

Dr. Clark's Ceremonial Opening Speech

## *Dedication of the Center for Occupation and Lifestyle Redesign*

By  
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President Sample, distinguished colleagues, alumni, students, friends and neighbors – good afternoon! I am Dr. Florence Clark, Professor and Chair of the USC Department of Occupational Science and Occupational Therapy and it is my distinct pleasure to welcome you to the grand opening of our Center for Occupation and Lifestyle Redesign.

As we gather today in front of this amazing Victorian home and realize that it is over 100 years old, it is hard not to muse on what this magnificent building has seen in its time.

The tall spires and carved scrollwork remind us of the craftsmanship that was prevalent a century ago, when individual work with one's hands was still part of an industrial age. Less than two decades after it was completed, the traffic in front of this home changed from horse-drawn carriages to Henry Ford's ubiquitous black Model T – and a small but increasing number of people began to worry about the effects of mass-production on society.

This building had stood nearly a quarter century before the profession of occupational therapy began in the aftermath of World War I, when the first practitioners took the broken bodies and broken spirits from the battlefield and got them involved in "occupation" – activities that allowed them to adapt to their new limitations, regain their independence and build productive lives.

This historic home saw more troops march off to battle in the 1940s – and it was then that our Occupational Therapy Department was founded at USC, just in time to help rehabilitate the thousands of returning World War II veterans as well as the civilian workers who had been injured making America the Arsenal of Democracy.

In the post-war era, many Victorian gems like this one fell to neglect as we headed for suburbs lined with ranch houses that boasted the latest labor-saving devices. It soon became clear that while space-age technology was lightening our daily workload, it was also causing other changes in the way we lived. For example, as automobiles became more pervasive, we no longer walked to work – or anywhere else for that matter. At home, instead of spending time at the sewing machine or out in the workshop using our hands and creatively perfecting our hand-eye coordination, we spent countless hours sitting in front of the television with a remote in one hand and a snack in the other – a very different form of hand-eye coordination. And yet, other advances like assistive technology and the information superhighway started allowing us to overcome physical limitations and functional barriers as well as expand our communication with people around the globe. How do all of these changes affect our sense of health, our bodies, our minds and our emotional well-being?

These were some of the questions we asked ourselves as this wonderful building was nearing its 100th year, when under the leadership of Distinguished Professor Emerita Elizabeth J.

Yerxa, USC established occupational science as a discipline to do the research needed to understand activity and to bring occupational therapy to new areas of modern life. Our efforts paid off in a very short time. Just a few years later our groundbreaking study of elderly in downtown Los Angeles made headline news. Our results proved definitively that occupational therapy can have a positive and protective effect on the lives of senior citizens. It also showed that occupational therapy can serve as a preventive intervention for many people, not just those who have a physical or psychological disability.

Now, as this newly restored home begins its third century and we enter a new millennium, The Center for Occupation and Lifestyle Redesign will place a major focus on how all of us can live better in the 21st century. Much of our research will naturally involve technology – how it may enhance health and compromise it at the same time. We want to understand what effect the sedentary lifestyle of the computer age is having on the body and on the social fabric of life – while we explore how to harness the potential of technology so we may support learning, promote adaptation, and improve functioning.

Actually, USC's occupational scientists will study many everyday activities and their impact on us physically, psychologically and spiritually. Our researchers, representing many disciplines, will examine all aspects of how we work, rest and spend our leisure hours with the goal of achieving optimal balance in our lives. We will look at the effects of activity on individuals and groups, like pregnant women, the elderly and children. Our scientists will study different occupations and lifestyles from around the world to see how cultural, religious and ethnic influences shape overall health and satisfaction. And we will examine the power of positive doing, harkening back to the age of craft for alternatives to improve daily living – how arts and crafts, or simple labors of the heart such as gardening, can enhance both our physical and emotional well-being.

In addition to cutting-edge research, the Center will be one of USC's educational hubs for preparing future generations of occupational therapists and scientists. And from here, we will serve the local community through our clinical practice. Utilizing a process called lifestyle redesign, our occupational therapists will help individuals restructure their daily activities into life patterns that are healthier, more positive and more personally meaningful.

It is my belief the scholarly research in occupational science that will take place here, along with the occupational therapy services we will provide, will lead us down a path that will eventually mean vital, more fulfilling lives for all of us – and give us emotional satisfaction in an increasingly technological world.

Today the USC Department of Occupational Science and Occupational Therapy celebrates a major milestone with the opening of our pioneering center – and we are witnessing an important development in the health and healing professions.