

*Citation read on the occasion of the
Installation of
Professor Jamie Cassels
As the Seventh President of the University of Victoria*

November 12, 2013

Mr. Chancellor, Your Honour, honored guests, colleagues, scholars, ladies and gentlemen. It is my privilege and pleasure to introduce Jamie Cassels upon the occasion of his installation as the seventh president of the University of Victoria.

One hundred and seventy-five years ago, Horace Greeley wrote in the New Yorker newspaper, “If any young man is about to commence the world, we say to him, privately and publicly, Go to the West.” It is advice that has been taken by the hundreds of thousands (some of them even women). It is what brought Jamie Cassels as far west as he could go, although I can pretty well guarantee that his passion for travel and exploration—especially by any kind of water transport—has taken him on adventures well beyond our westernmost shores.

Born into a large and deeply-rooted Toronto family, well-known for its contributions both to football and to the legal profession, young Jamie was a typical schoolboy, struggling with his studies and his sense of place. For someone whose natural orientation was to the outdoors and who thought he might make his life there, it wasn’t until he enrolled in a first year philosophy course at Carleton University, that Jamie “took fire,” as he himself puts it, graduating with a degree that ensured his first teaching position with the philosophy department at the University of Western Ontario.

At Western (only a little bit West but he’s on his way), he pursued a law degree and, after acquiring his Masters in Law from Columbia, (a necessary but brief digression eastward), his sense of adventure brought him to UVic in 1981. He was admitted to the British Columbia Bar in 1991 and, in recognition of his scholarly and service contributions to the legal profession, appointed Queen’s Counsel in 2004.

But well before that, Jamie had already “commenced his world,” having taught in UVic’s Faculty of Law for some ten years as professor then serving as Associate Dean and from 1999 to 2001 as Dean of Law. Those experiences, followed by two terms as the University of Victoria’s Provost and Vice President Academic, have well-prepared him for his present position. As the Chinese proverb has it, “Only he that has traveled the road knows where the holes are deep.”

A philosophic mind, informed by a compassionate attention to issues of social justice, gender equity and matters of law as they affect people is central to Prof. Cassels ethical position and is what drives

his teaching and his research. Among his publications, his examination of the Bhopal disaster of 1984 was hailed as an “achievement of massive scope” and of his law texts, one is now in its 6th edition. His wide-ranging scholarly concerns include equity for unpaid labour, pension reform for homemakers, and a career-long commitment to the improvement of university teaching across disciplines. In 2001, Prof. Cassels was one of the driving forces behind UVic’s innovative and ground-breaking Akitsariq Law School Program in Nunavut for Inuit students—and aboriginal education remains a continuing interest.

Mindful that this 3M Teaching Fellow was part of the 2002 Fellows’ team that looked at the state of higher education and issued a “double-hurricane warning,” it’s comforting to know that, apart from all his other accomplishments, Jamie not only recognizes a good boat when he’s in one but he’s also capable of stripping down a diesel engine, polishing its parts, applying oil to its rusty bits and getting it working better than ever before.

I know, Sir, that I speak for your crew when I say, “Welcome aboard!” As you set the new course, we are all delighted to be in the same boat and steering, with you, in new directions.

*Written and prepared by
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