Thank you for that wonderful introduction. I also thank my hosts for providing me the opportunity to share some remarks with you.

The River is a Part of Us

This is an intriguing title. It was suggested to me as the title for this talk last week. As I initially contemplated it, I saw that I could take it in a myriad of ways. After all, the river IS part of us; part of the livelihood of this place, St. Mary's County. I have sat on the bench not very far from my office in Calvert Hall on many a day considering some perplexing, challenging issue; just gazing out over the river, letting my mind wander with the light bouncing off the water. And, after some time of contemplation, I get up feeling rejuvenated in that I have arrived at a potential solution and, at the same time, saddened by the fact that I must then leave the river's edge, return to my office, and do some other work.

Yes, the river **is** part of us but how one defines that relationship is up to the individual. I am the president of an institution with a premier sailing program; an institution that literally sits on the banks of this river that feeds us in so many ways. When I think of the river, I can think of prepositions that can define one's relative position to the water. One can be "on" the water, "above" the water, "over" the water, "beside" the water. These are all good. One can also be "in" the water or "under" the water. No, not Tuajuanda. Tuajuanda doesn't swim. A president of a college that trains sailors and hosts sailors, boaters, and watermen from all over the world doesn't swim? How ironic is that!

Seriously, when I think about the river I most often think of it as *water*. Being a biochemist, I can **do** *water*. Water is a wonderfully simple molecule comprised of two hydrogen atoms bonded to an oxygen atom. Hydrogen, the simplest of all elements, just likes to hang out with others. All it has to give is a single proton and an electron. And,

give it does. Oxygen, on the other hand, takes. Oxygen is relatively reactive, darn near explosive, and it doesn't often share equally. Thus, it takes two hydrogens to transform a single oxygen atom into something that is innocuous and life-giving. Water.

Water shapes what we are. It is the way for nourishment to be delivered to our cells and waste removed. Its omnipresence has a direct effect on the shape of the macromolecules – the proteins, nucleic acids, lipids, and carbohydrates - that do the business of life. We need water to play nicely with these really big molecules, to interact with the macromolecules in such a way that they maintain their shapes and are able to function. Then we have a healthy life. If something happens to perturb the system - for example, if water's relationship with either itself or surrounding molecules becomes too giving or too needy – i.e., so positive that it becomes sickening; or so negative that it becomes toxic – things begin to fall apart, the balance in the system goes awry, and the organism becomes sick and eventually dies.

This is an oversimplification of what goes on inside our bodies with respect to the life-giving force of water but I think, at least at four o'clock this morning I thought – that my analogy nicely illustrates the essential role this molecule plays in providing life on this planet. This very simple molecule has such tremendous power over us all. We must respect it.

Water provides life. Babies are immersed in it while in the womb. Animals and plants live in it. We take our food from it. We drink it in its purest state.

Water has power. It can carve valleys through mountains. Its force can destroy man-made structures. It can carry away life.

Water provides tranquility and peace. It can be restorative. It is a source of recreation. It provides livelihood and a reason for being.

The College has embarked on developing a 3-year strategic plan. As we contemplate who we are now in the 175th year of our existence, where we are going in the future, and what it will take to get us there, the one thing that has remained constant is the reason for our being. Our preamble reads,

Founded on the site of Maryland's first capital, the College stands as a living legacy to the ideals of freedom and inclusiveness. Our beautiful residential campus on the banks of the St. Mary's River inspires our work, our play, and our commitment to the environment.

The River *is* a part of us.

Thus, it is incumbent upon us to take care of it, to be mindful of the things that are in it, flow into it, hover over it, bubble up through it. It is our job to work to keep the balance perfect so that we, our community, remains viable and thrives.

St. Mary's College was recently voted the fifth most beautiful campus in the country. I have a hard time imagining it would be ranked so high on that list if it were not for the river. Our sailing program has national prominence built on the backs of young women and young men from all over the country. What drew them to this little college tucked away in this historic place in Southern Maryland? Adam Werblow and Bill Ward showed them the river. Bob Paul and others have made studying the river and keeping it healthy their scholarly focus and their life-love passion. The College holds environmental stewardship as a core value. The ethos by which we challenge ourselves to live, known as the St. Mary's Way, begins "As a member of St. Mary's College of Maryland, I accept the St. Mary's Way, and agree to join in working with others to develop this college as a community where people respect the natural environment…"

The College takes protecting the river and working to ensure that it thrives very seriously. We are dutifully tending to the river with our practices like storm water management, permeable pavement (a.k.a. The Tuajuanda shoe killer), and grey water systems. The 15 acres of native meadows we have installed has eliminated the use of thousands of pounds of herbicides, fungicides and fertilizer. Storm water irrigation systems are eliminating ground water use and assist in filtering the loading of storm water pollutants to tidal waters. St Mary's College has a strong record of environmental stewardship and we will continue to do so.

In 2007, Bobby Kennedy said (O Magazine), "The environment is the infrastructure of our communities. As a nation, as a civilization, it's our obligation to create communities for our children that provide them with opportunities for dignity and good health. When we destroy nature, we diminish ourselves and impoverish our children. We ignore that at our own peril."

St. Mary's College's mission entails providing an excellent education that is accessible to the brightest students of this state, of this country. The St. Mary's River is an essential component of that holistic experience. We are proud of the work we have done to help protect the St. Mary's River. We appreciate all that the St. Mary's River Watershed Association does to ensure the viability of this river and thus our community, and look forward to a continued partnership as we work to protect this river that is a part of us.

Thank you.

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Annual Member Meeting, St. Mary's River Watershed Association
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