Good evening. Welcome to Weber State University. We are delighted to host this year’s Ogden Pioneer Days devotional. It is a fitting tribute to the city’s proud heritage and the illustrious men and women whose rugged pioneer spirit forged a prosperous, cosmopolitan city from what was once a rustic, mountain man trading post.

Weber State University is pleased to have played a major part in that astonishing transformation.

In 1889, the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints converted a red brick meeting house on the corner of Grant Avenue and 26th Street into an academy. The church paid German-born educator Louis F. Moench $125 a month to be principal. The Weber Stake Board of Education specified that this academy was to be “opened to male and female students as well as to all nationalities and religious denominations.”

Professor Moench was a highly respected educator who held fast to the notion that education was important for young students as well as for mature men and women who had not had the advantage of formal education. To attract more students and serve the public, the academy invited community members to choose one or more classes to attend. A local newspaper headline announced: “A CHANCE FOR ALL – ANYONE CAN ATTEND SCHOOL FOR AN HOUR EACH DAY,” suggesting that anyone—no matter their age or circumstance—could attend a class at Weber to improve a skill or learn a new subject.

Today, Weber State University’s large non-traditional student population, multiple campuses, flexible schedules and extensive list of online courses testify of our enduring dedication to Professor Moench’s ideals of open access, continuing education and lifelong learning.

By 1923, Weber was housed in a much larger building in downtown Ogden and had adopted a decidedly “college attitude.” The school dropped its high school courses. Ten years later, on July 1st 1933, the L.D.S. Church transferred ownership of Weber College to the State of Utah.

There’s an old saying that “Adversity Builds Character,” but I think it is perhaps more accurate to say that adversity reveals character. And just as Ogden’s pioneer settlers were tempered through hardship and calamity, so, too, did Weber display confidence and determination in its early struggles to survive.

The following are two examples:

Weber College became a state institution during The Great Depression. State salaries were slashed. Twenty-five Utah banks, including A.P. Bigelow’s Ogden State Bank, failed. One-hundred-seventy-thousand Utahns were out of work. Many families simply could not afford to send their children to college. In our commitment
to higher education, Weber responded by accepting in-kind donations of meat and produce in lieu of tuition.

As a budget-cutting measure in 1953, the State Legislature voted to stop funding Utah’s junior colleges. Our campus and community banded together to launch a “Save Weber” campaign and were able to overthrow the measure through a public referendum.

So you see, Weber State and Ogden City make a great team. From the beginning, both entities have enjoyed a symbiotic relationship of mutual respect and common goals.

We understand that the economic prosperity of our city depends on an educated workforce. We relish our role in supporting that connection by preparing students for rewarding careers. We rejoice when the rest of the world takes notice of our collective accomplishments—when Forbes Magazine lists Ogden as the sixth best place in America for business and careers (in 2012).

We are very excited about Weber State’s return to the heart of Ogden. This fall, Weber State Downtown opens in the 23-hundred block of Washington Boulevard. The new facility will house a campus store, Continuing Education classrooms and WSU’s new App Center.

As we anticipate the challenges of the future, Weber State University remains steadfast in its resolve to serve this diverse and ever-evolving community as a dynamic educational, cultural and economic hub.

People of Ogden, never forget that Weber State is YOUR university. It grows and adapts to meet your needs. We urge you to cherish it, support it, and take advantage of the many opportunities it provides.

We’ve been here for 125 years, and plan to be around for many, many more.

For the remainder of this devotional and during the spectacular Lindquist Pops Concert and Fireworks display that follows, let us pause to reflect on the courage and tenacity of those who paved the way for the limitless freedoms and advantages that we celebrate this evening.

Thank you.

(Approximate delivery time: 6 min.)