

**WARDEN FAREWELL ADDRESS:**  
**MR JOHN MCNEILL– 11 MAY 2013**

Mr John McNeill, wardens of the residences that make up Allan Webb Hall, sub-wardens and house committees, students, friends and colleagues of John, ladies and gentlemen

Molweni, goie naand, good evening.

Thank you for the opportunity to say a few words on behalf of the University.

First and foremost, thank you to all of you for this fantastic turn-out. I take this as testimony of the great regard we all have for John McNeill that we have turned out on this bitter cold evening in such numbers.

John, this evening, we acknowledge your 25 years of outstanding service as Warden of Winchester House and also your years of service as Hall Warden of Allan Webb.

We extend our gratitude to you for your wonderful and caring service to generations of students since 1988, and the thoughtfulness, dedication, care and integrity with which you have undertaken your responsibilities.

You will often hear me say that Rhodes is the Sheraton of University residences – Stellenbosch perhaps Southern Sun, UCT the Garden Court, and then there also the Formula One's.

But, of course, it is not only the physical environment that makes us a five star residence system. It is also wardens like John McNeill that ultimately make us a place of a quality, a place where you can grow and develop intellectually, socially and physically.

John was the very first Hall Warden to invite me to dinner with his charges at Allan Webb when I became Vice-Chancellor almost seven years ago. It was through that dinner in 2006 that I was to meet a local lad, Siyabulela Nomoyi, who went on to graduate with nine out of ten distinctions in his BSc degree.

John sent him to have tea with me and I will always be thankful to him for this – even though Siya now works as a financial analyst in Cape Town, we remain in contact and he visits me whenever he is in Grahamstown to visit his family.

Ladies and gentlemen, you do not easily replace a John McNeill. John's departure is not only the loss of a wise and outstanding House and Hall warden. It is also a loss of years of accumulated knowledge, expertise and experience. As critically, it is also a loss of very important institutional memory of and from the Rhodes wardening system.

John's commitment to his students and to his role of warden, and his years of experience has meant that he has commanded respect and brought stature to the wardening and residence system. If John speaks you listen, because you know there is no agenda - just straight talk that seeks the best for students, wardens and residences.

A few years ago we had to negotiate a new model of undergraduate residence design, one that was sensitive to quality, equity and costs. Because of his stature John was necessarily a key member of the team that trashed out the new model.

John you leave us with our residence system in relatively good shape. You have provided me, Dr Mabizela and the Dean of Students with wise and honest counsel on what needs to be done to enhance further the quality of our wardening; you have urged us to give attention to the quality of accommodation of your fellow wardens and you have also shared with us some other concerns. We thank you for this – and I hope there will be another John who will fill the vacuum that could be left by you.

You leave a wonderful legacy, and you will always hold a special place in the hearts and minds hundreds of students. We will miss your invaluable contribution at all levels.

A few months ago at the memorial service for our late former Chancellor Prof Jakes Gerwel, Koos Bekker, the CEO of the media and communication giant Naspers, said that he had examined some dictionaries for the antonym of 'racist' but could not find one. He concluded that the word should be 'Jakes'.

I think that we should persuade Jill Wolvaardt of the Oxford Dictionary Unit at Rhodes that the synonym for warden and especially a great warden should be 'John'.

Those of you who know the rock group The Eagles will know their most famous 1977 hit 'Hotel California'. The last two lines of the song are: 'You can check-out any time you like. But you can never leave!'

John, you may be checking out, but you can never just leave!

You will still be in our midst and we look forward to that, and especially to you playing some kind of role in helping us to address some of the challenges that you have laid out for us.

Our wish is that the years ahead will bless you with good health, and bring you joy and happiness as you spend your time pursuing other interests.

Ladies and Gentlemen, I invite you to join me in commending a wonderful and warden and servant of Winchester House, Allan Webb Hall and Rhodes University - Mr John McNeill.