



Remembering our Third President

**Given by Mark B. Rosenberg
on February 2, 2016**



This speech was presented to attendees of the Memorial for Gregory B. Wolfe held at the Biscayne Bay Campus Mary Ann Wolfe Theater on February 2, 2016.

Thank you for joining us today to celebrate the life of Dr. Gregory B. Wolfe, a visionary who was determined to turn FIU into an urban Flagship.

While we remember Gregory as our president, there are many here in this room who considered him their friend – but a special few got to call him Dad, Granddad, or Uncle. We are so blessed to have members of the Wolfe Family with us today.

Many former and current students, professors, administrators, and board members are also with us; thank you all for coming today and paying tribute to President Emeritus Wolfe!

I want to thank the Wolfe family for the honor of leading this celebration of life and likewise, on behalf of the other speakers, thank the Wolfe's for the honor that you have bestowed on them to help celebrate your father and grand-dad.

Gregory assumed the presidency of our university in March 1979! He was our Third President. That year, FIU granted 2,700 degrees and had about 12,000 students. Flare jeans were in; so were disco outfits. Jethro Toll and Led Zeppelin were rockin' it, the Village People had just released "In the Navy", Miami Sound Machine was just starting up, and Willie Chirino was already into his 5th album. Camp David Accords, the Panama Canal Treaty Sandinista Revolution was kicking in, then the Mariel Boat Lift, the Haitian Boat Lift in Grenada, the Liberty City Riots, and a new President; Ronald Reagan.

Closer to home, our friend Maurice Ferre was city of Miami Mayor and the Miami News was the leading evening newspaper! About the same time, the reporter, Michael Putney began his long and illustrious career with WPLG.

When we first met our new President Greg Baker Wolfe at FIU – here is what happened:

Imagine a classroom in Primera Casa – now named after our Founding President Chuck Perry, located at what is now the Modesto A. Maidique Campus. Then, imagine the Tamiami Campus – a classroom packed with many of the university’s aggressive founding faculty, and a lot of fresh-eye newbie liberal arts faculty, all of whom thought they knew it all – John Stack and Tom Breslin among them.

Our new President strolls into the expectant gathering interrupting what seemed like a thousand small conversations. Our new stately Dean of the College of Arts and Sciences, from Yale, James A. Mau warmly greets our new President with the following:

“Welcome Dr. Wolfe! Welcome to the center of the University – the College of Arts and Sciences!”

Dr. Wolfe did not even wait for “Sciences” to be completed – his blue eyes pierced Dr. Mau and the rest of us with a confident gaze – and then he completed the sentence with his trademark no **[BLANK]**:

“Happy to be here, but I always thought that the center of the university was the library.”

You could hear a pin drop. We did not see that coming...

Our new president had just arrived, and disarmed us all – including our usually infallible and unflappable dean.

Imagine a polished academic and practitioner of realpolitik in our midst at the fragile point in our evolution:

Following a charismatic and visionary founding president, Chuck Perry – whom himself was followed by a gentle judge – Hal Crosby who was a caretaker for nearly three years – in the midst of local and global upheaval – here is Greg Wolfe.

And one of the first things Greg Wolfe does is tell Tallahassee that he intended to alter the limited and limiting vision of our university as a “lunchbox institution” – that it needed to become major state university. That “no”, we would not merge with FAU, and that “no” – our enrollment could not be capped, and that “oh yes” – we needed a freshman class.

The faculty then understood quickly that the fire next door – in Nicaragua, in Grenada, in some of our very own neighborhoods could not match the fire in Gregory’s belly to build our university and our community. And so it has been with every president since!

Among his many achievements, he developed the Biscayne Bay Campus. Thanks to his leadership and hard work, today BBC is an integral part of FIU and of this community. So it is fitting that we gather here at BBC to remember him.

Thank you everyone for joining us today to remember Dr. Wolfe.