



Patrick F. Leahy

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Thank you, Tom, for that introduction. More importantly, thank you for your efforts in elevating our advancement efforts here at Wilkes.

In the long history of Wilkes, there have been many people who have helped to shape this institution with their dedication: Arnaud Marts, Gilbert McClintock, Harold Stark, George Ralston, Dorothy Darte, and, of course, our first President's Medal recipients – Joe Savitz, John Reese, and Theresa and Clayton Karambelas. Among these Wilkes giants stands yet another – Frank Henry.

Frank is not an alumnus of Wilkes. (In fact, he attended some second-rate university in New Haven, Connecticut – Yale. It's often referred to, of course, as the “Wilkes of Connecticut.”) But, Frank understood early in his career the important role that Wilkes plays in his community, and he adopted us as one of his causes. He agreed to serve on the Board of Trustees, holding the Chairman position for many years, before ultimately being named an emeritus trustee. He actually presided over the board when Wilkes achieved university status in 1990. In addition to his years of service, he, Dottie, and his family have supported the physical growth of the campus, as Tom has indicated.

Few people have been more committed to Wilkes' success than Frank. Every time Wilkes has called, Frank has answered. What we honor tonight with the awarding of the President's Medal – Wilkes' highest honor – is a lifelong commitment to Wilkes College and now Wilkes University.

Frank, would you join me at the podium please?

With the full support of the entire community, I, Patrick Leahy, President of Wilkes University, am pleased to present to you, Frank Henry, the President's Medal – Wilkes University's highest honor – which is bestowed annually on individuals whose personal and professional lives reflect the highest aspirations of Wilkes University. Congratulations!

Frank, on behalf of all of us gathered here, thank you for your steadfast generosity and loyal friendship. Please join me in saluting Frank Henry one more time.

This year, 2017, marks 70 years since our founding as an independent Wilkes College. In that long history, there has never been a better time at Wilkes.

As many of you know, we were founded in 1933 as Bucknell University Junior College. In 1947, we became an independent Wilkes College. In 1961, we offered our first master's degrees in physics and chemistry. In 1990, under the leadership of President Chris Breiseth, Wilkes College became Wilkes University to reflect the growth in our graduate programming. In 1996, we offered our first doctoral degree with the launch of the Pharmacy program. In 2006, we initiated our first research doctoral degree – the Ed.D. And, this fall of 2017, we will offer our first Ph.D. degree – the Ph.D. in Nursing. Today, if the Carnegie Foundation – which classifies all 5,000 or so institutions of higher learning in America – were to update its classifications, Wilkes would be considered a doctoral research university. This would complete our evolution from a junior college to a research university, which is the highest category in American higher education. It would enable us to enter the company of the finest universities in the nation.

There has never been a better time at Wilkes.

Today, we offer more academic programs, more athletics programs, and more clubs than ever before. These activities now serve more students (5,635) from more states (45) and from more countries (24) than ever before.

We are – like never before – becoming a university, as I like to say, “in all of its splendor.” In this most recent academic year, Wilkes conferred 1,521 degrees (583 bachelor's, 816 master's, and 122 doctoral degrees), placing us in the top 10 percent of all private colleges and universities nationwide in total degrees conferred. And, only five private institutions in Pennsylvania conferred at least as many bachelor's, master's, and doctoral degrees as Wilkes: Penn, Drexel, Carnegie Mellon, Villanova, and Duquesne.

We continue to make unprecedented investments in our campus here in downtown Wilkes-Barre: \$50 million over the past five years and \$50 million more over the next five years. In the next 15 months alone we will complete five major projects: 1) the Karambelas Media & Communication Center to consolidate our television studio, our radio station, our student newspaper, and more under one roof; 2) the Sordoni Art Gallery to expand and improve the visual arts for the benefit both of our students and of our community members; 3) a total renovation of Stark Learning Center to accommodate our growing engineering and health sciences programs; 4) a companion gateway to connect the south part of campus to the Fenner Quadrangle, just like the Karambelas Gateway connects the east part of campus; and 5) a Neighborhood Enhancement Project to upgrade the sidewalks and pedestrian access throughout South Wilkes-Barre. People often tell me that the campus has never looked better. I reply, “If you think the campus looks good now, just wait a year or so.”

As an evolving research university, there is also more discovery happening at Wilkes than ever before. By discovery, I mean scholarship, research, and entrepreneurial activity. Early cancer detection, wound therapy, Alzheimer's, minority voting patterns, global climate change – the big issues of our day. I just learned last week that we have faculty members collaborating across disciplines to figure out how to extract resveratrol from abundant ragweed. Resveratrol is a natural ingredient that evidently extends human life and is now most commonly ingested through the drinking of red wine. (I, for one, rather prefer that method.) You wouldn't be surprised if you heard all of this research coming out of Penn or Penn State, and this is happening right here on this campus.

In addition, we are raising more money to support these efforts than ever before. In just this past year, we gained \$15 million in commitments to our Gateway to the Future Campaign. Over the last few years, we have generated nearly \$10 million in support from the Commonwealth of Pennsylvania. (Please thank our elected officials before you leave here tonight.) And, as you heard from Tom earlier, we raised \$500 thousand dollars tonight alone for the benefit of our first-generation students. I can't thank you enough for your support.

As I said, there has never been a better time at Wilkes.

But, what I am most enthusiastic about is not all of this. What I am most enthusiastic about is the collection of people we have assembled to lead these efforts: administrators, deans, faculty and staff members, board members, and volunteers. In the last five years alone, we have hired 105 additional full-time employees, a higher percentage of which were faculty members than our previous rates. This brings our full-time employment to nearly 600. In calendar year 2016, Wilkes issued over 1,900 W-2s to various full-time, part-time, and contract employees.

In his memoirs, President Farley said, "I believe we should always recognize that it is the individual who gives substance and vitality to an institution." It is the individual who gives substance and vitality to an institution. I like to say, a bit more plainly, "Great people make great universities." And, we have great people assembled at Wilkes right now.

As we continue to evolve and develop as a national university, we will remain forever faithful to our founding mission, that is, to be a private institution with a public purpose.

First, we will continue to provide academic opportunity to students from this region and beyond, a very large percentage of whom will continue to be the first in their families to pursue a college education, like Danay, Gabriel, and Courtney. A private, non-sectarian university with 51 percent first-generation, 36 percent Pell grant, and 27 percent diversity among its undergraduate student body is almost unheard of. I like to say that we out-access even many public institutions in providing academic opportunity. You see, we at Wilkes believe talent is everywhere, and it is our job as educators to find it in our students and help them unleash it.

And second, in so doing, we will continue to be a force – not just a participant, but a force – for positive economic, cultural, and social development for this city, for this region, and increasingly for this country. Just by being located in this area we generate over \$200 million in economic impact annually. And, even more important than that, we are intentional about providing countless services to the community to aid its development. I was extremely proud to tout these outreach efforts during a speech at the United Nations on May 11 when Wilkes became a founding sponsor of International Micro-, Small-, and Medium-Sized Enterprises Day, one of just six American colleges or universities to be invited to do so.

What energizes me the most at Wilkes is not everything we have done in our last 70 years, but everything we can do together in our next 10 years. If we continue to grow our student population, if we continue to develop our campus and our host city, if we continue to commit to more discovery, if we continue to raise resources to support these efforts, if we continue to assemble great people in this effort (like all of you) . . . then we will look back 10 years from now and will thank God that Wilkes University was here.

There has never been a better time at Wilkes. Thank you all for being a part of it.