Shirley talks on ‘all the good stuff’
VCSU leader highlights economic impact, online education in address

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In spite of all nature could throw at her, Valley City State University is in great shape, according to VCSU President Steven Shirley.

Shirley outlined the past year’s accomplishments and programs that are furthering the university Monday during the annual state of the university address in Froemke Auditorium.

At the beginning of his address, Shirley recognized the efforts of students, faculty and staff during last spring’s flood fight.

“Through their thousands of hours with critical assistance during the flood – with levee building, sand bagging, volunteering – it was proven to all on our campus and throughout this community of the outstanding young people who comprise the VCSU student body,” Shirley said. “My hat’s off to this entire campus community for their heroic efforts last spring.”

Valley City Mayor Mary Lee Nielson was present at the address, and on Monday at the Valley City commission meeting she also expressed appreciation for VCSU students’ efforts.

“We’d have never made it without them,” Nielson said.

Shirley spoke of VCSU’s advances in online education and the crucial role that played in allowing the semester to continue last spring, even as the campus was evacuated.

Continued development of online capabilities will allow VCSU to deal with any future flooding or potential public health crisis caused by H1N1 flu, Shirley said.
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‘Right direction’

Shirley listed other promising developments:

- the largest fall enrollment in nine years
- a stable freshman-sophomore retention rate
- a marketing campaign with a virtual tour of the university on its Web site
- more study abroad opportunities
- the first international student from China
- a reinvigorated theater program
- recent approval of a fourth master’s degree concentration

On the financial side, Shirley announced congressional approval of a $381,000 grant appropriation for the Great Plains STEM initiative (science, technology, engineering and mathematics). VCSU is also working with Sen. Byron Dorgan, D-N.D., on a second grant.

“In fiscal year 2008, VCSU had a nearly $56 million economic impact and helped to support the equivalence of over 500 jobs in our region,” Shirley said.

“Direct student expenditures alone are estimated at $6.5 million, and our total payroll this fiscal year will exceed $11 million,” he said.

More than 100 students, faculty and staff members attended the address.

“I thought he did a good job of announcing all the good stuff that’s been going on on our campus in the last year,” said VCSU junior Chip Maresh. “And a really good job of letting people know what’ll be in the future of the university.”

Science professor Gilbert Kuipers agreed and said he thinks Shirley conveyed his message well.

“We’re moving in the right direction,” Kuipers said. “Enrollment’s up, and the ‘Explore, Reach and Achieve’ theme was very good.”