



Investiture of Dr. Robert O. Davies

President's Address

March 19, 2019

I am honored and humbled to wear this medallion today as I am formally installed as the 15th president of Central Michigan University and accept the responsibilities of leading this nationally recognized research university.

My sincere appreciation goes out to those who inspire me every day: our students, faculty, staff and alumni. Each day, you present me with new reasons to be grateful, to stretch further, and to foster ever-greater vision, enthusiasm and dedication.

I'd like to thank current and former members of the Central Michigan University Board of Trustees for their faith in me to uphold this position. I promise to continue to be worthy of your confidence, and I look forward to working with you to advance the university on all fronts.

Additionally, I want to acknowledge the extremely warm welcome my family and I have had from members of the greater community, in spite of the below-freezing wind chills of this winter.

My wife, Cindy, our daughter, Katie, and I thank you for embracing us as part of your family and helping us feel at home so quickly.

I want to thank our community leaders and legislators for your service and commitment to CMU. We are proud and eager to partner with you to achieve a bright future for Michigan.

Today, we also are joined by representatives from many peer and neighboring colleges and universities. I look forward to working alongside each of you in the years to come.

When I accepted the role as Central Michigan University's 15th president, I knew I was following in the footsteps of a great leader. I am honored to have my predecessor, President Emeritus George E. Ross, and his wife, Elizabeth, with us today.

When I stand beside Dr. Ross, I am very much reminded of, and fully understand, Sir Isaac Newton's famous words, "If I have seen further, it is by standing upon the shoulders of giants." I look forward to building on the foundation you have established.

I also am joined by many friends who have worked with me previously. Thank you — you have made this journey special. You have supported me and taught me valuable lessons. I will always cherish the times we have shared, the work we have accomplished, our friendships, and most importantly, the many lives we have positively impacted.

I would like especially to thank Carol Burdette for joining us today. Carol and her husband, the late David Burdette, have played a special role in my professional career. More importantly, David and Carol became more than friends, as they are part of our family.

Some of you had the chance to meet David while he was Central's vice president of finance and administrative services. David and I first met as vice presidents at Indiana University of Pennsylvania — prior to him coming here to CMU. In fact, it was David, in his role as a mentor and friend, who first encouraged me to imagine myself here at Central Michigan University. I know he is here, spiritually, with us today.

My father, Richard, whom you have just met, my mother, Sharon, and my sister, Jenny, have made the journey here today. Thank you for your lifelong inspiration, guidance and encouragement, and for the many laughs and much love you have provided me.

My two biggest cheerleaders are here today, too — Cindy and Katie.

Cindy, thank you for being such an incredible partner. Your energy and enthusiasm motivate me to do this important work, and I am grateful for the guidance you offer in the most challenging moments. I also am indebted to you for keeping me grounded and focused on what is most important — family and service to others.

And Katie, dear Katie. Katie is joined by her friends, Mary-Peyton and Stacy Bell from Murray, Kentucky, who have graciously hosted Katie in their home for her senior year.

As some of you may know, I am a very proud, and extremely protective, father. Katie might say a little overly protective and, well, she's probably right.

As is true for all parents, my life changed forever the day Katie was born. September 21, 2000, not only changed my personal life, it changed how I view my professional role in higher education. No longer was I just working at a university. I was working at a place that would profoundly shape the world Katie would inherit. Therefore, I began looking at my roles differently. I began asking, "How will this institution influence Katie's world? How will my efforts positively impact her future?"

Therefore, the final two questions I asked myself about becoming your 15th president were: Would I want Katie to be a student here? Would Katie herself want to be a student at CMU?

Let me say, unequivocally, the answer to both questions is a resounding YES.

Based on all of my interactions with each of you, I cannot think of a better place for my daughter that will enable her to further her dreams and ambitions. Katie, who has applied and was admitted to CMU, is excited, too, as she is already connecting with future

classmates and has selected her residence hall. I know she will be an engaged student, and I am certain CMU will help her achieve her full potential.

Katie, Mom and I are Fired Up that you'll be joining this wonderful community as a freshman this fall.

Again, thank you all for joining us here today to celebrate and reflect on our great university.

Investiture ceremonies are not about the person wearing the presidential seal. They are about the universities we represent. They are about our values, goals and aspirations.

These ceremonies are about all of us — scholars, joined by the mission to transform lives, create better communities, and foster an interconnected and interdependent global society.

Central Michigan University is an important and integral member of the American higher education landscape.

Our university was created to meet needs and to address challenges. Back in 1892, Michigan desperately needed teachers and business leaders. The gap led to the creation of Central Michigan Normal School and Business Institute, which opened its doors with just 31 students meeting for classes on the second floor of an office building in downtown Mount Pleasant.

We started out small in size, but big and bold in mission. And as the years went on, our leaders recognized that we could achieve more. Our community and the great state of Michigan needed us to achieve more. As a result, we successfully added degrees, advanced our academic programs and increased our scope.

Today, we are still meeting needs — for teachers and business leaders, for doctors, accountants, engineers, marketers, musicians, journalists, political scientists and more. We prepare innovators and change-makers who have and will continue to shape the future ... for Michigan and for the world.

Let us say proudly, we transformed ourselves from a small normal school into a leading, national research university.

Let us say proudly that we are leaders in preparing students in science, technology, engineering, business, health and other professional areas. Let us say proudly that we are leaders as well in the arts, humanities, the social sciences — the fields that spur creativity and fuel the essence of the human spirit. Let us say proudly that we are leaders in preparing the minds and the souls of our students.

Our university has, since its inception, been innovating and adapting to meet the changing needs of our state and beyond.

Such wise and strategic evolution is perhaps our oldest and most important tradition.

There's a period in our history, from 1939 to 1959, that showcases this.

When our fifth president, Dr. Charles Anspach, took office, we were known as Central State Teachers College. During his 20-year tenure, the institution changed names four times. Enrollment tripled. The number of faculty and staff quadrupled. Campus grew from seven buildings to more than 40. CMU had its first computerized registration. We began the process of seeking accreditation for new disciplines.

And, to the chagrin of many, we began charging for parking and issued our first parking ticket.

Those were not easy changes. They meant developing and implementing new processes and procedures, adapting to new working conditions and living arrangements, adding and adjusting academic programs. The list goes on and on. Becoming a university required the engagement of every member of the campus community.

Today, although our name has not changed as it did in President Anspach's time, our scope continues to expand.

We have gone from a regional undergraduate university, to a comprehensive, to a small research university and now to a national research university with a medical school.

Our challenges are different, yet our response must be the same: We must be flexible, adaptable and innovative.

We've seen the number of high school graduates shrink. We've seen significant declines in public funding for higher education while the costs of operations continue to climb. We're hearing growing doubt about whether higher education is "worth it," while at the same time, the number of jobs requiring a degree continues to rise.

Colleges and universities nationwide are being forced to make hard choices about their future. Some are cutting programs and shrinking in size and scope. Others are closing their doors altogether.

We, too, are impacted and must decide: Will we maintain our status quo, hoping to remain just relevant enough to merit our own existence? Or will we choose once again to adapt and innovate — to lead — so we can evolve to meet the needs of students, employers and communities?

I'm confident we will choose the latter. Michigan needs us to choose the latter.

Governor Whitmer recently articulated the state's growing need for a well-educated workforce. To meet its economic goals, Michigan must increase the number of individuals attending and graduating from quality institutions of higher education.

We are perfectly positioned to be a leader in addressing this challenge.

To achieve our shared goals, we must commit to an aggressive and bold agenda that advances academic rigor, relevant programs and excellence in everything we do.

Noted architect and urban planner Daniel Burnham once said, "Make no little plans; they have no magic to stir [our] blood and probably themselves will not be realized. Make big plans; aim high in hope and work, remembering that a noble, logical diagram once recorded will never die, but long after we are gone will be a living thing, asserting itself with ever-growing insistency."

The founding of Central Michigan, some 126 years ago, was not a little plan. It was a BIG vision that would span generations. Had it been a little plan, we would still be on the second floor of a downtown building serving 31 students.

The vision was bold, and the achievements and accolades we reap now are the result of the big plans of our past.

Now is the time in which we develop our next bold plan and set the agenda to build upon our history and firm foundation.

We have excellent, dedicated, passionate faculty who engage students in hands-on, experiential and active learning. We maintain our commitment to excellence in teaching while also making significant advances in research.

Having grown up in higher education, and having worked at a number of universities, I assure you that our commitment to student success is absolutely remarkable.

The time and energy our faculty and staff pour into our students make CMU a special place, and our students' careers and lives are far more vibrant, more rewarding and more accomplished because of it.

Rest assured, Central Michigan University is creating new knowledge that is changing the world in extraordinary ways.

- Our faculty are working with students at the graduate and undergraduate levels to seek cures for diseases such as Alzheimer's, tuberculosis and cancer.
- Our researchers and clinicians are helping parents understand digital addiction and its impact on children.
- We are managing our second \$10 million grant to protect and preserve the world's largest freshwater source, our Great Lakes.
- We're finding new ways to improve our justice system, fight hunger, support people with disabilities, educate young children and so much more.

Some people believe a university can be either a truly great teaching institution OR a leading research institution. At Central Michigan University, we prove both are possible.

We also deliver compassion. We are leaders in education and research, committed to improving the world around us. It's one of the differentiating factors that first drew me to CMU.

Dr. Martin Luther King Jr., in discussing the goal of higher education, wrote, "We must remember that intelligence is not enough. Intelligence plus character — that is the goal of true education. The complete education gives one not only power of concentration, but worthy objectives upon which to concentrate."

I believe we are living that goal here at Central Michigan University.

It's why our students from many disciplines are taking what they are learning in the classroom into the streets, providing services to our most vulnerable populations. They visit patients in their homes and in health and human service agencies across the region. Our students are joining the fight against the growing opioid crisis. And thousands of CMU students participate in volunteer activities, like Alternative Breaks, around the state and world, using their knowledge and skills to improve the lives of others.

At Central Michigan University, we are leaders in the creation of knowledge, the delivery of exceptional teaching and research, and the awareness that contributions to the greater good are our shared responsibility.

Our brand of excellence is unique, and it is well worth celebrating.

That said, competition for students continues to intensify, and our enrollment numbers will continue to decline if we operate and function in the ways we always have.

We have a tradition of being innovative and adaptive in a changing world. Now is the time for us to once again demonstrate that leadership. As I said earlier, this is the time to set ambitious goals and take bold action.

We must act quickly. Technology and knowledge are advancing at a rapid pace, doubling every 18 months. As leading New York Times columnist Thomas Friedman has said, "It is no longer what you know, but what you can do with what you know."

Advancements in technology and knowledge are forcing questions that require insights that transcend traditional academic disciplines and college boundaries.

Innovation means, for example, shifting our focus to solutions for common problems, and doing so from the vantage point of multiple perspectives and disciplines. It means expanding student engagement in problem-solving for today's most critical issues.

We must continually create intersections among the disciplines, including from our STEM programs, our professional studies and the liberal arts. It is within and among these areas of collaboration that the most valuable, most exciting innovations will occur.

Work being done in our Critical Engagements program is a great example. Faculty from several academic colleges are joining together, leveraging university resources to explore and address the most pressing issues of our time.

Similarly, students and faculty from the College of Business Administration and the College of Science and Engineering are collaborating as an SAP NextGen Innovation Lab. Together, they will work with leaders worldwide to address the United Nations' notable Sustainable Development Goals.

Innovation also means embracing the power of technology. We were pioneers in distance education in the early 1970s. Today, we can and must leverage technology to serve students in nontraditional places.

We must innovate in our partnerships with community colleges to offer a seamless transition for transfer students, and we must seek new ways and new programs to serve international students and working adults.

We must be adaptable to changes in the world around us.

Adaptability means evaluating the ways we've always done things and pursuing an improved course. We must look every day for ways to be better, because substantive improvement does not come easily. It is hard to change a habit. It is hard to build something better or new, to take risks and be bold.

Charles Elliott in 1869 became president of Harvard University. Over the next four decades, he transformed not only Harvard, but higher education throughout America.

President Elliott faced demographic shifts, financial uncertainties and cries for colleges to move from theoretical teachings to practical applications. Increased competition and rising costs were forcing many colleges to close. American higher education was at a watershed moment when he wrote an article for *The Atlantic* titled "The New Education." Elliott noted, "It requires courage to quit the beaten paths in which the great majority of well-educated [individuals] have walked and still walk."

Those words ring true today. We are in the midst of our own watershed moment. We, too, must have the courage to quit the beaten path in order to cut our own new path, based on a concerted and unwavering commitment to rigor, relevance and excellence.

Being bold and taking risks requires courage and faith. This is where leadership becomes most important. As leaders, we must seek ways to remove hurdles and clear obstacles in order to establish a culture of innovation and a culture of excellence.

We must be willing to dare boldly. We must actively engage with one another to overcome our challenges. We cannot fear failure, but must acknowledge and learn from our shortcomings if we hope to significantly and profoundly advance our university.

Over the past six months, as we have worked together on various issues, we are setting this culture in motion.

I began here at Central Michigan University with a listening and learning tour. I visited with many of you to ask about your needs and your goals. At the end of those conversations, I asked, "What can I do to support you?"

I appreciate your candid feedback, and I promise to use your ideas and to continue to ask that question.

These conversations about our success are deeply personal for me, because when we are talking about innovation and making bold choices, we are talking about improving education for every student— including my daughter, Katie.

Our choices change lives, so let's think big, let's think bold.

Since arriving, I have often been asked "Who is CMU." Before I answer that, I want to speak a little about WHAT we are, as a leading, national research university.

We are big enough to attract and compete for large grants. We offer the facilities, labs, study abroad programs, volunteer opportunities and career services of the largest universities.

We are big enough to recruit top faculty and attract students from every county in Michigan, from 47 states and from 21 countries.

We are undergraduate-centered and invigorated by our graduate programs and medical school. We also offer students more leadership development opportunities than any other college or university in the nation, and we provide an outstanding honors program.

We are big enough to attract more than 18,000 employers to hire our graduates.

We are big enough to contribute more than \$1.2 billion to Michigan's economy each year and to impact the world far beyond our state's borders.

At the same time, we are fortunate to also be small enough to care and to help each of our students on their career and life journeys.

We know our students on a first-name basis. We offer them one-on-one, hands-on experiences in our labs, enable them to pursue creative endeavors and engage them in classes small enough to enable deep learning.

We proudly join them in celebrating their achievements. And, we are there when students need our help. We provide them a shoulder to lean on ... and the encouragement to keep going.

We must set aside our "Midwest modesty" and think about what makes CMU exceptional. After all, our students and faculty are chosen as Fulbright scholars, just as they are at Ivy League schools.

Our faculty members publish thousands of articles in journals and bring in millions of dollars in research funding, just as they do at the nation's largest research institutions.

Just last month, our students and faculty received numerous awards and accolades at the Kennedy Center American College Theatre Region III Festival.

Our students take top honors in competitions for music, dance, engineering and business, often beating out Big 10 schools and private, elite colleges. Our student-athletes are champions in competition, bringing home conference and national titles. They also are stellar scholars and active community volunteers.

Our university achieves incredible successes. We often simply neglect to recognize our own prominence.

That is what we are. Now let's talk about WHO we are.

We are a leading, national research university with a soul.

We are more than a university; we are a community. A community of scholars, practitioners, artists, researchers, educators and learners who inspire, support and uplift one another. We value long-lasting personal connections over cut-throat competition, and we build deep, meaningful relationships.

We adhere to six Leadership Standards, which guide us daily to be thoughtful, open communicators who treat each other with compassion and respect. We focus on ways to work together and to hold each other accountable for excellence. We are focused on our students and passionate about Central Michigan University.

We seek ways to serve others. We empower our students to mobilize for social justice and to transform lives and communities around the globe. We seek solutions for the world's most critical issues while training compassionate, ethical leaders to address them.

In short, we exemplify Martin Luther King's goal of education by fueling the growth of intellectual abilities and enhancing the character in all of us.

We are different, and that difference makes us powerful.

We should not try to copy or model ourselves after any other university. In fact, it's time we realize with pride that no other institution can copy or match us.

We are Central Michigan University. We have a proud history. And today, we recommit to the boldness, the innovation and the excellence that drive the greatest national universities.

So, let's get fired up for the future together.

When I first heard the phrase "Fire Up Chips!," I confess I wasn't sure precisely what it meant. I heard alumni say it to one another as they met in airports and at reunions. I heard coaches say it to our athletes as they prepared for competition.

Now, after six months as your president, I believe I've finally learned the true meaning of those three words.

They are a clarion call to action, pushing us to step beyond our comfort zones so we can reach our full potential and rise together to meet challenges head on. Those three simple words sum up the spirit of this great university

I believe the time has come for all of us to get FIRED UP about the future of this leading, national university. The attitudes and behaviors we exhibit today and every day — the decisions we make today and every day — will set the tone for Central Michigan University's next 126 years.

During the course of our \$100 million fundraising campaign, which just concluded three years ahead of schedule, I've heard it said that CMU is one of education's best-kept secrets.

While I appreciate the "best" part of that statement, the thought of Central being a secret is extremely unfortunate. We have a great story to tell about the quality of our teaching, our commitment to student success and our research. We have more than 235,000 alumni experiencing success in their careers and transforming their communities.

Like the song we heard from Stephan earlier today, we must "Go out and tell our story. Let it echo far and wide." We must be sure our story is heard, and doing so requires more than marketing and advertising. Showing the world who and what we are requires each and every one of us to act upon our values and commit to excellence in all we do.

Each one of us has a role to play in CMU's success. Each of us must embrace the challenges of the future and answer the call for innovation. We all must be ambassadors of this leading, national research university, proudly telling the story of our achievements.

I thank each of you for all that you have done and all that you will continue to do for Central Michigan University, our students and our alumni.

We have a tremendous road ahead of us. The best truly is yet to come.

Let's begin today. I will start by saying again how proud I am, how honored I am, how Fired Up I am, to be your 15th president.

SO, let us...

Fire Up for Excellence

Fire Up for Teaching

Fire Up for Innovation

Fire Up for Research

Fire Up for Students

And,

Fire Up Chips!