

6-17-2016

Dream Big

University of Dayton

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Recommended Citation

University of Dayton. "Dream Big" (2016). http://wayback.archive-it.org/4727/20160920161439/https://www.udayton.edu/news/articles/2016/06/curran_op_ed.php

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NEWS



Friday June 17, 2016

Dream Big

As Daniel J. Curran steps down as president, he thanks community leaders for their can-do spirit that led to explosive growth on campus and inspires the region to dream big.

(This op-ed appeared in the *Dayton Daily News* on June 17, 2016.)

What makes a community a place of welcome?

As I considered a move from Philadelphia for the University of Dayton presidency nearly 15 years ago, I was drawn to the warmth, hospitality and innovative spirit of Dayton.

A friendly taxi driver talked up the Dale Chihuly glass sculpture exhibit at the Dayton Art Institute. On campus, longtime University of Dayton President Brother Raymond Fitz, S.M., graciously welcomed me and my family and introduced me to community leaders.

While I inherited a university on an upward path, I didn't immediately realize what gives Dayton its competitive edge. It's a can-do spirit. This community welcomes new ideas, actually *collaborates* and is willing to take risks to transform itself for the times.

As president, Brother Ray worked with the city of Dayton, Miami Valley Hospital and Citywide Development Corp. to reinvigorate the Fairgrounds neighborhood with new housing.

When I became president, community leaders and neighbors rallied around the transformation of a brownfield, the purchase of NCR's world headquarters as a highly visible home for the University of Dayton Research Institute (UDRI) and the revitalization of Brown Street. With new businesses, bike lanes and decorative street lighting, Brown Street today has emerged as one of the city's most successful redevelopments. In laboratories in a former Fortune 500 headquarters, UDRI will close a record year in sponsored research, thanks largely to Wright-Patterson Air Force Base, an anchor for innovation.

I credit the renaissance of the southern edge of the city to the ingenuity, leadership and buy-in of a community of supporters on campus and beyond. The Dayton Development Coalition, CityWide Development, the Dayton Area Chamber of Commerce, city and county officials and others saw the possibilities, shared our vision and partnered with us to turn our master plan for the former NCR land into reality.

We envisioned attracting high-tech companies that could spur research, serve as real-world classrooms for students and spark economic development for the Dayton region. GE Aviation, Emerson Climate Technologies and Midmark saw our college campus as a magnet for innovation and highly skilled workers.

I believe universities that will thrive in the future are the ones that forge these types of strategic partnerships to advance innovation, provide students with priceless experience and create jobs.

Today, this portion of campus, one of the most developable parcels of land in Dayton, stands as a testament to what imagination and collaboration can accomplish. It's what happens when we embrace the possibilities.

Could this type of transformation happen in other communities, on other campuses?

Perhaps, but likely not as quickly.

My first impression of the Dayton community has lasted. This is a place of innovation, a region where the can-do spirit inherited from the Wright brothers, Charles Kettering and other great thinkers and tinkerers continues to inspire us to dream big.

— Daniel J. Curran, Ph.D., will step down as the University of Dayton's 18th president on June 30, 2016, after a 14-year tenure. As president emeritus, he will continue to make Dayton home as he teaches on campus and serves as executive-in-residence for Asian affairs in the University of Dayton China Institute.