

President M. Roy Wilson
Wayne State University
Sesquicentennial Kickoff
January 26, 2018

Thank you, Sandra.

First, I want to thank our students for their incredible performances. We have remarkable talent here at Wayne State University, don't we? Let's give them a round of applause.

I'd also be remiss if I didn't extend a special thank you to the Sesquicentennial Honorary Committee, for lending their names and support to these efforts. While there are too many members to name individually, you can see a complete list of members in your program book. Several of the committee members are with us here in the audience – would you stand and be recognized?

I would like to highlight one committee member in particular. He is a dear friend and alumnus of Wayne State University—Mr. Eugene Applebaum. Sadly, he died about a month ago. Mr. Applebaum was a celebrated businessman, a visionary philanthropist, and a wonderful man. He will be sorely missed here at his alma mater.

This year, 2018, is the 150th anniversary of Wayne State University's founding as the Detroit Medical College. With all we have to do, it can be tempting to ask, "Why should we care?" 2018 is just another year, and we continue to serve our mission and strive toward our vision of being a pre-eminent, public, urban research university.

But anniversaries like this – our sesquicentennial – are special, and afford us the opportunity to pause for a brief moment. To assess where we have been and where we are. To place ourselves in a longer and larger context. And to envision a brighter future.

We are located in Midtown Detroit. In 1868, there was no such place. In *A Place of Light*, a history of Wayne State written to celebrate its centennial, a passage describes the time and place of our founding.

“Those who drove in during late August, 1868 noticed that nearer at hand, beyond Canfield Street at the Harper Hospital grounds, something unusual was happening. A lumber-dray stood by the road; as they passed the last patch of woods and the hospital’s northerly board fence, the rattle of hammers and zip of hand saws met their ears...

A few veterans from Harper’s Soldiers’ Home stood or sat watching. Otherwise, all was quiet, normal, almost rural. At the hitching-rail on Woodward, in front of the long picket fence, waited a couple of doctors’ rigs. Neither the farmers nor anyone else could imagine they were witnessing an historic event – that here was the beginning of a medical school destined to endure for a century and become part of a state university.”

The place where Wayne State stands today was on the north side of Detroit, “quiet...almost rural.” It certainly wasn’t “Midtown” then. I read this passage at my inauguration, because it allows us to imagine our humble beginnings, and understand our awesome responsibility, today, to build upon the legacy of the great men and women who forged this university over the past 150 years.

Our founders call to us from the past, driving us to do better. And we accept the challenge, even as we honor a history that includes achievements and people, like those you learned about just moments ago, who have changed the world, improved health for millions, and opened wide the door of opportunity.

Here are a few more:

- **Dr. Forest Dodrill**, associate professor of surgery, performed the world’s first successful open-heart surgery at Wayne State University in 1952.

- **Abraham Nemeth**, Ph.D. '64, not only helped create the first computer science programs at Wayne State, he also developed the Nemeth Code, a Braille system for mathematics that allows visually impaired people to study complex computations.
- The Wayne State Tolerance Curve — developed in the Bioengineering Center — established the head injury criterion used in current federal motor vehicle safety standards.
- Beginning in 1947 through her retirement in 1970, College of Nursing **Professor Irene L. Beland** brought a revolutionary approach to educating nurses that continues to be useful today. Instead of viewing an illness as an isolated problem, she taught students to see patients as total individuals, considering psychological and emotional principles in addition to physical concerns. Beland also was instrumental in developing the College of Nursing's graduate programs, now ranked among the top in the nation by *U.S. News and World Report*.
- **Dorothy Comstock Riley** was the first woman to serve on the Michigan Court of Appeals and the first Hispanic woman to be elected to the Supreme Court of any state. Riley was born in Detroit and earned her bachelor's from Wayne State in 1946 and her law degree in 1949. She was Michigan Supreme Court chief justice from 1987 to 1991.
- A 1992 graduate of the College of Liberal Arts and Sciences, **Jihad Mustapha** is known as the “leg saver” for his groundbreaking work with peripheral vascular disease. He holds more than 30 patents for alternative treatments he's created to prevent amputation.

We proudly celebrate our first 150 years in the heart of Detroit, but we live in the present. Our time is now. And what does “now” look like?

- From our founding as the Detroit Medical College we have become a thriving university with 13 schools and colleges serving more than 27,000 students.

- We began in Detroit, and have *remained* in Detroit – a city that has seen the highest heights and the deepest depths, and now is reinventing the great American City.
- Our campus models our values of diversity and inclusion, and embraces a tapestry of diverse races, cultures, creeds and views.
- We continue to make great strides in meeting the goals of our five-year strategic plan. Our enrollment continues to be strong as we welcome increasing numbers of new students every fall. Our overall six-year graduation rate continues to rise remarkably, and our African American graduation rate is more than double what it was just a few years ago. Our Pivotal Moments fundraising campaign is on track to meet or exceed its \$750 million goal. Our research programs are accelerating with broad impact for the communities we serve, and our financial health is stronger.
- As I speak, a new 800-bed facility to accommodate exploding demand for student housing is well under construction on Anthony Wayne Drive. Architects are envisioning plans for a new STEM Innovation Learning Center to restore an aging science building on our campus.
- The Mike Ilitch School of Business is scheduled to open its doors this spring, expanding our campus into District: Detroit while adding academic programs in the business of sports and entertainment. Our new “Warrior Strong” brand campaign is helping us tell our unique stories, and unleash our common spirit.

Driving all this, and the other initiatives I described earlier, is our mission: to create and advance knowledge, prepare a diverse student body to thrive, and positively impact local and global communities. The words are simple and direct. But there is passion behind them.

This is what we do. This is why we get up in the morning. This is why we chose our path, and this university, in this city. To ensure every student has an opportunity to succeed and make their unique mark on the world. To ensure every scholar has the chance to be the next great pioneer in their field.

To continue to be an anchor institution in this city, rising to the challenges faced by urban centers around the world – from health disparities to clean water – and seizing the opportunities unique to our time and place.

We all have choices in our lives. Where to live. What career to pursue. What causes to support, or injustices to oppose. My choice to join Wayne State University is one for which I am profoundly grateful.

I have the privilege to serve as president during this momentous era, but the greater privilege is to be part of a community that daily demonstrates a passion for learning, and a compassion for others, whether students on campus or citizens on the street. A community that sees our cultural values – integrity, excellence, collaboration, innovation, diversity and inclusion – as more than words on paper, but ideals for which we constantly strive, and keys to achieving our vision. A community that will hold each other accountable, and lend a helping hand to a stranger.

We owe a debt to our past, and we pay that debt as we honor the accomplishments of the past. But we do not live in the past.

We also owe a great debt to the future. People who are not yet born, but will benefit from what we do today. People who will hold Wayne State's bicentennial in 2068, and look back at all we faced and all we accomplished. People who will write the history that we live today, and benefit from the legacy we leave. We will not disappoint them.

But we cannot live in the future. Our greatest responsibility is to today. To the mission and people we serve. To the vision that guides us. To the community we share.

What we do in the present honors both the past and the future. This is our time. Our moment. Let us seize our opportunity with pride and determination.

And now I'm happy to announce a new initiative that both celebrates our 150th anniversary and highlights our commitment to the community. I have said many times that Wayne State and Detroit are now and forever linked. We never left when things got tough. We've been here since 1868. We have never wavered. And we are here to stay.

So, as Detroit's research university and a committed member of our Detroit community, how should we celebrate? What about with a goal that shows our heart and our commitment? I challenge our students, faculty, staff and administration to join me in giving back to our community by committing to a year of community service. I have established a goal of 150,000 community service volunteer hours for the university for 2018.

It is a collective university-wide goal to which we all can contribute. Many of you already volunteer through initiatives you are a part of, and these can be counted in the total.

There is no limit to the number of hours each individual can contribute – and indeed, some of the more ambitious people in our Wayne State family may volunteer as many as 150 hours this year in honor of our anniversary. Some of you may want to volunteer for the first time...welcome!

I am excited to announce that one of these organizations, Life Remodeled, is partnering with the university for a major initiative. On Saturday, April 7th, we hope to have 200 Wayne State volunteers at Life Remodeled. If you are not familiar with this organization, I hope this short video will help you understand why we felt it fit so well with our goal of giving back to the community. [*Video*]

I am pleased to introduce Christopher Lambert, president and CEO of Life Remodeled, who has joined us for today's program. [*Christopher stands to be recognized.*]

Thank you, Christopher, for joining us – we look forward to showing you our Warrior spirit on April 7th.

150,000 hours is an ambitious goal, and on Monday, you'll receive an email with additional details including how to track your hours, a link to a website listing organizations in need of volunteers, and suggestions for giving back to our community.

I encourage you to participate, individually or in teams. And I have no doubt that the Wayne State community will not only meet but exceed this goal.

Thank you.

And now, please help me welcome the Wayne State University Concert Chorale.