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## We Soar!

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# We Soar! : University of Dayton, Ohio

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Monday April 24, 2023

## We Soar!

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By Eric F. Spina

Slowly playing a jazzy rendition of the UD fight song on a trumpet, Willie L. Morris IV '13 wound his way around the familiar intersection of Lowes and Lawnview, past campus lampposts, and through the audience to the center of a stage in the historic Dayton Arcade.

Looking up through the soaring glass rotunda's dome, I saw light beaming in, casting a magical twilight aura over the audience of 300 alumni, trustees, Marianists, faculty, staff, and students all attired in Flyer apparel and sitting in the center of a replica of UD's student neighborhood, complete with welcoming porches and a tolling chapel bell. Enormous vintage and colorful images of campus life over the eras flashed across the screen behind Willie and around the atrium windows, creating the mood for a heart-tugging evening.

Creative masterminds Brian LaDuca and Michelle Hayford developed an original play inspired by Thornton Wilder's "Our Town" and starring our students, aka the Common Good Players, which was a perfect vehicle for the April 19 public launch of our historic \$400 million "We Soar" fundraising campaign.

Through the play, we heard stories about the transformative power of a UD education recounted through the personal experiences and memories of students and alumni who found more than a home at UD. They found a place where dreams take wing and where faculty encouraged them "to aspire higher," as Sharon Howard White '78 told us. Like the Marianists, they cultivated a "say yes" mindset to embracing a future of boundless possibilities.

"Are we in the present, past or future? Or are we in all timelines at once, celebrating the past and the present and in joyful anticipation of the future we want to build for UD?" Willie asked the audience during the hour-long production, which was livestreamed to a virtual audience that included 20 alumni communities around the nation and hundreds of students in the RecPlex.

When I arrived on campus that morning before the sun peeked over the chapel, I sensed this would be an adrenaline-fueled day like no other for UD — a day that would start in prayer and reflection and end in cheers and poignant tears.

In a new record, nearly 1,000 students showcased their research, scholarship, and artistic achievements at the annual Stander Symposium, which included Dean's Showcases featuring signature hands-on learning initiatives. At the same time, a record 7,250 supporters donated more than \$3.4 million during our fifth annual "One Day, One Dayton" Giving Day that included a flurry of matching donations and competitions among classes and alumni communities. We culminated the day with a joyful celebration of the announcement that, with two years to go, we have attracted \$325 million thus far in our first comprehensive campaign in two decades and are quickly nearing ambitious goals for new volunteer engagement and participation.

Throughout this extraordinary day, campaign chair Deb Tobias '73 and I felt the love and energy pulsating through campus, in the heart of downtown Dayton, and over the miles for our beloved UD. Both of us — and many in the audience — fought back tears during the play and the premiere of a fast-paced, inspirational campaign video. By midnight, we had hit the trifecta in involvement, love, and support from Flyer Nation.

This is a campaign with people at its heart. It's about elevating the dreams of the brightest students, regardless of their means to pay, and providing them with access to great minds in the classroom and hands-on learning in the city and around the globe.

This is a campaign about setting our sights higher. Flyers, *this* is our moment to soar.

*(Photo credit: Briana Snyder of Knack Video + Photo.)*