BALL STATE UNIVERSITY
Office of the President

# GEOFFREY S. MEARNS
# CENTENNIAL CELEBRATION
# EMENS AUDITORIUM
# SEPTEMBER 6, 2018
# 7:30 P.M.

Good evening. It's my pleasure to welcome you to tonight's special celebration, and it is a privilege to serve as the president of Ball State University.

It's a privilege because, for 100 years, we have transformed the lives of more than 200,000 women and men who have earned a degree from our University.

Tonight, on this very special occasion, I will speak very briefly about the history of this institution—you will hear much more about our distinctive history in the documentary. I will also briefly talk about how our University's enduring values have guided us through our proud past and will continue to be a source of inspiration for a bright future.

First, I want to express my appreciation to all of the members of our Board of Trustees. Seven of the nine members of the board are here with us this evening: Rick Hall, Renae Conley, Tom Bracken, Wayne Estopinal, Jean Ann Harcourt, Mike McDaniel, and our student trustee, Marlene Jacocks. Please stand, so that we may recognize you.

I would also like to acknowledge three of our past presidents who are here tonight.

Dr. Terry King, you were appointed to serve as interim president at a critical time in the history of our University. I am also grateful for the personal support you gave me during my transition as president. Terry, thank you for your service and support.

Dr. Jo Ann Gora, welcome back to Ball State. Jo Ann was the University's 14th president. During the decade she served as president, Jo Ann was a champion of immersive learning, and she helped launch the development of our geothermal system, the largest of its kind in the country. Jo Ann, thank you for your service, and thank you for being with us tonight.

Finally, please join me in recognizing Dr. John Worthen. John was Ball State's 11th president. He served for 16 years. During his tenure, he oversaw the successful completion of the University's first capital campaign, he strengthened our reputation as an outstanding teaching university, and he helped Ball State become nationally recognized for its use of technology to enhance learning. John, thank you for your outstanding leadership.

Each of these educators—these leaders—was passionately committed to this University. The Ball State community was fortunate to experience their guidance in its first 100 years. Individually—and collectively—they played an important role in helping this institution evolve into the premier public university it is today.

We are also fortunate to have First Lady Janet Holcomb in attendance.

Some of you may know that Janet is an alumna. She earned both her bachelor and master's degrees in fine arts from Ball State. She has praised the University for empowering her with a passion and a purpose for the arts and for serving others.

Please join me in welcoming First Lady Holcomb to the stage to read Governor Holcomb's proclamation honoring our Centennial celebration.

[First Lady Holcomb reads proclamation. Return to stage.]

Thank you, Janet.

As you just heard, tonight's celebration is an opportunity for our campus community to recognize how, for 100 years, Ball State University has prepared students to have successful careers and inspired them to lead meaningful lives.

We are about to watch a documentary that captures the historic impact Ball State has had through the dedication of our faculty, staff, students, and alumni.

That impact is what we wanted to capture with the launch last year of a more visible, more vocal campaign to tell the world about Ball State University.

Last November, as part of this effort, we held an event in Sursa Hall where we invited our senior cabaret class to perform a song that they wrote—a song that captures the passion and pride of our University.

Their lyrics communicate a few key aspects of our fundamental mission.

The lyrics remind us that our faculty, staff, and students are given the freedom and flexibility to collaborate as learning partners.

Their words demonstrate that we provide a transformative educational experience to our students.

And their lyrics prove that our history and our future are guided by our sustained commitment to the enduring values represented by Beneficence—whom they affectionately refer to as "Benny."

This evening, our senior cabaret students will again perform this song. These students will be joined by students from Muncie Community Schools.

As I shared in my convocation remarks a few weeks ago, Ball State has a long-term interest in Muncie. Our latest partnership with MCS is an extension of our mission, and a reflection of our continuing commitment to the community. Tonight's performance is another example of the strength of that partnership.

Please welcome our cabaret students and students from West View Elementary School.

[Students perform and exit stage. Return to give your remarks.]

Please join me in another round of applause for our cabaret students and for the choir members who joined them from West View Elementary.

As our First Lady read to you from the Governor's proclamation, our University began with the dream of five industrious brothers who wanted to create a college in Muncie.

But their aspirations weren't the first attempt to bring higher education to Muncie.

In fact, there were four prior efforts to start a college or university here.

The Eastern Normal School in 1899.

Palmer University in 1902.

Indiana Normal School and College of Applied Technology in 1905.

And the Muncie Normal Institute in 1912.

All four of these initial attempts failed. But these unsuccessful efforts were not total failures. To the contrary, these unsuccessful efforts demonstrated some important, positive attributes about our predecessors and about our community.

Our founders were innovative and creative. They embraced risks, and they were courageous. They were persistent and tenacious. Most importantly, they had the audacity to dream bold dreams.

Those previous attempts to start a college in Muncie did not deter the Ball brothers. They were temporary setbacks that they were determined to overcome.

As we celebrate our 100th anniversary, we share our pride in our founders' achievements. As a result of their vision and their generosity, we are here tonight, gathered as a community, to kick off the yearlong celebration of our Centennial.

It is a momentous time in the history of our institution. A time during which we recognize how our University has served Muncie, the state of Indiana, and the world.

It is a time for us to honor the accomplishments of our faculty, staff, students, and alumni.

And it is an opportunity for us to celebrate what I believe is perhaps the most important attribute of our community—one that has been a constant throughout our institution's history.

This public university proudly proclaims its commitment to certain enduring values—excellence, integrity, social responsibility, respect for all people, and gratitude.

*Beneficence*, the iconic statue of our University, symbolizes those values. She was completed in 1937, during an era when many Americans were extremely poor. Yet in the midst of the Great Depression, the citizens of Muncie donated $450,000 to commission *Beneficence*. And our neighbors chose to install her on our campus.

Now, many things have changed in the first 100 years of our University. But what remains a constant is our history of gratitude—a history personified in this beautiful symbol of our proud past, a symbol that will guide us into the future.

A century ago, it was the generosity of the Ball brothers who provided the land for this institution. But it was the generosity of the people of Muncie that sustained and grew their vision to bring higher education to east central Indiana.

I am thankful for their efforts. And in the months to come, I look forward to embracing our Centennial events, projects, and activities with an abiding sense of gratitude for the women and men who founded this institution and for the people who transformed it into the outstanding University that we have inherited.

We are about to enjoy the premiere of one of those projects: our student-produced Centennial documentary, *From Normal to Extraordinary: Ball State's First Century*. Afterwards, I hope all of you will join me outside for the live music, food and drinks, and fireworks we have planned to cap off our evening.

I want to thank the John W. Anderson Foundation for funding this documentary.

I am also grateful to Professor Jim Rhinehart for composing the music for the film, and to the Ball State Symphony Orchestra for providing the live accompaniment.

I also want to thank Chris Flook from the Department of Telecommunications for writing the script and for serving as faculty advisor for the project.

Most importantly, I want to thank the students—approximately 40 students—who were responsible for the film we are about to see tonight.

A project of this size and of this scope requires a lot of talent and skill. And it requires thousands of hours of hard work. Some universities would hire a film company to do this work. But at Ball State, we entrusted this critical responsibility to our students.

What makes a Ball State immersive learning experience like this one so valuable is that it is a real-world experience that is comparable to those that await our students once they graduate.

Jacob Cannon, a senior who assisted with camera work on the documentary, described this project as a "valuable 'sink or swim' kind of learning experience."

And in the words of Jacob's instructor, Chris Flook: "The students aren't play-acting, or experimenting with what it is to be a professional who is working on a set making a documentary. They are doing it. The challenges they face are real, and unplanned, and they have to devise solutions to those problems and figure it out. My role was to get them gear, get them resources, and get out of their way."

Every day I am proud to serve as president of Ball State. But on nights like this one, when I witness the extraordinary impact of our education, I am most proud to serve as the president of this outstanding University.

Ladies and gentlemen, it is my distinct honor to introduce *From Normal to Extraordinary: Ball State's First Century*.