At the end of February, the University of Kentucky celebrated its 150th Anniversary and its multi-faceted mission as Kentucky’s flagship university. It was a special moment to honor those who came before us; the faculty, staff and students who carry that legacy today; and the countless others who will define this place and its work in the future.

The university was a European invention. It was for the wealthy and the well-to-do. But land grant universities were birthed with a revolutionary idea. They were to be for the common man, and, today, for men and women of all colors and backgrounds.

In February 1865, amid the still smoldering embers of the Civil War, John Bryan Bowman advocated for a public university in Lexington. Though located in the Bluegrass, the Agriculture and Mechanical College of Kentucky University would go on to serve the better interests of the entire Commonwealth.

Today, UK’s campus is far different than the A&M College of 1865. It covers more than 918 acres; is home to more than 30,000 students, 14,500 employees and 2,300 full-time faculty; and boosts an annual budget of more than $3.0 billion. Though we have evolved – and our multi-faceted mission of teaching, research, service and health care has expanded – we remain dedicated to those we touch and teach across our Commonwealth and beyond. They remain our compass, the soul of the University of Kentucky.

That is what it means to be a 21st century flagship and land grant research university. From our first Nobel Laureate to cutting-edge work in addressing health disparities, and from the artistic wonders that stir souls to our scientific creativity that inspires minds, we seek a brighter future through the contributions of our faculty, staff, students and alumni.

At no single point in our history has the necessity of this work been clearer. Today, multidimensional challenges linger while new and far more complex questions arise. Like no other place in the Commonwealth, our university impacts lives and helps chart the future for our state and for thousands of lives.

Thank you for sharing in this moment of celebration and for supporting Kentucky’s flagship in profound ways that illustrate our depth of purpose as the state’s indispensable institution -- a University for Kentucky.

Through world-class research across an array of disciplines and a commitment to working as partners with communities across the state, some of the most stubborn health challenges and statistics that plague Kentucky can be successfully attacked.

In early March, the state General Assembly and Gov. Steve Beshear demonstrated their unwavering commitment to that vision of addressing Kentucky’s most stubborn health disparities by endorsing funding for construction of a $265 million, multidisciplinary research building at UK.

The Senate voted 36-1 in support of funding $132.5 million of the cost of constructing the $265 million facility. UK will fund the other half through research contracts and private fundraising.

The health challenges the facility and researchers will address include the hundreds of deaths that occur in Kentucky each year due to cancer, heart and pulmonary disease, stroke and other preventable illnesses. These health maladies are particularly acute in Eastern Kentucky, which is served by UK HealthCare through a number of partnerships with local and regional hospitals and health providers.

UK has some 330 individual research projects — totaling some $350 million — currently investigating those challenges and others. Moreover, the economic impact of research is significant as well. A recent UK study concluded that the annual direct and indirect economic impact of UK’s sponsored research across the campus was $581 million in fiscal year 2013, with more than 8,000 jobs created and $21.3 million generated annually in local and state taxes.

The building, which would be located near UK’s bio-pharm and biological biomedical research buildings, would put together researchers across disciplines, working in teams, to address some of the state’s most intractable issues.
UK, SOAR Advancing Eastern Kentucky Health, Economy

The University of Kentucky and SOAR recently announced a three-year, more than $300,000 partnership as part of UK’s ongoing commitment to the health and economy of Eastern Kentucky.

SOAR — Shaping Our Appalachian Region — was established in 2013 by Gov. Steve Beshear and Congressman Hal Rogers and is designed to address the most significant challenges confronting Appalachian Kentucky in partnership with communities throughout the mountains. UK is the first university and first presenting sponsor for SOAR.

The sponsorship will ensure the university’s full involvement in Corporate Partner Strategic Meetings, exposure at board meetings, SOAR summits and other events that grow out of the organization’s work. Several members of UK’s faculty and staff were involved in initial SOAR work groups that studied and produced reports around issues such as health and the economy of the region. Currently, UK has some 125 individual research projects in Appalachia, involving health, energy, environment, agriculture and many other issues.

USDA Partners with University of Kentucky to Establish National Rural Child Poverty Nutrition Center

Agriculture Secretary Tom Vilsack joined Kentucky Governor Steve Beshear and University of Kentucky officials to announce the establishment of the USDA Rural Child Poverty Nutrition Center at the University of Kentucky in Lexington. The Center will use cutting-edge solutions in child nutrition to reduce child food insecurity in states with the highest number of persistently poor rural counties. Currently, about 85 percent of all persistently poor counties in the United States are in rural areas, and children are one of the most vulnerable groups living in rural areas.

With USDA’s investment of $2.5 million, the Rural Child Poverty Nutrition Center will administer and evaluate a series of sub-grants targeted to as many as 30 rural areas with high poverty rates in up to 15 states. The communities will use the funds to better coordinate existing child nutrition programs and create solutions to target child food insecurity. The University of Kentucky will partner with Altarum Institute and the Southern Rural Development Center to develop the center.

This announcement is part of the Obama Administration’s continuing efforts to combat poverty and food insecurity among children, especially in rural areas. In Kentucky alone, more than 26 percent of children live in poverty.

DanceBlue Raises

With sore feet, worn-out bodies and emotions running high, committee members revealed a grand fundraising total of $1,615,057.18 at the 10th annual DanceBlue dance marathon to a crowd of several thousand people.

Whether participating as a dancer, volunteer, committee member or even just a supporter, DanceBlue is something no one ever forgets, especially the last few hours. With a family talent show featuring children from the clinic and an emotional memorial hour to remember those who have lost their battle with cancer, the reveal was a much anticipated moment for so many people at UK.

This year was special as DanceBlue celebrated its 10th anniversary. A large contingent of DanceBlue alumni joined the crowd to celebrate the reveal of the fundraising total.

It all began in 2006 by raising $123,323.16 and has increased every year. With this year’s total, DanceBlue has contributed more than $8.1 million dollars to the Golden Matrix Fund and the DanceBlue Kentucky Children’s Hospital Pediatric Hematology/Oncology Clinic.

Gaines Fellowship Awarded to 12 UK Scholars

The University of Kentucky Gaines Center for the Humanities has chosen 12 outstanding undergraduates as new scholars for the university’s Gaines Fellowship Program for the 2015-2016 and 2016-2017 academic years. Gaines Fellowships are given in recognition of outstanding academic performance, demonstrated ability to conduct independent research, an interest in public issues and a desire to enhance understanding of the human condition through the humanities.

Gaines Fellowships are awarded for the tenure of a student’s junior and senior years, or for the last two years of a five-year program; students in all disciplines and with any intended profession are given equal consideration.

All Gaines Fellows are required to take a specially designed, four-credit hour per semester seminar in the humanities during both semesters of their junior year. In addition, each junior fellow must complete a jury project, planning and optionally carrying out an improvement for a local community. In the senior year, each fellow must complete a major independent study project of six to 15 credit hours. At the conclusion of this project, a thesis paper must be submitted and defended in front of a thesis committee of three university faculty members and the director of the Gaines Center.