

# Sooner Nation

Matt Moen believes conciliation can follow conflict.

## A COUNTRY DIVIDED

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**hese three words** are often used to describe the United States today. But events that took place 157 years ago add important context to current conflicts.

The Battle of Gettysburg was one of the bloodiest of the Civil War, yet in its aftermath are lessons that are still relevant, says Matt Moen, a graduate of the Carl Albert Congressional Research and Studies Center at the University of Oklahoma and current president and CEO of the Gettysburg Foundation.

“Our country is in a time when we desperately need more political civility,” Moen says. “The post-battle phase of Gettysburg is a way to remind Americans that conciliation can follow even the most bitter conflict.”

For three days, Gettysburg was the largest battle in the history of North America, but starting on July 4, 1863, and continuing to the present, Moen says, it has been a place of care and healing, of forgiveness and redemption.

“Everyone remembers the battle, but not enough Americans know how civilians emerged after the fighting to help those on

clusivity and democracy in all exchanges between human beings, regardless of political affiliation or whether those at odds are private citizens or public servants.

While pursuing his Ph.D. in political science at OU in the early 1980s, Moen got an insider’s view of the latter as a congressional fellow in Indiana Rep. Philip Sharp’s office in Washington, D.C. Sharp showed him how government processes work and let Moen travel with him to Indiana to observe communication with his constituents.

“It’s one thing to study Congress, but another to be up close,” Moen says. “It helped me better understand how a member of Congress connects and represents the voters.”

After earning a master’s in political science at OU, Moen received the first doctorate affiliated with the Carl Albert Congressional Research and Studies Center. Established in 1979, the center was created as a nonpartisan educational institution with the goal of strengthening representative democracy through scholarship, learning and service.

The program continues to offer a rigorous field of study. Moen spent countless hours completing coursework, conduct-

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both sides who could be saved, to bury those who couldn’t, and to offer those who survived whatever provisions they could scrounge up.”

His knowledge and perspective keep Moen in frequent demand as a speaker, often crisscrossing states that were on opposite sides of the war to give lectures and share the ongoing relevance of Gettysburg. Even his home base near the famous battlefield is but a few miles from the Mason-Dixon Line – the divide between what was once the Union and the Confederacy.

“Both sides at Gettysburg lost so much,” says Moen, who also has been president of the New England Political Science Association and the Council of Colleges of Arts and Sciences – the national arts and sciences dean’s organization. “Our nation lost so much in the war. But rebuilding occurred and democracy was restored. We can draw lessons.”

The Gettysburg Foundation promotes humility, civility, in-

ing research and compiling his results. He was given the chance to meet notables of the day, including Albert himself, an OU alumnus, Rhodes Scholar and the former speaker of the U.S. House of Representatives.

Moen’s work at OU led to a career in academia, the publication of six books, and teaching and service as a professor of political science at the University of Maine from 1986 to 2002. Subsequently, he was named dean of the College of Arts and Sciences and Lohre Distinguished Professor at the University of South Dakota.

“I loved teaching and helping students,” he says of his 16 years as a professor, followed by 15 years as an advocate for the liberal arts and sciences as dean.

Growing up in Sioux Falls, S.D., it wasn’t easy for Moen to give up a deanship in his native state. But Gettysburg called to him with a different educational role – one for all those wishing to learn lessons of hope from the problems of the past.



Matt Moen, who earned the first Ph.D. affiliated with OU's Carl Albert Congressional Research and Studies Center, has served as the CEO and president of the Gettysburg Foundation for the past three years.

As president and CEO, Moen leads fundraising and preservation efforts by the Gettysburg Foundation in partnership with the National Park Service. Approximately 165,000 soldiers fought at Gettysburg, with more than 51,000 casualties. All together, these fields of reflection and remembrance stretch to more than 6,000 acres. The National Park Service estimates about 1 million visitors a year make the trek to this scene of bloodshed and, ultimately, conciliation.

Although the park had been closed since March due to the coronavirus, it re-opened June 25. "We were so pleased to re-open in time for the anniversary July 1 through 3," says Moen. "At this time of turmoil in our beloved country, we need to work through our problems for the sake of future generations. Gettysburg has characterized the spirit of healing and reconciliation since the battle ended here 157 years ago."

Moen continues to appreciate the opportunities his OU education gave him and the mentorship of Professor

Emeritus Ronald M. Peters Jr., author and former director of the Carl Albert Center. Now, Moen's daughter Erika is at OU, a National Merit Scholar entering her final semester this fall, pursuing a double major in chemistry/biochemistry and communication.

Perhaps someday, Moen will return to OU to discuss civility in public discourse. He has traveled over 28,000 miles giving such lectures at service clubs, historical societies and colleges and universities. The author of seven books, he is leaving his current post this summer to resume his writing career. He says he will miss his work at the foundation.

"If you create meaningful discussion, you improve civility," Moen says. "One of the great lessons of education is learning to listen to one another."

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