

Fall Reception to Honor Retiring Faculty

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Friday marks a momentous occasion in the history of UNF not just because we are graduating another class of students, but because of the graduation into retirement of so many of our colleagues, and particularly so many of them who quite literally built this university. The honor owed to our retirees is reflected in the number of people who have chosen to attend this reception:

representatives of our board of trustees; President Delaney and many members of his staff; our deans and associate deans and department chairs; former president Anne Hopkins; and members of Academic Affairs.

We are here this evening not just to wish you well in retirement, but more immediately to thank you for your extraordinary contributions to this university and to the countless students who you had the opportunity to educate over the past 35 years. With regard to those students, it is clear from the devotion of our alumni (e.g., Chuck Ged) that long before we adopted the concept of the TLO as an official initiative of the university, you were transforming lives in ways that still mark a UNF education as special. And with regard to UNF, if you will permit the folklorist to allude to a folktale, like Rumpelstiltskin you transmuted straw into gold, or at least mud and mortar into a large and

complex institution whose potential for greatness seems to me to be fully within our reach.

Many of you are aware that I have been leading a task force to revise our university's mission statement and, perhaps even more importantly, to express our ambitions for the future of UNF in the form of a vision statement. I would like to read a few lines of that vision statement to you. It begins:

“The University of North Florida, a preeminent public institution of higher learning, will serve its metropolitan region at a level of national quality.”

My guess is that 35 years ago, dreamers that you may have been, such a claim might have seemed outlandish. Today, as a result of the effort of the retirees in this room, I believe our aspiration is highly credible.

The second line reads: “The university will provide distinctive programs in the liberal arts and professional fields whose graduates will make vital contributions to the intellectual advancement of Jacksonville, North Florida, and the world beyond.” Once again, I believe that our retirees can claim enormous credit for having touched the lives of so many students who are themselves touching the lives of so many others.

And finally, skipping to the last sentence of the vision: “Students, faculty, staff, and visitors will enjoy a campus noteworthy for its communal spirit, cultural richness, and environmental beauty.”

In this last regard, the UNF of the future will be utterly continuous with the UNF of the past and present. The legacy of community that you are leaving to those of us who still have the privilege and pleasure of working here is no less significant than the programs you have built and the students you have taught. It is what makes UNF feel like an extended family, and it is why we will always regard you as its founding mothers and fathers.