

*President Mark B. Rosenberg is in Detroit for the Little Caesars Pizza Bowl on Sunday, Dec. 26. The president is sharing commentary and photos from his trip, so be sure to check out his blog on this whirlwind trip. Below is the president's first entry:*



Detroit at Christmas? As the USA 3000 Charter landed in a snow-covered airport on the outskirts of the once-mighty industrial city, I could only wonder what to expect!

Sure, the surrounding grounds at the airport were blanketed with white – from the snow of a days-earlier precipitation that in more Southern climes is the rain Floridians normally enjoy.

As we approached the FIU team headquarters, the Fort Shelby Detroit Downtown Doubletree hotel, white plumes of steam rising from boilers in scattered dirty brick buildings reminded me of an earlier life in Pittsburgh, where the harsh winters seemed to never end.

Stepping off the bus at the hotel, we were greeted warmly by the host senior management. Bill Aprill, director of sales, happily volunteered that his sister—Susan Aprill Tiffin — graduated from FIU. Imagine—the first person in Detroit that we meet has a direct connection to FIU! Now I was feeling more comfortable—proving the point that wherever you go, you can find a connection to our vibrant institution. But wait—it gets better.



*Is it a sign? FIU alumna Syesha Mercado is in Detroit performing with the touring production of Dreamgirls.*

We are invited by the Little Caesars Pizza Bowl Host Committee to attend a production of *Dreamgirls* at the historic Fox Theater in downtown Detroit. Who is the lead performer in the musical? None other than FIU theater graduate and *American Idol* second runner-up Syesha Mercado! Upon hearing about Syesha's presence here in Detroit, Alumni Relations Associate Vice President Bill Draughon promptly declared in an email message that this was a "sign."

Of course Detroit has many "signs." One penetrating analysis about the city (*Chicago Art Magazine*, Nov. 26, 2010) outlines the "utopic visions" to build a new urban community that pivots around a revitalized artistic community, community gardens that replace brownfields and abandoned buildings, and a more assertive back-to-nature elan that will provide some solidarity in the face of an otherwise bleak set of trends—depopulation, rising crime, high unemployment.

There is no possible way to judge exactly which direction the city will take, but I would not underestimate the will of city leaders to find a path to a more promising tomorrow for what remains of the urban population.

So Detroit at Christmas? Today was a very good start to the first football bowl that FIU has experienced! We can be grateful to the city and to Little Caesars Pizza Bowl leaders for their initiative. And for those pizza lovers, no— we have not yet encountered stacks of Little Caesars piping fresh hot pizza anywhere in Detroit!