 Strategic Plan comes to life

I'm sure I'm not alone when I say that I've sat through planning sessions where great minds come together, a grand vision is formulated, and then the mission document promptly begins collecting dust on a forgotten shelf.

This span of two weeks alone at Ball State, however, is proof that all the time and effort that you spent poring over our Strategic Plan was time well spent. As I alluded to when we gathered for the fall convocation (*The Challenge of Distinctiveness*), all you need to do is look out any window on our campus and you'll see -- quite literally -- that our plan has already sprung to life. In fact, I'd say our plan has been enacted with such force that it's *creating* dust rather than *collecting* it.

On August 22, many of you joined in opening Park Hall. This new residence hall -- the first on our campus since 1969 -- is definitely changing the way students look at dormitory living. Their four-room clusters that share two bathrooms offer privacy yet promote interactivity. The soon-to-be LEED-certified building is flooded with plenty of natural light and fresh air. A centrally located desk, which is staffed 24/7, exudes a welcoming atmosphere yet also ensures security. And art, purchased from Ball State students, adorns the communal areas. Many of you commented -- and I certainly concur -- that it proudly upholds the Park family tradition and will continue to do so for many years to come.

Not to be outdone, the football game at Scheumann Stadium will be amazing. I can't help but wonder what it will feel like for our student athletes to race out onto the field to play under the lights and be cheered by such a raucous crowd. I wonder if they will have time to fully absorb the stadium's distinctive features. All I can do is comment from a fan's perspective. And from that view, I can tell you that it will be more than just a game. It will be a grand spectacle -- a standing-ovation example of what we can accomplish when we set our minds to improving something.

Next week, I fully anticipate the crowd at our next major event will rival that of
the game. On September 7, David Letterman and his mother, Dorothy Mengering, will be present for the dedication of the Letterman Communication and Media Building. The grand opening will take place at 4 p.m., and I’d like to invite everyone to help welcome Dave and Dorothy back to campus. Many special guests will be in attendance, including Jeff Smulyan, chairman of the board of Emmis Communications Corporation, who will participate in the ceremony as well as panel discussions involving the future of media and communications.

Some of the special guests and panelists include Congressman Mike Pence; Andy Alexander, Cox Newspapers Washington bureau chief; Jane Clark, Time Warner Global Marketing’s vice president of insights and innovation; Dennis Ryerson, vice president and editor for The Indianapolis Star; and Michael Smith, executive director of Northwestern University’s Media Management Center. Panels and tours begin at 1:30 p.m.

Our focus is to provide the tools that the best and brightest students demand of a leading American university in the 21st century. I can tell you without hesitation that this building with all of its high-tech trappings will exceed everyone’s expectations. The building, which will also be LEED certified, houses a $1 million post-production studio where students can blend high definition video with surround sound on the same equipment found in New York and Hollywood, many high-tech classrooms, a screening room, the studios of WCRD-FM and Indiana Public Radio, and much more.

**High achievers**

This summer, as I monitored the progress of Letterman building and the other projects, I couldn’t help but feel that something was missing. Now that our students have returned and are taking advantage of all the bleeding-edge features these new structures have to offer, that feeling has faded completely. And our newest students are some of the brightest yet.

Our applications for this class were 21 percent higher than last year and 32 percent higher than 2005. I’m proud to announce that their SAT scores are 22 points higher than last year, and this class has a 19 percent increase over last year in the number of students who indicated they will enroll in the Honors College.

These are concrete examples of how our efforts to attract higher quality students are bearing fruit. As you read this message, these bright and creative students are diligently working to meet the challenges of the immersive learning environment you have created. Through your continued dedication to Ball State, they will no doubt go on to be the next generation of Lettermans, Parks, and Scheumanns.

**A healthy perspective**

On New Year’s Eve, I find little value in setting resolutions -- a tradition that sees many empty promises go unfulfilled. I am, however, a firm believer in setting goals and mapping out the objectives to reach them. And typically, this course of action for my fellow academics and me takes place in August rather than January.

With the start of our academic year everyone has charted their course to reach
their goals they have pledged to accomplish before May. These well-plotted plans are built upon a foundation of solid, definable goals rather than wobbly resolutions. It's that vein in which I hope to capitalize. By harnessing that synergy, I'm hoping to have you join me for the *Start Where You Are* walk at 3:30 p.m. September 4 at LaFollette Field. Together we will walk the *McKinley Mile* from Worthen Arena to the Old Quad.

To demonstrate our commitment to the goal of improved wellness, we will close down the street and have the *Pride of Mid-America* Marching Band lead our way. We'll also have a health fair with plenty of people available to answer questions about the university's new and existing wellness programs.

Why all of the pomp and circumstance? Because just as we set goals for our academic success, we need to also make the same deep commitment to our own wellness.

As a small step to that goal, I am authorizing all supervisors to allow their employees to participate in the *McKinley Mile* so staff as well as faculty can show their support for the university's wellness initiative. This festive event will effectively proclaim -- quite loudly -- that Ball State is a place that values healthy lifestyles.

The walk also represents the kickoff of many wellness events that will take place throughout the year. Once such program is the *Start Where You Are* physical activity initiative. This six-week program will encourage all of us to get up and get moving through a variety of activities. For example, recreation services will be offering *Walk and Talk*, a free lunchtime activity that will take place on Mondays beginning September 10.

Whether you join a structured program or use the university's resources to formulate your own plan, the goal of the initiative is clear: We want to give you the resources to find a diet that's satisfying yet healthy, choose exercises and activities that are viewed as fun rather than drudgery, kick unhealthy habits like smoking or over-eating, and get the most from your healthcare plan so you can improve the quality of your life. These actions are critical to lengthening your life span, enhancing the quality of your life, and combating spiraling, double-digit annual increases in our medical costs. So to enhance the vitality of our university community, we must all commit to leading healthier lifestyles and encourage a commitment to healthier living for all of our employees, retirees, and their families.

One way to create such an environment is working toward the creation of a smoke-free campus. Already the Staff Council has given a strong, positive recommendation, and the students will weigh in on this soon. We would like a faculty statement on this issue by December 1 so we can make a decision early next year.

**Technology transfer**

I'd like to take a moment to welcome Michael Halbrook as our new director of technology transfer. This is a new position for the university and Michael brings
tremendous experience helping IT startup companies.

Michael will be responsible for the management of technology disclosures, copyrights, patents, and other intellectual property held by the university, including the evaluation and commercialization of technology transfer opportunities. He will provide assistance to faculty inventors, authors, and entrepreneurs on intellectual property policies, and will help facilitate disclosures, patents, and decisions related to the marketing and licensing of technology. He will also act to negotiate with third parties on technology transfer matters and assist in the development of business ventures from the university.

I look forward to seeing everyone at the walk and later that week at the Letterman dedication. Both events -- and this historic span of two weeks -- dramatically demonstrate that Ball State is a university on the move and that our Strategic Plan is a living, breathing document that is kicking up plenty of dust.

Jo Ann M. Gora
President

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