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Nova Southeastern University's Sixth President
Remarks from Downtowner of the Year Award Luncheon
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“It is An Honor”

I am humbled to be included in the company of the list of individuals who have received this honor in prior years. Hearing comments from the likes of Mayor Cox, Fred Lippmann, and Reverend Thompson.

As James Buchanan left office, he stated to Lincoln that if he was as happy entering to office of President as he was as happy to leave; he (Lincoln) must be the happiest man in the world. Lincoln's response: "I feel like the man who was tarred and feathered and ridden out of town on a rail. To the man who asked him how he liked it, he said: 'If it wasn't for the honor of the thing, I'd rather walk.'"

According to City Managers and land use planners, downtowns should exhibit a sense of "place" where business and commerce, merge with culture, museums, entertainment, restaurants, and housing and the place where "people want to see and be seen."

In fact, Nova Southeastern University was born in Downtown. A group of businessmen meeting in the Governors Club wanted to have a university in Broward and in 1964 at 232 East Las Olas, NSU was chartered. And with the merger with the Museum of Art and the relocation of offices in the Nova Southeastern Building (formerly Blockbuster's headquarters), NSU's presence is back where it began.

But as we all know, Downtown Fort Lauderdale, as downtowns throughout the nation, came on hard times during the late 60's, 70's and 80's. People left for the suburbs, and there was no longer a sense of place.

Thank God for the community leaders, past and present, who would not and will not, accept the fact that this beautiful city, embraced by the Atlantic Ocean, 300 miles of scenic inland waterways, and a river – the New River running through it, with an average annual temperature of 75 degrees Fahrenheit, would be no more than an historical memory of a bye-gone era.

You see, those individuals, past and present saw Downtown as “The heart and soul of the community.” And without a heart and soul, what is the purpose for living?

Today, Downtown Fort Lauderdale is Downtown Broward. I have had an opportunity to travel to most of the 31 cities in Broward. When people talk of downtown, they really mean “Downtown” Fort Lauderdale – not downtown Miramar, Coconut Creek, or Lazy Lake. Today, there is a “sense of place” where business and commerce merge with culture, museums, churches and synagogues, entertainment, restaurants, and housing - the place where “people want to see and be seen.”

When I think of the development of downtown and the myriad of all things that make downtown great, I am reminded of the quote by James Maclean, the source of Robert Redford’s movie, “Eventually, all things merge into one, and a river runs through it.”

Jana and I have now live in Fort Lauderdale for almost 25 years, we have lived in the same home longer than any other place we have lived in our lives. We feel blessed to have been recruited here by the likes of Mayor Cox and the City Commission in the late 80’s, and recruited once again fifteen years ago by Ray Ferrero to come to NSU. Because of such a long tenure in this one place, I have been able to witness the re-creation of a “sense of place” for Downtown.

I am reminded of a statement made by an old Virginia Governor that “In public service, we all plant seeds for shade trees under which we may never sit.” I feel fortunate that I have, for once in my life, found roots in a city 1,000 miles from my native state, and I have actually been able to sit under some of the shade trees I helped plant.

Thank you.