

Thank you, Courtney.

It's my good fortune to serve as the president of Ball State University, and it's a pleasure to join you for this afternoon's 50th anniversary celebration of our Office of Disability Services.

As you heard today from Rich and from Ro-Anne and from Courtney, Ball State has a long and proud history of serving our students with disabilities.

This work began modestly. When Mr. Harris was first named Director of Orientation and Coordinator of Handicapped Services, this work only involved 10 percent of his job duties. Today, the work of our Office of Disability Services requires the talent and skills of dozens of employees working across multiple units and divisions, from the Learning Center to Unified Technology Support to Admissions and Housing and Residence Life. Their collaborative efforts have propelled our University to become nationally recognized for promoting an inclusive environment for all members of our University community. I am proud of this recognition, and I know that everyone here today agrees with me.

[PAUSE]

In a moment, I will share a few stories about the positive impact that our Office of Disability Services has had on our students and on our graduates.

But first, I want to expression my appreciation to several people in the room.

Richard Harris, I am grateful for your long-standing commitment to our students and for your many years of service to our University. Because of the model of disability services you implemented on our campus, Ball State has long been upheld as one of the most accessible and accommodating universities in the country. And your leadership has enabled thousands of students who need this support to graduate and find fulfilling work.

Larry Markle, as the second director of this office, you made significant advancements, including a name change to the Office of Disability Services in 2012. You also created an innovative mentorship program that connected our students with disabilities with faculty mentors teaching in the students' major field. Now, in your work beyond Ball State, you continue to champion our

students and graduates as director of the Gregory S. Fehribach Center at Eskenazi Health.

And Courtney Jarrett, since becoming director in 2018, you have dedicated yourself to supporting the thousands of students who utilize the services of this office annually. Your warmth and wit make our students feel welcome from the moment they meet you. Thank you for all you do to advance the mission of our University.

[PAUSE]

Each year, the number of students reporting disabilities at our University continues to grow. Last year, more than 3,900 students were served by our Office of Disability Services—a 14 percent increase from the year before.

It is a testament to the work of Courtney and her staff—and many more of our colleagues across campus—that we can accommodate all of these students for their diverse needs.

Each of the students we serve has a story to tell about the impact this office has had on them. So, too, do our graduates, many of whom chose to come to

Ball State because they knew they would be treated with the dignity and respect they deserve.

One of those graduates was Greg Fehribach, whose name you heard me mention a few moments ago.

Greg earned both his undergraduate and master's degrees from Ball State. Today, he is a prominent attorney in Indianapolis and a national leader in accessibility and inclusion for people with disabilities.

Greg was born with osteogenesis imperfecta, a genetic disease that has required him to use a wheelchair for most of his life.

I'll never forgot how, when I spoke to Greg last August as a guest on my podcast, he described the lack of accommodations available to him at his high school in Indianapolis in the 1970s. His friends actually had to carry him up and down the stairs to his classes.

Greg said, when it came time to go to college, Ball State was the only school he seriously considered. In his own words, he said:

“My first quarter here, back when we had quarters, was the spring quarter of 1977. I thought I’d died and gone to heaven with the accessibility, and with being able to roll around campus and use the facilities, same as the rest of my classmates.”

Greg went on to say: “I said to myself, ‘There’s no place for me better than Ball State,’ and I made a few good right decisions in my life, and that was probably the best one I ever made.”

[PAUSE]

Earlier today, several of our younger graduates spoke on a panel here in the Student Center as part of our University’s lineup of Disability Awareness Month events.

These graduates—Savannah Bassett, Georgana Nichols, and Devin Summan—returned to campus to participate in this conversation, and I am grateful to them and to our student organization, Alliance for Disability Awareness, for sponsoring this event.

Before they shared their thoughts about life after graduation with that audience, these graduates shared with me their personal stories of how Ball State empowered them as students.

Devin told me he would not have completed his undergraduate degree without the outstanding accommodations he received for his classes, the support he received from his professors, and the outstanding staff from Disability Services who advocated on behalf of his needs.

Savannah shared how my colleagues from Disability Services helped her find her voice so she could become a better advocate for herself.

Savannah said that, growing up, she lacked the courage to tell other people that she even had a disability. Because, in her own words, “I thought I wasn’t ‘deaf’ enough or I was too ‘high functioning’ to ever need anything.”

With the support of Courtney and her team, Savannah was given the proper tools to find her voice and her confidence. “Ball State,” she said, “is truly a place where ... there was never any worry about ‘fitting in.’”

[PAUSE]

These stories demonstrate how the support that our colleagues provide in this office —work that continues to expand in scope and creativity—has been changing the lives of our students for the past 50 years.

I know that this vital work will continue for many decades to come, improving the lives of countless more future Ball State students.

To everyone here this afternoon, helping us to celebrate the mission of Disability Services and this milestone anniversary, I say thank you.

And to those who have returned to campus for this event, welcome back.

I appreciate the invitation to join you. I'd now like to ask Courtney to return to the podium to conclude our program.