

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE:

FAIRFAX--For the last seven years Lorin A. Thompson has been George Mason University's top salesman. Monday morning a farewell replaced his sales pitch.

Retiring from more than a half century of involvement in education, Thompson stepped down from his post as president of George Mason University in a brief ceremony attended by 18 of his top administrators and by incoming president Vergil H. Dykstra.

His retirement brought to a close a seven-year period of George Mason history which had seen the young university begin its emergence as a regional university. Thompson's presidency had been an almost text book study of marketing principles.

What Thompson had sold to Northern Virginians and to the General Assembly these past seven years was the need for a center of learning in Northern Virginia. His pitch was simple: Northern Virginians needed and deserved a four-year university accessible to those it served, dedicated to excellence, and responsive to the needs of the community.

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GEORGE MASON UNIVERSITY

4400 University Drive · Fairfax, Virginia 22030

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He had hammered away at the central idea which has guided George Mason's development:

"In an urban area such as ours, it is just common sense to enable the student to obtain his education where he lives and works."

Thompson had sold his product well. In just seven years, George Mason's enrollment had increased from 840 to more than 4,200 students. Its land holdings had increased from 147 to nearly 600 acres. Where four small classroom buildings had stood when he arrived on campus in 1966, eight buildings now marked the university's rapidly changing skyline, and the campus was buzzing with some \$10.5 million worth of new construction. Ninety-two per cent of the University's students were Virginia residents; about 90 per cent were employed.

"When George Mason was established," reflected Thompson, "it had no reputation, no prestige. It was thought of as a place for people who couldn't go anywhere else."

The challenge facing him, he said, was to demonstrate to students, members of the General Assembly, and Northern Virginians in general that George Mason was dedicated to excellence.

Thompson acknowledged that "few men have the opportunity to experience the challenge that I have had at George Mason." His most satisfying experience, he said, was to have watched the "growth and maturity" of George Mason's student body.

"I like to think," he said, "that our students here now are here because they believe we are an excellent university."

In assessing the university's academic strengths and weaknesses as he left George Mason, Thompson said he believed the basic natural and physical sciences remained among the university's strongest offerings together with some of the

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humanities programs.

While George Mason is developing in the area of the social sciences, he added, stronger leadership is needed. He expects educators like the University of Connecticut's respected economist William P. Snavely to provide the kind of leadership required. Snavely recently accepted a position as the chairman of George Mason's newly established Department of Economics.

George Mason's retiring president has waged a continuing effort to develop Northern Virginia's lone four-year, degree granting university. His early years were devoted to developing a land use plan, acquiring some 450 additional acres of land, and developing a master plan for the development of the university's academic programs and physical development.

"I went out and huckstered and cajoled local governments for the money we needed to buy the land," recalled Thompson with a chuckle.

His master plan called for 15,000 students to be studying in six schools and colleges by 1985. Despite nationwide trends of declining enrollments and local governments' attempts to halt growth, Thompson firmly contends that his 1985 projection is accurate.

He still expects Northern Virginia to have approximately 90,000 college age (18-21) students by 1985 and dismisses most talk about "no growth" policies as "rhetoric."

"I still expect the 8th Planning District (which encompasses most of Northern Virginia) to have a population of about a million and a quarter people by 1985," he said.

Thompson founded the University of Virginia's Bureau of Population and Economic Research in 1944 and served as its director for 22 years before becoming George Mason's first chancellor.

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Because of his work with the Bureau, he became a familiar figure in Richmond and well-known to members of the General Assembly and the heads of various state agencies. This recognition made it easier for him to sell George Mason.

"I was known and respected as a professional," he said, "and when I appeared before them, they knew me and trusted what I told them."

Thompson will be 72 in January and with his wife, Amelia, will retire this week to their home in Charlottesville. They plan to do some traveling and visiting with their seven children and 13 grandchildren (a 14th is on the way).

But mostly said Thompson, who was named as George Mason's first president emeritus by the University's Board of Visitors in late June, "I guess I'll start reorienting myself. I want to get reacquainted with society as a whole."