the challenges they face and wants to be helpful. A special partnership also develops between the Foundation and each funded institution, supporting and encouraging the institution to sustain its focus on serving the targeted students and to keep learning from other institutions. This approach benefits students and institutions, and we wish we could fund more. We invite you to learn more via the Foundation's website.

As we reflect on the Foundation's first thirty years, we celebrate Mrs. Newcombe's humility, generosity and faithfulness. She would be amazed at what her Foundation has accomplished, and by this award. Thank you for honoring her legacy.