



HR Service & Recognition Awards Ceremony

**Given by Mark B. Rosenberg
on October 27, 2009**



Office of the President
FLORIDA INTERNATIONAL UNIVERSITY

This speech was presented to attendees of the Annual Faculty and Staff Service & Recognition Awards Ceremony on October 27, 2009.

It's great to be back home. There is no place like South Florida, and I can't think of a better place, a more vibrant community, for an institution to thrive. I am grateful for this special occasion because it is one more opportunity I get to say "thank you" for your many contributions to FIU, for your many years of service, and for the quality of service that is keeping FIU on track to becoming one of our country's leading student-centered urban public research universities. Before we go on, let's take a moment to remember the employees who have passed away since our last ceremony. Their hard work on behalf of FIU students and the ways in which they touched the lives of their co-workers will always remain with us.

[MOMENT OF SILENCE]

Thank you.

As many of you have heard me say before, our employees are masters at turning the impossible into the inevitable. The FIU story is proof of that - when we opened our doors 37 years ago on an abandoned airfield who could have imagined we would become a major public research university and a major economic development, job creation and innovation engine for our community?

I could recite all of our accomplishments from the beginning, but with four decades of history, we could be here until next week. Still, I'd like to share some highlights that employees in this room took part in:

35 years:

Those of you who are celebrating 35 years with FIU will remember working under the leadership of our first President, Chuck Perry, and you experienced many of our "firsts", including our first graduating ceremony in the reading room of the library on the ground floor of Primera Casa.

Once we had our first alumni, you saw the opening of our first alumni office and were here for the construction of our student center, then known as University House, with its colonial dining room that sold hamburgers for 30 cents, hot dogs for 25 cents, and a can of beer for 40 cents.

And you were here when we created a division of Student Affairs, reaffirming our commitment to meet our students' needs and when we opened what was then our North Miami Campus, expanding our reach into the community and bringing more students into the FIU fold.

30 years:

Those of you who have been here 30 years were here in time to welcome our third president, Gregory Wolfe, who shepherded FIU through a major evolution, as it went from a two-year upper division school with limited graduate programs to a four-year university with doctoral programs.

In your first years here, FIU established the English Language Institute, which over the years has helped thousands of international students and professionals master the English language. It was just one of many ways FIU, over the years, lived up to its middle name of "international".

During those years, our athletics program began taking shape with our talented student athletes fueling successful programs in volleyball, tennis, golf, soccer and women's basketball and building a new men's basketball program.

It was during that time that we established the Latin American and Caribbean Center, using a talented pool of FIU professors to create one of the country's preeminent centers for the study of the region.

Our dedication to students also took a leap forward as we welcomed our first freshmen on August 26, 1981 - our "First-Class First Class" - and established our School of Nursing, expanding the career opportunities for our students and impacting our community through the training of health professionals.

25 years:

For those who are celebrating their silver anniversaries with FIU, you were here when we opened our first dorms, another step in turning FIU into a comprehensive university, and you helped launch the Maidique era and the transformation that FIU underwent under his leadership.

Some of the big changes in those years were with names - our Tamiami Campus became University Park. Bay Vista went back to being called North Miami Campus, our School of Technology became the School of Engineering and we went from being Sunblazers to Golden Panthers as our athletes began playing at the Division I level.

At the same time, arts and culture were playing a big role at FIU. Our students had opportunities to showcase their talents through a variety of productions and well-known international artists came to our university, expanding the cultural horizons of our entire student body and our community.

FIU made history as well when it was the site of a historic outdoor Mass by Pope John Paul II.

And our student life grew, as students established fraternities and sororities on campus, complete with toga parties.

20 years:

For our 20-year employees, you were here for the historic commencement where we honored Celia Cruz and President Bush, who famously said “They won’t be asking ‘FI-Who?’ anymore.”

And he was right. You were here for FIU’s maturity. We dedicated the library at our North campus. We strengthened our traditions and created new ones, such as the unveiling of a new seal, with the motto “Spes, Scientia, Facultas” – “Hope, Knowledge and Opportunity”

FIU received its first patent and our students revived their newspaper, naming it the Beacon. Our students and employees also got a new home – the Ernest R. Graham University Center.

You were also here for one of the biggest challenges for our university and South Florida – the aftermath of Hurricane Andrew.

Many of you rolled up your sleeves and joined the relief effort, showing that FIU cared about its community, even while you worked long hours to make our university operational again.

Appropriately enough, our university became the new home of the National Hurricane Center, a major step in helping FIU establish itself as a hub for hurricane research.

15 years:

Our 15-year employees came in time for a period of tremendous physical growth at FIU, including construction of the Wertheim Performing Arts Center and other buildings on our campuses. We added the millionth book to our library collection and expanded the library to house even more books and resources for our students, faculty and staff. During those years FIU began receiving recognition as the number one producer of Hispanic graduates and one of the top producers of African-American graduates in our country.

We also took the first steps to establish distance learning, giving our students even more options to obtain a first-rate FIU education. In those early 90s, with 50,000 alumni, we were becoming an ever-stronger force in our community as many of our graduates remained and contributed to our region.

10 years:

For our decade-long employees, you witnessed FIU seizing its international destiny as it played host to heads of state and other international figures such as His Holiness the Dalai Lama.

We had visiting professors such as Betty Friedan and increased our reach in the community, establishing the Metropolitan Center in downtown Miami to help our decision makers forge solutions to community problems. We also established a College of Law, fulfilling a need in our diverse community for an affordable law education.

Academically, FIU continued climbing the rankings and attained the highest ranking in the Carnegie Foundation classification system. We also became the youngest university invited into Phi Beta Kappa and we played – and won – our first-ever collegiate football game.

5 years:

And for the employees who are celebrating five years with FIU, after hearing all the great accomplishments that preceded you, you might wonder if you've made an impact in just five years with our university.

I am here to tell you that you have! You were here as all the components came together for FIU to aspire to be one of the country's top universities.

In the years since you joined us, FIU has stretched farther than before, establishing a hospitality and tourism school in Tianjin, China. Closer to home, we established a School of Public Health, opened the Broward Pines Center and built the spectacular new Patricia and Phillip Frost Art Museum. We also made tremendous strides in enhancing our students' college experience, including building a football stadium.

And we finally established South Florida's only public College of Medicine. This medical school was the result of a hard-fought battle to increase access to health care for our community and access to a medical education for those in our community who might otherwise not have the opportunity.

The thread that runs through all of these accomplishments and milestones is the commitment of our employees – to our students and to learning, entrepreneurship, research, innovation and creativity.

Your belief in FIU and its ability to harness the knowledge and passion of our employees to engage the community and address our most pressing challenges, both locally and globally, will carry us through the next phase of FIU's growth. I look forward to writing that next chapter in the FIU story together, and now... I would like to share a special message with you from our service recipients...