Thank you Jordan and good afternoon everyone. Let me also welcome you to the Linda and Lee Scott Performance Hall and the Bicknell Family Center for the Arts. Wow! It’s finally here…this milestone in the history of Pittsburg State University has finally arrived. The doors are open…the lights are on…the microphone works…and most importantly, there are people in the building. WE DID IT! Together…we did it!! What an amazing place this is and what an amazing day it is for Pittsburg State University.

More than anything, this day is a celebration of the spirit of this institution and this community. Without the support of our students and donors and the incredible work of our campus faculty and staff who helped design this beautiful structure, this day would have never arrived. To the 636 donors, I say ‘thank you!’

Your belief in our vision and your investment in this structure have produced an extraordinary outcome that will serve generations to come.

What happens in this building in the days, months, and years ahead will lift spirits; evoke smiles and tears; challenge our views of the world; and strengthen our sense of community. Can one structure…one building do all that? My response to is ‘yes, absolutely.’

On August 2nd, 2010, the planning for the design of this building began. But in reality, the planning and the visioning began long before that. Throughout the time I have been president, I have kept a document on my desk that is dated May 1972.

On that document is a list of 6 construction projects that then President George Budd hoped to have privately funded. Number 6 on that list was a ‘Center for the Performing Arts’ and the dollar figure listed for that project was $4M. That document has served to motivate me and to focus my energies over the past 5 and half years. Monday morning, I plan to send that document to Randy Roberts, the university’s archivist.
In many ways, what you see here today comprises a journey…a journey that began with President Budd’s document in 1972 and became more imperative when Carney Hall was torn down in 1981. The journey has had many moments of extraordinary elation and a few setbacks along the way. I want to share with you a couple of thoughts about this journey and the people who made it possible:

- Of course, we would not be here today without the extraordinary gift from Gene and Rita Bicknell. That contribution was announced in October of 2008 as an anonymous gift. In June of this year, we identified Gene and Rita as the donors and announced the naming of the building…the Bicknell Family Center for the Arts. I’ll have more to say about Gene and Rita later in the program as I introduce Gene and invite him to make a few remarks.

- In the spring of 2012, our student body voted overwhelmingly to support three capital projects in a referendum. Thank you Jordan and thanks to all of our students who have helped make this possible. Today we deliver the first of those three projects and trust that you are pleased with the outcome.

- You may recall that in March of 2012, we announced the receipt of a $5M gift from the Walton Family Foundation. This gift was in honor of Lee Scott (who, yes, just happens to be my brother) for the leadership he provided for Walmart as its CEO from 2000-2009. That gift led to the naming of the performance hall in which we now sit.

- The Miller family is well known in the Pittsburg community for its extraordinary generosity, and this project is no exception…however, it does have a unique twist. Over the years, the Millers have preferred to make their gifts anonymously. In this case, gifts from Richard Miller and Faith and Dick Coleman were made in honor of Richard and Faith’s mother and father…Dotty and Bill Miller. As a result of that gift, one of the main venues in the Bicknell Center will carry the Dotty and Bill Miller’s name in perpetuity. Given Dotty’s love of theater, this is the perfect way to honor such a generous family. Thank you!
• There is a story behind each and every **seat plaque**. Consider long-time faculty member Doris Bradley honoring her late husband Robert who was also a member of the faculty; or Orville and Elizabeth Brill honoring their parents; or Don Porter recognizing his late wife Carolyn; or Jim Dawson who recognized eight members of his family, and these stories go on and on. Please take a look at the seat plaque in front of you and reflect for a moment on the story behind this special gift.

At this time, I’d like to call your attention to the program and the complete list of donors, which begins on page four. It’s quite a list, isn’t it?

On behalf of the university, I want each donor to know, every single gift was critical to the completion of this project...every single one. And every gift tells a story about a commitment to the arts or to Pittsburg State or to the memory of a family member. These gifts and the stories behind them have created something far more powerful than each gift standing alone. Because of your generosity, what was most recently the former site of married student housing has now been transformed into a world-class center to celebrate creative works and performance...the Bicknell Family Center for the Arts.

During an August 2010 speech to our faculty and staff, I cited the importance of growing the university’s capacity in the fine and performing arts. As a part of my comments, I quoted Albert Einstein; he noted: “Logic will get you from A to B. Imagination will take you everywhere.” Well, imagination got us here today and this building will feed the imaginations of children, students, and adults who are drawn here.

Standing behind me today are the men and women of the University Choir. I’m looking forward to their performance and in particular to the song they have chosen to sing. There’s a line within this song that really speaks to me...and I think it will speak to you as well.

The line is...”Let all the dreamers wake the nation.” I anticipate the Bicknell Center will indeed wake this campus and this community...and even at times the nation...to the power and importance of the arts, and it will serve as a symbol of inspiration for years to come.
Finally, I want you to share with you my greatest hope for today…that this is the first of many, many times that you will be in this venue and in this building. Will you all promise me that you’ll return often??

Thank you for coming and thank you for being a part of this day…let’s give all of our donors a round of applause.

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