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11-12-2014

### 47th Annual University Hill Corporation Meeting & Luncheon

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*Syracuse University*

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#### Recommended Citation

Syverud, Kent, "47th Annual University Hill Corporation Meeting & Luncheon" (2014). *Chancellor's Office (2004 - 2013)*. 97.

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# Syracuse University

Remarks by Chancellor Kent Syverud

Delivered on Wednesday, November 12, 2014

Location: Drumlins Country Club

Remarks: 47<sup>th</sup> Annual University Hill Corporation Meeting & Luncheon

*The Chancellor was introduced by Executive Vice President, Board Vice Chairman of Crouse Hospital, Dr. Paul Kronenberg*

Thank you, Paul. Good afternoon, everyone. It is great to be here with so many distinguished folks whose leadership of our neighbor institutions makes University Hill such a vibrant and critically important part of this city and region.

I am so glad for this opportunity to talk to you a little about my background, about some of the challenges facing higher education today, and about my vision for how Syracuse University can become even stronger in the face of—and because of—those challenges.

Although I have only been at Syracuse since January, I am proud to call myself an Upstate New Yorker. I grew up in Irondequoit, near Rochester. My dad worked at Eastman Kodak, and my mother worked for Rochester General Hospital. My twin brother went to medical school here on the Hill, my other brother was editor [now retired] of The Daily Messenger in Canandaigua, and my sister worked at St. Elizabeth's Utica for decades.

So I have a pretty deep background in Upstate New York. And it is great to be back.

This city and region have such incredible assets: the chance to experience all four seasons. A rich history of innovation and phenomenal cultural, medical, and educational assets. And, most of all, wonderful people.

I like the ethic of hard work and the deep sense of community. It has a Midwest feel to it. And by that I mean, decent, hard-working and unentitled folks who pull together and support one another and the community.

I like that wherever I go, people care about the University—and not just the sports teams, although they do claim their share of attention. I like that folks here—especially those of you in this room—care passionately about your institutions, this city and region, and that, in spite of its challenges, you choose to be here and work together on solutions.

I believe the greatest contribution Syracuse University can make to this city and region is to be a great, thriving, and engaged international research university.

I think we do that best by producing and pursuing cutting-edge research and scholarship. By being a place of excellence that attracts students who are hungry for knowledge and willing to work hard to attain it. By attracting and retaining world-class faculty who excel as researchers as well as teachers and mentors to our students by engaging with our communities.

These are challenging times for institutions of higher education. Technology is changing the way we learn and do just about everything; access, affordability, and return-on-investment are growing concerns; competition for the best students and faculty is increasingly fierce; and demographics debates simmer over whether colleges and universities are professional training schools, liberal arts schools, both, or something more.

These and other shifting dynamics present challenges. But for universities willing to embrace change and innovation in place of “business as usual,” they also present incredible opportunities.

But it requires us to think strategically, to act nimbly, and to not be afraid to lead the way.

That is why I am focusing on four areas that I believe the University needs to prioritize in order to thrive well into the future.

First is to advance an outstanding student experience here at Syracuse. We do that by making sure our students have excellent teachers, innovative research opportunities, diverse learning experiences—on campus, in the community, and around the world—and supportive staff who care about them. We also do that by building an unrivalled College of Arts and Sciences. The college is the heart of the liberal arts experience at Syracuse and home to the largest number of undergraduates.

Second, I believe we need to encourage and support even more collaborative research that pulls from across the disciplines. The emerging needs of the world today are incredibly complex, messy, and sprawling. Sustainable solutions require input from multiple perspectives and areas of expertise.

By investing in interdisciplinary research that targets specific and emerging areas of need, we will enhance our standing as a global research university that is acutely attuned to the needs of the community and world and equipped to respond. I believe that is the greatest value that the University can bring to this city and region.

Third, as I mentioned briefly already—we need to not be afraid to change and innovate, because that is how we distinguish ourselves from our peers. Syracuse has a long legacy of innovation and change—from welcoming in record numbers of returning GI's after World War II to building an expansive global studies infrastructure and program to seeding student entrepreneurship to collaborating with community and global partners on scholarship initiatives that tackle urgent problems of the day.

Innovation requires both a compelling strategic vision and fortitude—a willingness to act boldly and to take risks that will make us more distinctive to prospective students and to the world. Syracuse University is what it is today because of chancellors who were unafraid to shake up the status quo in favor of risks that ultimately would make the University stronger and more distinctive.

When Chancellor Tolley decided that Syracuse would lead the way in enrolling veterans under the newly implemented GI Bill, he changed the face of the campus forever—and that one key decision continues to define and shape the University today.

That brings me to the fourth priority area. I believe we must once again become the best university in the world for veterans. We have done it before, and we can do it again. We do it by building on the work of the Institute for Veterans and Military Families and other cross-campus initiatives that seek to empower those who have borne the battle.

Yesterday I had the honor of participating in the University's annual Veterans' Day observance. As I listened to the speakers, I was reminded yet again of the tremendous asset our veterans are to the University across multiple dimensions.

They bring to the classroom incredible leadership and teamwork skills, a hard-working and entrepreneurial spirit, an astute world view, and a desire to get the most out of their education. They make the University a better place, enhance the lives of all those students lucky enough to learn alongside and from them, and they go on to achieve amazing things.

There are more than 3 million men and women in uniform who will be coming out of active service in the next few years. Ninety-nine percent of them have high school degrees. The great universities are underserving them, just like they at the end of WWII. Expanding opportunity for these

young men and women to earn their college degree is not only in their best interests—it is in all of our best interests.

So these are four key areas that I believe we can and must build on.

To further clarify priorities and how to best achieve them, the University also recently launched an ambitious strategic initiative, Fast Forward Syracuse. The initiative will provide a framework for how Syracuse will improve and get better by embracing change and prioritizing students as the primary focus of everything we do.

It is three-pronged and includes participation across the University's many constituencies. Its components are:

- A Strategic Plan, centered on academics, that lays out a shared vision for the University and identifies clear priorities and action steps needed to achieve it.
- A Campus Master Plan framework to guide decisions about the University's strategic infrastructure needs.
- An Operational Excellence Program to help the University be more effective, maximize efficiencies, and create opportunities and resources for funding investment in the Strategic Plan and Campus Master Plan.

Development of all three components is under way, but implementation will be a multi-year process. It will require us to act both thoughtfully and quickly, especially given the rapidly shifting landscape of higher education and increased public scrutiny of its role and relevance.

The overarching goal of this work is to position Syracuse strongly as an innovator and leader among its peers in advancing excellence and assuring successful outcomes for our students. I think this is the single most important way we can serve the best interests of this community and region.

The University is looking at other issues that affect our relationship with our University Hill neighbors and the larger community as well, including the size of our incoming class. Universities face incredible competition today, and we want a robust student body. But we do not want to achieve it at the expense of our educational mission.

So we are looking to determine just how big we can be without compromising our educational mission. We do not have the answers yet, but we are looking at that closely and will continue to make adjustments.

With technological advancements, stiff competition for the best students and faculty scholars, and increasing calls for an education with real-world relevance and a proven return on investment, universities simply cannot afford to rest on their laurels. They must have a clear vision of where they want to go and how they are going to get there. They must build on their existing strengths—but not be afraid to change. And they must—always—prioritize students as central to everything they do.

By doing this, I believe we are positioning Syracuse University to take advantage of emerging opportunities and thrive for generations to come. That is good news for the University, of course, but it is also good news for the city and region and our University Hill partners.

We have historically called our schools “anchor” institutions because they really do anchor our regions and are here after other industries leave. Perhaps “anchor,” though, is the wrong nautical term for what we do. “Anchor” has some negative connotations too—it holds the ship down and keeps it from moving forward. It creates a vision of something heavy and sinking.

That is not at all what a great research university does for a city.

Rather, we can, at our best, provide a support that enables the ship to do what it does best—move, thrive, and carry the community. In this sense,

the more apt nautical analogy would be “mainstay”—the rope that supports the main mast and thereby helps hold the ship on course.

Likewise, many of you here today represent “mainstay” institutions, businesses, or organizations for the city and region—choosing to stay in place even when others move on, and working tirelessly to guide the city toward prosperity.

At Syracuse University we are proud to be a mainstay of this city and region—not the whole ship but a vital support along with so many of you.

Syracuse has a lot to be proud of. I have been in all sorts of great places, many of them taking excessive pride in where and who they are. None of them should be as proud as Syracuse. It’s good here, nowhere better that I have lived.

Yes, we have challenges—as all cities do everywhere, especially older industrial cities. But that spirit—that we can do great things when we work together and that we all have a stake in the outcome—that is what gives me confidence. Many thanks.

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