

## Former Mayor to Direct the Van Raalte Institute of Hope College

Phil Tanis ('87), former mayor of Holland, Michigan, has been designated as the next director of the Van Raalte Institute (VRI) of Hope College. His term will begin July 1, 2025. In the interim, Tanis will serve as a senior research fellow at the institute. Tanis will replace current director Donald A. Luidens who will continue as the editor-in-chief of the Van Raalte Press and as a senior research fellow.

Tanis was the founding manager of the Knickerbocker Theatre in the late 1980s when Hope College first acquired that complex and was elected to the Holland City Council when he was an undergraduate at Hope College. During his tenure on the city council, the downtown snowmelt system was approved and undertaken, and the muddy paths that crisscrossed Centennial Park were replaced by lovely brick walkways. From 1987 to 1989, Tanis served as the youngest city mayor in the United States. As mayor, he helped to found the Joint Archives of Holland, which at the time included Hope College, Western Theological Seminary, and the city of Holland. The Joint Archives (now, Hope College Archives and Special Collections) has been a close partner of the VRI since its inception in 1994.

Tanis served for ten years in a variety of executive capacities with the World Communion of Reformed Churches (WCRC), headquartered in Hanover, Germany. His roles centered on communication and operations of the WCRC. Before joining the WCRC staff, Tanis was manager of electronic communications on behalf of the Reformed Church in America. In that capacity, he honed his skills as a communications expert.

Tanis's sojourn in Hanover was not his only overseas assignment. From 1995 to 1996, he was a resident program officer of the International Republican Institute, serving in Sofia, Bulgaria. Drawing on the political experience of running his own local election campaigns, Tanis helped post-Soviet Union Bulgarians develop democratic institutions in their towns and cities.

As a Hope College student and city council member, Tanis interviewed surviving mayors about their tenures as mayors. This oral history project was the harbinger of his current interest in Holland's history. Tanis hopes to build on those earlier records, adding interviews with subsequent mayors and other city leaders to write a fuller history of the political leadership of Holland, Michigan, over the last several decades.

The VRI is a research institute of Hope College; its mission is to honor "the memory and vision of the Reverend Dr. Albertus C. Van Raalte, the founder of Holland, Michigan, by engaging in and promoting the study of his life and legacy, exploring the history of the West Michigan community, and publishing through the Van Raalte Press, scholarly work on Dutch-American relations and Dutch immigration and heritage in North American and around the globe."

Recent publications of the Van Raalte Press include *A. C. Van Raalte: Pastor by Vocation, Entrepreneur by Necessity* by Robert P. Swierenga (2023); *American Eyes on the Netherlands: Film, Public Diplomacy, and Dutch Identity* by Henk Aay (2024); and *Present, but Not Counted: Dutch-Immigrant and Second Generation Midwives Working in Dutch Colonies in the United States, 1840-1940* by Janet Sjaarda Sheeres (2025). Please see [hope.edu/vri](https://hope.edu/vri) for more information and a complete list of our publications.