



Address at the 14th Annual Torch Awards

**Given by Mark B. Rosenberg
on March 28, 2015**



*This speech was presented to FIU Alumni and guests
of the 14th Annual Torch Awards on March 28, 2015.*

Thank you all for being here! Congratulations to our Torch Awardees!

So here we are - 2015. The 50th Anniversary of the legislature's creation of FIU!

You and I are here for the same reason. We want to celebrate the accomplishments of our former students, to bask in the reflected glory of their good work. We also know that this is a special moment to rededicate ourselves to keeping hope and opportunity alive for the hundreds of thousands of students who will enroll in and graduate from our FIU in the *next* 50 years.

How did we get here? We have been on a mission! Every decade we have had a cause – a grand project! The 60s – to get the university chartered and funded. The 70s – to get the university staffed, operating, and opened. The 80s – expand the university and initiate housing and grad programs. The 90s – to build a research university.

The 2000s – the law school and medical school. It was the medical school initiative that prompted a statement from a senior higher education officer, the then Provost of UF. When I informed him that we were going for a medical school, he reacted viscerally - with all his upstate hubris! He couldn't mask his disgust. His verbal response – which I will never forget! “You folks down there want everything, don't you?”

“You folks down there”...That's us! ... You and me. All we wanted was broader shoulders to carry a heavier load. And we did it the hard way – “from the ground up”!

The expectations then were not high. That's why they only gave us 340 acres, even while they were giving other public universities (opened during the same period) twice and three times as much land for their main campuses.

We owe a debt of gratitude to former County Commissioner, Robert M. Haverfield, who as a freshman senator got Senate Bill 711 passed in June 1965 to create FIU! Isn't it ironic that it was a county commissioner who heroically took the lead! Little did we know that our fate would again lie in the hands of our County Commission – but now there are four FIU grads on that commission, poised with their colleagues, to do right by our community; to help us keep the doors of hope and opportunity to our community open by helping us to expand on land that unapologetically should have been ours in the first place!

And so we built our FIU from the ground up! Chuck Perry, our founding President, will not apologize for wanting it all. And Greg Wolfe will not apologize. And Mitch Maidique – you know that he ain't apologizing! Chuck Perry's first official statement on August 1, 1969 was: "A university is not built in a day, in a year, or even in a decade. Its creation is a long, arduous, and cumulative process, which will require the dedicated help and support of all segments of our community."

And this year, we will graduate a record 12,500 students. Some of these graduates will have a special connection to our founding. As you all know, FIU was founded on the old Tamiami Airport grounds. As FIU grew, campus sprawled out around the iconic tower – which has been home to many different departments over the years.

Last year, the tower became home to yet another group: our veterans. Today, we have with us some of our active military and veteran students who work and study in this new space. Will our FIU military and veteran group please rise and be recognized? In the next ten years, we will graduate nearly 130,000 students. Many – like these veterans – you will know ... and yet others you will *need*. They will be your sons and daughters, grandsons, granddaughters; your nurses, doctors, bankers, engineers, architects, artists, mayors, commissioners.

If you graduated from FIU or indeed live in this community, have we done right by you? Are we doing right by the 12,500 graduates this year? Will we do right by the thousands who will choose us by choice or indeed because we are the only option? We cannot do this unilaterally without you! We want broader shoulders so we do not have to lighten the load. We want the eligible sons and daughters from every zip code in Miami-Dade County. Some of you...many of you, might not be where you are today if we had been apologetic, if we had not advocated for your right to be educated at FIU...From the ground up!

We have only just begun. You must guide us! I challenge everyone in this room to give back to your FIU! And then I challenge you to encourage a fellow alumnus or two to give back as well! The great universities of our nation have alumni who stand behind them. You can show you are behind your FIU by demonstrating your Panther pride. Mentor one of our students. Offer our students internships. Donate to your FIU and support one of our great initiatives. Get an FIU license plate. Help us continue to be a beacon of hope and opportunity for South Florida.

Our founders built FIU from the ground up on a runway. We need you to take it to the next horizon! The consensus in our community is that world class cities deserve world class universities.

Help us build a world class university!