

Aspiration, purpose
and opportunity
meet in the launch
of OU's \$2 billion
"Lead On" campaign

A Time to LEAD



BY ANNE BARAJAS HARP

A night of celebration and inspiration shared by Sooner faithful at home and abroad launched the \$2 billion "Lead On: The University of Oklahoma's Campaign for the Future" on Oct. 14.

While nearly 600 gathered at a gala in a dramatically transformed Lloyd Noble Center awash with lights and color, alumni clubs and OU students joyfully joined in the celebration via livestream from Chicago; Washington, D.C.; Columbus, Ohio; Dallas; Houston; Amarillo, Texas; Tulsa, Okla.; and Kansas City, Kan. The campaign also was celebrated with alumni parties in Paris; London; Arezzo, Italy; and Puebla, Mexico.

"Lead On" is the largest philanthropic campaign in Oklahoma's history and OU's first comprehensive campaign in more than 20 years. It comes on the heels of record, back-to-back fundraising efforts led by the OU Foundation—\$237.9 million in fiscal year 2021 and \$317.4 million in fiscal year 2022.

The seven-year campaign began with a quiet launch July 1, 2020, and \$600 million has since been raised toward the campaign's \$2 billion goal, OU President Joseph Harroz Jr. told those gathered and watching from afar. "The silent phase ended today," he said. "We just got loud."

In alignment with OU's "Lead On, University" Strategic Plan, the campaign prioritizes increasing access through enhanced student support and programming, fostering faculty growth, creating research opportunities, and encouraging a welcoming campus culture. Central to the campaign's goal is a \$500 million commitment to scholarship and student support and \$300 million to support the strategic recruitment and retention of outstanding faculty.

The gala featured "spotlight speakers" Maria Bustamante Molina, a Claremore, Okla., senior majoring in health and

analytical science, who shared how OU scholarships made it possible for her to access higher education; OU Presbyterian Presidential Professor Doris M. Benbrook, who developed the groundbreaking cancer drug OK-1 (see related story on pg. 10); and a performance by 11-year-old Eveline Cavanagh, whose prosthetic limb was developed by OU-Tulsa researchers and enables her to play the violin.

Kyle Harper, OU's G.T. Blankenship Chair in the History of Liberty and professor of classics and letters, also related his journey, which started as an OU freshman from a small Oklahoma town.

"The recipe for the secret sauce that makes this place special is really simple," Harper said. "There are two ingredients: excellence and opportunity. It's the belief that we can and should have one of the greatest universities anywhere. And it's the belief that anybody can come to OU if they have ability and determination. That is what makes us who we are, and it has changed my life."

Harroz pointed out that OU students continue to blaze new paths. This year's freshman class boasts the institution's highest GPA and ACT scores at 3.67 and 26.1, respectively. Some 39% of freshmen are minority and 25% are first-generation college students.

The president added that OU students often ask him for advice. Harroz tells them that the most accomplished people he meets have one thing in common: "If you ask them what they're most proud of, it's always the difference they made in the lives of others."

"This is our turn. This is our time," he said. "This is our moment to pick up where our predecessors left off, to carry OU's tradition into the future and to expand upon it."

"Together, we will achieve nothing short of transformation and, together, we will lead on."



Hundreds of OU alumni and friends gather in a dozen locations in the United States and abroad to launch the “Lead On” campaign. See a full gallery of campaign watch party photos at home-oufoundation.org/galaphotos.

LEAD ON

Spearheading the “Lead On” campaign are the Campaign Champions, a network of volunteer alumni and friends.

- Co-Chairs: Jonny and Brenda Jones (Austin, Texas)
- Phil and Nancy Estes (Carson City, Nev.)
- Christy Everest (Nichols Hills, Okla.)
- Harold Hamm and Jane Hamm Lerum (Oklahoma City)
- Bill and Sherri Lance (Sulphur, Okla.)
representing the Chickasaw Nation
- Ken Levit (Tulsa, Okla.)
representing the George Kaiser Family Foundation
- David Love (Oklahoma City)
- Jenny Love Meyer (Nichols Hills, Okla.)
- David and Kim Rainbolt (Oklahoma City)
- Dr. Jerry Ransom (Greenville, Texas)
- Jeff and Marisa Records (Oklahoma City)
representing MidFirst Bank
- Regent Robert J. Ross (Oklahoma City)
representing Inasmuch Foundation
- Bart Shelley (Nichols Hills, Okla.)
representing Tim Headington
- Randall and Lenise Stephenson (Dallas)
- Steve Stephenson (Big Sky, Mont.)
representing the Charlie and Peggy Stephenson Family
- Ken and Laura Waits (Tyler, Texas)
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For more information about supporting the “Lead On” campaign, visit www.oufoundation.org.