

Embracing a new frontier

By Roderick J. McDavis



As Ohio's college students made their way back to campus this fall, major changes were under way in the state of Ohio's approach to higher education.

Gov. Ted Strickland recently authorized the creation of The University System of Ohio. His vision to redefine higher education not only in Ohio, but as a model for the entire nation, is a wonderful and important opportunity for Ohioans.

The state defines The University System of Ohio as a network of all Ohio public colleges and universities: 13 universities with 24 regional campuses, 23 two-year technical and community colleges, and a standalone medical school. Collectively, the institutions have an enrollment of some 470,000 students. Strickland has said the system will not be modeled after the public university systems of other states, but rather serve as a model for public higher education in the 21st century.

The intent is to help the state's public campuses streamline higher education while working to make college affordable and accessible to everyone. This kind of enlightened, new momentum comes along once in a lifetime — and can only reach its true potential through the combined support of educators, legislators, and business and civic leaders.

The creation of The University System of Ohio marks a historic shift at a time when Ohio needs a renewed interest in public higher education. Now is the time for all of us to determine how we can leverage our public institutions' history, strengths

and prominence to benefit Ohioans, our graduates, our state and nation.

Ohio Board of Regents Chancellor Eric Fingerhut is charged with the task of drafting a 10-year strategic plan for legislative approval. He has invited the state's public institutions to play a key role in determining this new direction, an invitation that, at Ohio University, is spurring reflection and discussion across all campuses.

This university was founded nearly 204 years ago to help citizens carve out opportunities on the new frontier. By the turn of the 20th century, public universities and colleges emerged as institutions that could meet the changing needs of society while providing quality and access to an education.

In 2007, it is clear to all of us in public higher education that the needs of society are shifting again. Today, accessibility means affordability.

As other college and university presidents and I work to define the excellence that is present on our campuses, we have the opportunity to shape another new frontier. This means collaborating across disciplines and institutions, offering students and researchers new possibilities to pursue excellence in our classrooms, laboratories and communities.

Remaining true to our state's two-century legacy of public higher education, we will continue finding ways to utilize education and research to make people's lives better. We owe it to the citizens of Ohio to hold a trust from the past to the future.

Roderick J. McDavis is president of Ohio University and chair of Ohio's Inter-University Council of college and university presidents.



Associate Professor Gerardine Botte demonstrates an ammonia-powered car for Gov. Ted Strickland (center) and State Rep. Jimmy Stewart.

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