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Dear 40th Commemoration committee

Now that we have had a few weeks to relax and think about the content of the event to acknowledge the 40th anniversary of the 1972 disaster, I wanted to take a long moment and thank all of you for your unselfish and splendid work to make this period in South Dakota history so meaningful for many, many people. After Mayor Sam requested that I serve as Chairman of our Committee, we began our work in November of last year. Seven full months of dedication, work, discussions, focus, and fellowship.

At the worship service on Sunday, I stated that we had met our challenge. Case closed.

I can't personally thank each of you for the role that you played in our success. However, a few comments are absolutely necessary.

Chuck Childs:

We wanted the recognition of the families of the disaster victims to be our central theme. Chuck and his ladies achieved this beyond our wildest expectations. Way over 400 family members attended the convocation on Saturday evening. It was very nice. A special thanks to Chuck and his ladies who framed this moment so nicely.

Our National Guard, Air Force, Fireman, and Policemen:

These fine men were recognized, and our depth of appreciation for their efforts was made clear to all of South Dakota. Thanks to all of you who made this happen.

Caroline and Milo: The music could not have been better. It was truly wonderful. The concluding “Ode To Joy” was one of the most moving and monumental moments in South Dakota History.

That moment is framed in my memory for ever. We appreciate the time, devotion, and musical talent of those involved. Thank you so much.

The Civic Center Staff: Not a finer group of professionals anywhere in the nation. Brian (and Larry Dale) and the staff manage that facility with such skill and dedication. We wish these dedicated civil servants much success with their continuing efforts to lead South Dakota with expansions and improvements.

Larry and Jerry. I did not have one sleepless night in Littleton or worry about their efforts to successfully raise the money to meet Mayor Sam's challenge. A special thanks to these fine citizens. Both are dear friends of mine, going back to 1951 (Jerry) and 1971 (Larry). Thanks for a job well done.

The Journey Museum:

The programming at the Journey complimented our commemoration in every possible way. The content of these programs was intellectually stimulating and historically significant for all of South Dakota. Just a great job by all.

The Content and theme of the Sunday Worship Service.

Larry, Lin, and everyone involved served their city so well. South Dakota was deeply moved with this service. It was a glorious afternoon.

Two wonderful friends:

During my illness in early spring, Verne Sheppard and Suzanne Martley virtually took over the management and direction of the committee. The end result was the magnificent Agenda Booklet. The Sharp PR firm deserves much of this credit. Please treasure that historical document. Thanks again to the magnificent Simpson family for their support.

The Pathway Signs:

Van Lindquist reports that installation of the signs will be complete by Labor Day. This monumental effort (including word-smithing by Jim Kuehn and many others) is historic to future generations. Thanks to Van for a job well done.

Greta Chapman and her library staff:

The accumulation and display of historical data on the City's Website is so important. A special thanks to these professionals for their dedicated assistance in distributing so much data to our citizens and our committee. It was and is a very valuable service to Rapid City.

Tomorrow:

1. The future: Our work is not finished:

I will appreciate a note from each of you with your comments about the content of the 2012 event and your suggestions on how the City of Rapid City should frame the 50th commemoration in 2012. Please send me your suggestions by August 15th. I will try to complete my report to Mayor Sam by the middle of September. I will attach your notes to my final report.

2. It was the general conclusion of so many folks that we should select a central storage room for so much of the historical data about the flood.

Many of our exhibitors have pledged to donate their materials to the city for future use. The management of the civic center may have a room. This is not yet confirmed.

3. Future scholarship about the Disaster.

I hope the regional and statewide college and universities will designate scholars to complete more historical research (Possibly Masters Degree Thesis projects) about the flood and the recovery. The materials should be inventoried, labeled, and stored in an orderly fashion. This will require serious and skilled efforts by many people. I will help. Your suggestions are appreciated.

Much more could be said. I stated on Sunday afternoon the following, “I do not have a challenge for the citizens of Rapid City for Monday morning. It is time to smell the roses and recognize the magnitude of this recovery for our wonderful city.”

Please enjoy the moment.

It was an honor for me to work with you on this commemoration. I cherish my friendship with each of you and wish you much happiness.

Thank you.

Donald V. Barnett
Mayor of Rapid City, 1971-1975