

## **What a joy to be back home**

“There is no place like home” is the phrase I spoke from my heart as I was announced as the 10th president of Fort Hays State University. The phrase clearly signifies that I have a strong affinity for Fort Hays State University and the community. A home isn’t just a place where you live. It is where the heart dwells. It is a place where we feel our best. It is a safe place – a place I feel free to be myself; to live and lead authentically.

Home is also about relationships with the people who create an atmosphere of being part of something truly wonderful – people I trust and know to be valued colleagues who care deeply about students and serve with a spirit of positive restlessness, people who are always evolving and innovating in ways that matter.

FHSU encompasses a leadership team which has synergy and vision, faculty who thrive on excellence and engagement with students and staff who are committed to removing barriers to student success and celebrating their students’ personal transformation. I love the fact that FHSU is so clearly focused on the students. As a first-generation student myself, the learner-centered approach is very important to me.

I have been impressed by the progress that has occurred over the past three years. The campus continues to be beautifully maintained through the care of our facilities staff and community. The facility improvements, upgrades and new buildings are truly remarkable. The university remains fiscally strong, healthy and well-respected. Affordability continues to serve as the institution’s magnetic north, creating access and success for diverse learners and ultimately, engaged citizens. This is important to me as I believe our lives are measured by the people we have helped and the stewardship in which we have invested.

The generosity of the faculty, staff, students, alumni and friends is truly remarkable. I am so amazed by the success of the Journey Campaign, a \$100 million, five-year, comprehensive campaign designed to advance the university by enhancing scholarships, academic programs, athletics and student life. It is incredible to learn that we received over 11,000 gifts this past year! I love the tag line we use – Every Gift Matters – because it is so true. Every gift does matter just as every student matters and every person matters. A successful university takes all of us working together – and from my perspective, working together is our way forward.

The presidential profile described Fort Hays State as a “distinctive university that follows its own path rather than modeling another institution.” I smiled when I read that statement, because I remember how invigorating and yet a bit scary that sense of progress was when I first joined the university as the vice president for student affairs in 2008. I recall being in leadership meetings as the new vice president, listening intently and wondering if I could think big enough to keep up with this university. In the end, that challenge motivated me to always be learning and listening so I could be even more forward thinking!

Other institutional characteristics featured in the profile included a culture of hands-on, sleeves-rolled-up work ethic, characterized by competent students, faculty and staff who are committed to high quality, creative innovation and efficiency in all endeavors; faculty who are collegial and personally invested in the institution and community, know their students by name, and create environments where they can have a positive impact on the lives of students; and an institutional culture described as “we can get it done.”

I smiled as I read these descriptors because for me, they were not just marketing words on a brochure but the true essence of the people and place I have always admired and loved. I knew from six and a half years of firsthand experience that these words are lived every day at FHSU and that the university is an amazing collection of people who make a distinct difference for our students and our community. Who wouldn't want to be part of an institution that consistently exceeds expectations, dreams big, delivers on the promise of student success and stands together?

My husband, Bill, and I are very grateful for the enthusiastic homecoming we have received from both the campus and the community. What a joy to be back home and part of such a caring community that consistently demonstrates a genuine appreciation and love for the university. Thank you to everyone who has extended a warm greeting. We look forward to seeing you around town and learning your stories of home and heart.

For after all – home is where the heart is, and there is no place like home!