

UofL President Ramsey remarks
Community Engagement Outreach Recognition
Oct. 20, 2009

Following are excerpts from the presentation by University of Louisville President James Ramsey at the first Community Engagement Outreach Recognition awards program Tuesday, Oct. 20, at the Chao Auditorium in UofL's Ekstrom Library.

Good evening. Thank you for joining us tonight for this special occasion.

Generally, if you've heard me speak, you've heard me speak. I typically follow a couple of themes and deliver the same messages.

No one has had to listen to me speak as often as two people – my wife, Jane, and Provost Shirley Willihnganz. Jane's response when I tell her I'm speaking is simple – She says "I've heard your speech. I don't need to hear it again." You notice she is not here tonight. The provost's response usually goes something like this: "You speak so often. Do you want me to give your remarks for you?"

But I am here tonight. I'm honored to be here. And I am happy to share my messages with you.

The University of Louisville has a great history, a great tradition. More than two hundred years ago, the founders of this university had a vision of a great university that would uplift the community and the commonwealth.

Two hundred years later, we are proud of the impacts we are having.

For instance, just this month the university was named one of the top 25 "Best Neighbor" colleges and universities. We were ranked number 12. Our goal is to be number one.

We have been classified by the Carnegie Foundation as a Community Engagement University, meaning we are recognized nationally for having a significant impact on our community.

As part of being a good neighbor, we are trying to become more "green." We recently received a grade of B+ on a national green report card, the highest ranking (along with Berea College) in Kentucky. We're not happy with a B+. We want an A+. But we've improved every year.

And we are doing more.

So we have much to be proud of. But as great as we are, the expectations of us are to do more. In 1997, it was written into Kentucky law that the University of Louisville would be a "premier nationally recognized metropolitan research university."

What that means is that we have a public agenda. Our task is to increase economic opportunity and quality of life for the citizens of our state.

This is a university of great traditions. Last night we celebrated the Phi Beta Kappa lecture series. Every fall, the College of Arts and Sciences brings in an external speaker for a lecture and reception. That event started four years ago, and each year it has grown bigger and stronger and more successful.

Tonight we recognize faculty, staff members, students and members of our community for their outstanding community engagement – for these are really the ones that are making a difference in the lives of our community. We are starting a new tradition, and this, too, will become a more important tradition each year.

Six years ago, on Sept. 9, 2003, I said in my inaugural address that “The University of Louisville has a rich history and tradition dating back to 1798, when it was stated by members of the city’s founding families that Louisville should be a place “of some consequence.”

I stated further that “we must play a central role, a leadership role, ensuring a better way of life for the people of our state, a leadership role ensuring improved economic and educational opportunities for all Kentuckians.”

It is time for us as an institution and as a community to recommit to the mandate given us by our founding fathers.

The late Charles Kuralt referred to the University of North Carolina as the “people’s university.” We, too, are the “people’s university” – a citizen university – so improving the lives of our citizens is our job; it is our responsibility.

Later in my inaugural address, I stated our recommitment and our efforts must extend out into the community, but that our community extends far beyond our campus. Our dreams must stretch not only from Pleasure Ridge Park to Prospect, but from Pikeville to Paducah.

And I stressed that it is not enough to dream. We must be the doers of deeds that bring benefits to everyone in the state – not just the people in Shively and St. Matthews, but the people of Somerset and Salyersville and Smiths Grove.

We also recommit ourselves to partner with those who share our ideals and dreams. A stronger and healthier Louisville and Jefferson County are critical not only to the future of our people here, but to all the people of Kentucky. Working with our valued partners, we can together make a difference, not just in Buechel and Butchertown, but also in Burkesville and Benton. Not just in Fern Creek and Fairdale, but in Floyd County and in Frankfort and all of Kentucky.

My address in 2003 concludes with this comment: May it be said in the future that despite the challenges we faced in 2003, we did not back off; we did not retreat; rather we hitched up our belts and did our jobs – to make a better Kentucky... This is our job. It is an important job; it is important to me, for I was born in this community, educated in our public school in Kentucky, and I believe in Kentucky and its people and all that they can be.

And so it is on Oct. 20, 2009. We are facing even greater challenges than we faced in 2003, and our work is even more important.

But with the help of our tremendous community partners, we are continuing to make a better community and state. We are continuing to build dreams and do deeds that help make this commonwealth great.

For that we thank each and every one of you for all that you're doing for our community. And we congratulate you for the recognition you are receiving this evening.