



Address at FIU's 2011 Employee Holiday Celebration

**Given by Mark B. Rosenberg
on December 7, 2011**



This speech was presented to at FIU's Employees at their annual Holiday Celebration on December 7, 2011.

Good afternoon! It's always great to get together as a family and celebrate our blessings – all of the wonderful experiences and accomplishments from the past year and all of the wonderful experiences and accomplishments that await us in the year ahead. And today is a great day to reflect on all that we have to be proud of as an FIU family.

You can be proud that all of your hard work, many times under difficult circumstances and with few resources, is making a difference. Your contributions are making FIU an institution where students want to come and get an education and where people want to come and work.

You can be proud that you are making a difference: You have made FIU a Great College to Work For. The Chronicle of Higher Education recognized us as a Great College to Work For in the category of Diversity. This recognizes that we have created a culture around diversity, one that respects and fosters the contributions of each person. Your generosity just helped us exceed our United Way goal of \$200,000. You are making important contributions through our Haiti initiative, to help rebuild a country that is still hurting, almost two years after an earthquake ravaged it.

You have been out in the community, promoting healthy living and battling diseases such as heart disease and stroke by taking part in the Mercedes-Benz Corporate Run and the American Heart Association Heart Walk. You are participating in partnerships, like our partnership with Miami-Dade County Public Schools, which has led to groundbreaking programs such as our Academy for Advanced Academics and the Education Effect at Miami Northwestern High School, where we are creating a college-going culture.

Last holiday season you brightened the lives of hundreds of children in our community by donating almost 1,400 toys. And you've done it again this season, by donating hundreds of toys again. Let me share with you a story that shows why we should be proud of how the faculty and staff of FIU pull together to change lives. This story starts with a mother named Lily, who has a 21-year-old son with an intellectual disability.

His name is Alex. Doctors told Lily early on in Alex's life that there were things he would never do, like play football or ride a bike. Alex proved them wrong, exceeding their expectations. The day came when Alex wanted to break yet another barrier.

He told his mother: "I want to go to college."

Lily was determined to make her son's dream come true even if she didn't know how she would do so. So she started knocking on doors, asking every institution she could think of how she could make this happen. At FIU, we opened that door. Our provost, Douglas Wartzok, and his staff joined forces with Vice President of Student Affairs Rosa Jones, College of Education Dean Delia Garcia and Special Education Professor Diana Valle-Riestra, along with other faculty and staff, to come up with a plan. Working with Miami-Dade County Public Schools and Lily, they created Panther LIFE - Learning is For Everyone. Today Alex and seven other students with intellectual disabilities have the opportunity to attend college courses, participate in college life and grow into productive, independent adults who will give back to this community. Today, Alex and his fellow students walk around our campus feeling proud that they belong. And they can do so thanks to the efforts of so many people at FIU - faculty and staff from the Provost's Office, Student Affairs, the College of Education, the Disability Resource Center, as well as everyone else, including people in this room, who offer them a warm smile, kind words or a helping hand when you see them on campus.

We are a university that serves our entire community, thanks to all of you. And that is something we all can be proud of. Thank you for all that you do. Thank you for your hard work and dedication. And thank you for making FIU a university we can be proud of. And now, to get the party started and to get the conga line started, here are our very own Dazzlers.