

President's Memorandum to Faculty and Staff

Office of the President
March 1, 2011

Partnerships

One of the three core objectives in Ferris State University's Vision statement is the desire to be the premiere educational partner. Four recent or upcoming public expressions demonstrate our success in pursuing this vision.

Friends of Ferris, Our Communities and Efforts in Lansing

Friday evening more than 240 people attended the Friends of Ferris dinner and auction. This event raises funds that support political efforts for our University. Through this people from throughout the community provide financial support to help our University confront the difficult challenges we face in Lansing. I want to thank the Friends of Ferris board members and the chair, Chip Issette, who helped make this such a successful and enjoyable event. Thanks are also due to so many members of the Ferris community who support this annual event with their attendance and gifts.

Festival of Arts and Big Rapids

Saturday evening Johnnie Bassett and his jazz/blues quartet packed the Blue Cow in downtown Big Rapids despite the snow and cold. This wonderful evening of jazz was a perfect example of how the arts can be an economic catalyst in our community. Sunday's concert by Voca Lyrica and the Con Brio Voce Brass Ensemble helped bring the 2011 Festival of the Arts to a successful conclusion. An exciting part of the closing events was the unveiling of a sculpture by Kendall College Art and Design student Tristan Sisbach. Tristan's sculpture won the festival's sculpture competition and will be installed in Swede Hill Park here in Big Rapids. As remarkable as Tristan's sculpture is the idea for this competition, which came not from the University, but from community member, Mark Gifford. Bravo, Mark.

Please join me in thanking Bruce Dilg, chairman of the Festival for the Arts, for his passion and commitment to make this celebration of culture possible. Thanks also are due to the Festival of the Arts committee members Scott Cohen, Bill Donahue, Mark Gifford and Ed Mallett, as well as to Jack Batdorff for their efforts in making this festival available to our community.

Jim Crow Museum and DTE Foundation

Monday evening the travelling exhibition "Them" from the Jim Crow Museum was unveiled at the Charles H. Wright Museum in Detroit. This event and the evening were sponsored by the DTE Energy Foundation. In his remarks, Jerry Norcia, president of DTE's Mich Con unit, talked of their partnership with Ferris State College which began in 1954 to bring natural gas service to Big Rapids. He quoted directly from our mission statement to highlight his company's pride in partnering with "a University that prepares students for a world that is connected, global and diverse."

The evening announced major support from the DTE Foundation for the Jim Crow Museum. Critical to the support of the DTE Foundation has been its chair, Fred Schell. His remarks spoke directly to the power of the Jim Crow Museum, "I've seen a lot during my long career in public relations and government affairs. But viewing these images from the Jim Crow era was one of the most sobering experiences of my career. I suspect that many people here tonight will experience similar emotions. After seeing the exhibit, I was convinced that the unique and provocative collection deserves an appropriate facility. So we are pleased to not only help the museum expand its space at Ferris State University, but to widen its exposure across the state as well." At Ferris we are deeply appreciative to DTE for their support.

Vice President for Diversity and Inclusion, David Pilgrim, was the featured speaker. Last evening was a triumph for Dr. Pilgrim. His insightful and emotional remarks brought the audience to their feet. It is wonderful to see his efforts to raise funds for the collection meet with such success. If you have experienced the Jim Crow Museum, you know the power of this experience. If you have not, I encourage you to do so. Beyond embracing the vision of partnerships, it embodies our commitment to the values and mission of our University.

Federal Building, Wege Foundation and Grand Rapids

Thursday I will speak at the Grand Rapids Rotary Club. These remarks will focus on how Ferris State University reaches out to Grand Rapids and communities around the state to create enduring partnerships. In Grand Rapids this began with our support for Grand Rapids Community College, where we currently teach more than 2,000 students on their campus and from whom we receive more than a 1,000 transfer students each year. Their president, Steve Ender, will be present.

Next I will highlight our merger with the Kendall College of Art and Design and the extraordinary results from this partnership. At the time of the merger in 2001, Kendall had 500+ students, an annual budget of \$4 million and was in financial difficulty. With renovated facilities, support from Ferris, and great work by the faculty, staff and administration at Kendall, today the school has more than 1,400 students, a \$15 million budget and is a vibrant force in Grand Rapids. President Oliver Evans and others from Kendall will be present.

Over the past two years Ferris has created a developing partnership with underserved communities in Grand Rapids. Working with churches and community organizations we are reaching out to young people who would not traditionally consider attending college. We believe strongly that Ferris is the place where our unique educational programs and strong support systems can help these students. This is a direct reflection of a commitment to access that goes back to our founder, Woodbridge Ferris. Representatives of our partners will be in the audience.

Finally I will share progress on the Federal Building project in Grand Rapids. This \$22 million renovation demonstrates partnerships in a manner unlike any public university project in our state. Representatives from our partnerships with the city, county and industry will be present. The Executive Director of the Wege Foundation, Ellen Satterlee, will join me to announce a \$1 million gift from the Wege Foundation to create the Wege Center for Sustainable Design through this project.

Spring Break

It is hard to believe that next week is our spring recess. This is an exciting and challenging year for our University. If you are travelling next week, please do so carefully. I look forward to the activity of the remainder of our academic year, which will include the accreditation visit by the Higher Learning Commission on April 18-20.

Thank you very much for the difference you make for our students. Have a great spring break.

Sincerely,

David L. Eisler, President