

**COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT CENTER  
GROUNDBREAKING  
CHANCELLOR JOHN E. CHRISTENSEN**

**OCTOBER 24, 2012**

Good afternoon. Welcome and thank you for joining us today....a day we've worked toward for several years and a day that symbolizes the future of UNO. I'm John Christensen and I have the privilege of serving as UNO Chancellor and Emcee for this special event.

Let me begin by introducing special guests with us today:

- Mayor Jim Suttle
- Former Mayors Hal Daub and Mike Fahey
- Regent Randy Ferlic and Regent Bob Whitehouse
- President Emeritus Ron Roskens
- Brian Hastings, University of Nebraska Foundation CEO & President – welcome to Omaha Brian
- Elected city officials (not by name just ask them to all stand/wave/be recognized)
- Guests representing community non-profits (stand together – not by name). Thank you for attending.

The concept of “community engagement” has long been a part of the fabric of UNO, and stewardship of place as an engaged university will always have a significant role in the mission, vision, and values of our campus. Our engagement with the community has been meaningful and has enriched our teaching, learning, and research while at the same time adding value to the community and its citizens.

We break ground today on a “one of a kind” Community Engagement Center that will provide an opportunity for UNO to set the standard for metropolitan university engagement. The center, to be completed in 2014, will be the focus of national attention in the fall of 2015 as the Coalition of Urban and Metropolitan Universities elected to hold its annual national convention in Omaha with UNO serving as host. The prospects of this unique facility have stirred considerable interest in the national academic community, as the value of great metropolitan public universities working in collaboration with their respective cities, is being recognized and embraced as a critical factor in the health and vitality of tomorrow's urban centers.

This is all possible because of the commitment and inspiration provided by true visionaries: Barbara and Wally Weitz, and their entire family, Ruth and Bill Scott, John Scott, and the entire Scott family, and Union Pacific Railroad led by UNO alum Jim Young. Thank you all for your tremendous support of UNO and your trust and belief in our direction for the future. For those

who may not know, Barb and Wally in the mid 90's were the supporters of our original ventures into Service Learning as a new pedagogy and engagement strategy. Clearly, this was the catalyst for all we celebrate today.

Earlier this month Barbara Holland, an international expert in community engagement visited our campus. She remarked that UNO "is on the cusp of a significant shift in academic culture, one in which a university's faculty and researchers work hand-in-hand with members of the community to address the challenges that community faces." At the same time, an engaged university enriches the teaching/learning experience for the students through the application of knowledge as well as creating a culture of active citizenship throughout the campus. Dr. Holland also indicated that UNO is the first place she knows of that's actually building a facility like the one we break ground for today, and she added "many other institutions will be watching to see how this goes, and they better not blink." Dr. Ira Harkavy, Chair of the National Anchor Institutions Organization and Director of Engagement at Penn University, also spent time on campus earlier this week to discuss the facility and our engagement activities. He confirmed Dr. Holland's observations and suggested that this center would be transformational for UNO's already strong engagement agenda, and so we again thank you all for your support.

President Milliken is ill today and is unable to join in the celebration. He of course offers his heartfelt thanks to the Weitz family, the Scott's family, and our friends at UP. President Milliken has long been a strong supporter of the engaged metropolitan university and for that we are appreciative. Get well JB.

It's now my opportunity to introduce B.J. Reed, Senior Vice Chancellor for Academic & Student Affairs and a leader in the center's planning and development.

And last, but clearly our most important speaker is Julie Smith. Julie is a graduate student in the NonProfit Leadership Alliance program, housed here at UNO, and will share a student's perspective of the center and its possibilities.

### Groundbreaking

- At this time, I would ask the Weitz Family to come forward to the front of the stage for the official "groundbreaking" and I would also ask Ruth and Bill Scott come to the stage to unveil the renderings of the center.
- Once the Weitz family members have shovels, ask the audience to join you in the countdown. The Weitz family members will then turn dirt and the Scotts will remove the covering over the renderings.....3-2-1

## Closing

- Thank you all for attending and being part of this special day.
- Please join us for a reception in the HPER building just south of the tent.
- And we look forward to gathering again in 2014 for the dedication of this remarkable new facility.