It has been my wonderful, good fortune to know some incredibly talented people over the years. My career in computers started by working in association with Edward Teller, John von Newmann, Harold Brown and a whole galaxy of other brilliant physicists and mathematicians.

Being a part of the birth and growth of one of those technologies that changes man's history has meant exposure to leaders in all walks of life -- business and politics, as well as science and technology.

As I think about that array of folks, however, there are just a very few who by their example show you the kind of person you'd like to be, who can inspire, who by just being, provide others with an example of what humanity is supposed to be.

And Sandy Bemis is one of those few.

For example, the phrase "responsible and caring citizenship" hardly seems adequate to describe someone who chaired the United Negro College Fund for years, served on the board of Fisk University for 40 years, helped create the MN Project on Corporate Responsibility, chaired the Mpls. Urban Coalition, served on the Board of the Urban League, served on the Governor’s Human Rights Commission, served on the Board of Directors of the Sigurd F. Olson Institute -- and none of this even touches his work with the fine arts community, which has occupied a major part of his attention for years. It is not an exaggeration to say that one of the nation’s finer regional opera companies, the MN Opera, exists and flourishes because of Sandy’s dedication and persistence.
The phrase “thoughtful business leader” appears frequently in profiles and biographies. But it is beyond “thoughtful” to help bring into being an institution for continuing responsible business participation in the public policy process, as did Sandy with the MN Business Partnership. There is something more at work in such a person -- good citizenship. There is a deeply held responsiveness as well as responsibility -- there is persistence and patience, equanimity and enthusiasm, and above all, intensity and integrity.

His work with Alpha is a logical extension of the kind of work Sandy had already been doing for decades. It was both his recognition of responsible and creative ideas as well as the leadership skills to marshall human and financial resources to support those ideas that gave rise to Alpha.

It all started after Control Data’s 25th anniversary conference in September of 1982, which focused on converting social needs into business opportunities -- Sandy raised his hand at the next Board of Directors meeting to compliment Bill Norris on the conference and ask him how he planned to continue spreading the gospel.

Bill said he didn’t know, but why didn’t Sandy chair a committee to figure out a plan? (That, by the way, is vintage Bill Norris)

Thus was born the Public Policy Committee of the Board. We had a number of meetings over the course of a year or so, then linked up with the Aspen Institute which gave us the forum to bring together others who helped shape the Alpha concept. The rest is history (or at least chronology).

The words on the plaque Doug will read to you in a few minutes truly reflect the approach Sandy has taken to his responsibilities as Chair: Without his vision and his personal commitment, Alpha would not have survived.

First of all, he has never wavered (or let the rest of us waver) from a belief in what we are doing.
And his commitment has been demonstrated in so many other ways, especially in terms of time and money. Doug and Jerr estimate that Sandy has averaged about one or two days per week on Alpha activities ... for nearly seven years -- and they tell me he has always been available when they needed him. I know both Doug and Jerr will have more to say about that in a few minutes.

Sandy has been absolutely tireless as a spokesperson for Alpha -- at public venues, with his friends, with the media, in search of funds, whenever he has been asked. Nor has it all been words. Sandy's personal financial commitment has been there just at those times when it was critical to Alpha's survival.

Men of vision are not always appreciated in their own time. During his six years as Chair, people in the nonprofit world, in business and in government have gradually begun to understand fundamental truth behind the Alpha concept: there is just not enough money available from philanthropy and government to solve our social problems.

And the demand for Alpha's services is on the rise....

But it may still be years before people fully appreciate what Sandy has done, and is doing.

Those of us in this room do not have to wait that long

We know.

And that is why we are gathered here tonight to honor him for his six years as our Founding Chair.

At this point I would like to ask Doug Ades, who served as our President and CEO for nearly five years, to read the inscription on this plaque, a very small token of our appreciation, and to then add a few remarks of his own .....