A RICH PAST, A DYNAMIC FUTURE:
BOISE’S UNIVERSITY CELEBRATES ITS CITY’S MILESTONE

By President Bob Kustra

Boise State University shares much more than a name with Idaho’s capital city. For eight decades, our university has grown up alongside its 150-year-old namesake and it is hard to imagine one without the other.

I am extraordinarily proud of our city and Boise State’s place in it. The connections between the two are fundamental and play vital and irreplaceable roles in each other’s culture and perspective. Our shared place at the center of Idaho’s cultural, intellectual, commercial and governmental heart make the success of one, the success of the other. We even share a footbridge over the Boise River that perfectly symbolizes this kinship.

The attributes that make our city so special – its friendly people, low crime rate, clean air, outdoor opportunities, vibrant downtown and stunning Greenbelt and river that grace the border of our campus and provide year-round recreation – are major factors that draw students to enroll at Boise State, and to pursue careers here after they graduate that strengthen our economy and culture.

Top faculty prospects are recruited and retained because, as we often hear, they “get to live in Boise.” Boise enjoys outstanding regional health care, something that helps us attract and keep top personnel at the university, and provides partnerships with our College of Health Sciences, including major gifts to the Norco Building from Norco, St. Luke’s and Saint Alphonsus. First-time visitors to Boise come away impressed, and some develop lifelong ties, becoming major donors to the university and locating new start-up businesses in our city.

Our campus is surrounded by natural beauty, with the Boise Foothills often on display during nationally televised Bronco games. The power of place is evident every time Boise is named to another Top 10 list for quality of life or business climate. Simply put, it is a huge positive for our university to be located here.

While Boise gives much to Boise State, our university also gives back to its city. We are a proving
ground for young minds seeking a path to tomorrow’s success, and a beacon of knowledge and pride that lights the way for a city that seeks enlightenment, improvement and entertainment. We are a center for discovery and innovation that attracts new minds and wealth, and a creator of intellectual property that can be commercialized by our city’s businesses and make significant contributions to its economy. Boise State is a catalyst for public/private partnerships capable of tackling complex issues, a center for artistic expression and creativity that inspires and delights, and a facilitator of public engagement that draws together a diverse constituency for a common conversation. Few of our city’s institutions play a bigger role in knitting the fabric that make Boise the gleaming city it is today.

Our 22,000 students and almost 45,000 degree-holding graduates in Idaho – a large proportion of whom hail from Boise – are our most important charge and contribution. By preparing students with the knowledge, experience and skills to excel at the demanding and rewarding jobs of the future, Boise State plays an extraordinary role in feeding the local economy. Our graduates are fulfilling some of this city’s greatest demands for qualified employees.

Boise State graduates living in the Boise area earn double the wages – about $21,000 more – than residents without a degree. Each academic year, our students participate in approximately 1,400 internships, contributing more than 200,000 internship hours at many businesses, agencies and nonprofit organizations based here in the capital city.

Our university employs more than 3,000 faculty and staff with wages and salaries totaling approximately $110 million and the overwhelming percentage of their take-home pay is spent right here in the Boise area economy. Altogether, Boise State’s indirect and induced economic output from purchasing, construction and employee spending is estimated at $325 million annually.

Boise State’s entertainment and meeting venues attract nearly 1.5 million people annually for a wide variety of concerts, stage productions, sporting events and conventions to venues such as the 2,037-seat Velma V. Morrison Center for the Performing Arts. Through its numerous art galleries, a renowned master’s degree program in creative writing, and deep ties to Boise’s museums, drama companies, theaters and galleries, Boise State prides itself on its role as a leader in Boise’s cultural scene.

And, of course, the blue football field is becoming an internationally recognized symbol, not only of our university, but also of Boise. It’s been said, perhaps a bit tongue-in-cheek, that “if you haven’t been to the blue turf, you haven’t been to Boise,” a sentiment that speaks to the iconic status of our unique field.
Over the last four years alone, the university has opened eight new major buildings on campus, encompassing well over a half of a million square feet of living, classroom, laboratory, office, event and common areas – contributing to the creation of an urban campus in the heart of Boise’s dynamic downtown.

Our new Micron Business and Economics Building – at the intersection of University Drive and Capitol Boulevard – is both a symbolic and physical link between the theory and knowledge-creation of the classroom and laboratory, and the nuts-and-bolts practicality of Boise’s workplaces. This building isn’t just where tomorrow’s executives will build a foundation for their and our future success. It is Boise’s new front door to its very own university. Boise’s largest employer, Micron, provided the $12 million lead gift for this building, an example of our strong relationship with the business community, and an acknowledgment of how closely our futures are intertwined.

Community education is central to Boise State’s place in the city’s intellectual life. As host to the state’s only Osher Lifelong Learning Institute, Boise State provides educational programming for some 800 older learners and facilitates the exchange of opinions, solutions and experiences.

Additionally, Boise State’s concurrent enrollment program serves approximately 2,500 high school students – again, many of whom live right here in Boise – who earn over 10,000 college credits each year. Because these students pay only $65 per college credit, this program collectively saves Idaho students and their parents almost $2 million per year. Most importantly, our studies show that these students are going on to college, succeeding academically and graduating on time at rates greater than other students.

Partnerships and collaborations that bind the community and university’s civic consciousness encompass the areas of public policy, health care, education, city planning and more. For example, through an agreement with the non-profit Mountain States Group, Boise State helps refugees from a variety of war-torn areas around the globe rebuild successful lives here. This collaboration led to the creation of three new academic certificates that prepare students at the undergraduate and graduate level to work effectively with refugees who now call our community home. Last fall, Boise State student-athletes and the Make-a-Wish Foundation came together at a unique gala to raise a record $265,000 to make wishes come true for Idaho children facing major medical challenges. Through partnerships like these, Boise State students and faculty contribute to the work of countless government entities, nonprofits and private partners – most of which are based right here in Boise.

Additionally, approximately 2,770 students across 28 academic departments contribute an estimated 59,700 hours to over 100 community organizations each year as part of hands-on learning
experiences in the Service-Learning program. It is an invaluable opportunity for these students to not only apply what they learn in the classroom to the real world, but also for them to understand the challenges so many people across this city are working to overcome.

With tens of millions in research grant funding from external sources each year, Boise State is one of the city’s leading knowledge-based enterprises with a growing research portfolio that makes it an important contributor of ideas and expertise to local industry and business. Every $1 million of new Boise State research funding pumped into the region’s economy creates 11 direct jobs and 18 indirect jobs. Boise State researchers are increasingly relied-upon partners for key national research funding agencies like NASA, the Department of Defense, the National Science Foundation and the National Institutes of Health.

Boise State University is truly coming of age in higher education and we give considerable credit to the city of Boise for helping that happen. Our faculty, students, alumni and staff have put Boise State on the map with their breakthrough research and record of achievement. We are stretching beyond our regional roots and extending our academic and athletic influence to a national level. But more importantly, we are deepening our partnerships and relationships close to home. Each initiative at Boise State is undertaken to enrich the community experience, foster the development of human capital through education and outreach, and help drive a dynamic and creative local economy. In every way Boise State reflects its hometown’s unique, independent and creative spirit, and shares its aspirations to make Boise one of the best cities in the world to call home.

We are proud of Boise and proud to be Boise’s university.

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*Dr. Bob Kustra is in his tenth year as president of Boise State University. Under his tenure, Boise State has seen unparalleled growth that has served to strengthen ties with its city and redefine the university in academics, research and athletics. Dr. Kustra’s administration has been marked by an emphasis on upgrading admissions standards, improving the undergraduate experience and creating a vibrant campus life, and increasing the number of graduate and doctoral programs, especially in science and engineering.*