

President's tenure 'has been transforming'

BY DR. GARY MAROTTA

Dr. Gary Marotta served as UL Lafayette's vice president for Academic Affairs from 1989-1999. A self-described "recovering administrator," he is now professor of history at Buffalo State College, the largest four-year college in the State University of New York system. Marotta is former University Dean at Long Island University and former provost of Buffalo State College.

The University of Louisiana has been fortunate to have had a number of remarkable presidents in its long history; their stewardship, at key moments, has been decisive. But President Ray Authement's tenure – of unprecedented duration and intensity – has been more than decisive; it has been transforming.

Today, the University commands regional and national, indeed global, recognition. It is a recognition grounded in the academic and research core of the University, identified by distinguished programs in each of its colleges. A strong and productive faculty, an aspiring student body, committed alumni, all supported by state of the art infrastructure, backed by endowments, have been assembled. And that is what matters and that is what endures – a place that cherishes the human mind.

The impact of Dr. Authement is, I believe, comparable to the impact that President Charles William Eliot had on Harvard in the late 19th century and Nicholas Murray Butler had on Columbia in the first half of the 20th century. The transformation of the University during Dr. Authement's



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presidency, from a provincial to a nationally competitive institution, has been achieved in the face of financial and political densities of resistance. By consolidating authority on campus, partnering with city and parish, astutely avoiding dangers, mastering details, and pursuing a large vision, Dr. Authement has overcome the obstacles and created a modern, dynamic university.

There is an e-mail I send to my graduate students; it says, "The main thing is to keep the main thing the main thing." The message helps them to sustain the focus on the essence of the research projects or theses they are developing. Once they grasp its import, they get the job done. I do not recall the source of the aphorism, but it is the big lesson I have learned from

Dr. Authement. The "main thing" is not some strategic plan vetted by the university stakeholders. It is in Dr. Authement's head. But we can discern its shape in the details of decades of decisions and projects. Look around to see their fruits: nothing less than the University of Louisiana.

I have worked with several university presidents and chancellors, in both the public and independent sectors. All have been smart, all have been dedicated, but none as tireless or as determined as Dr. Authement. He is not, like too many higher education CEOs, a careerist, opportunist, or mere image-maker. The University of Louisiana is not smoke and mirrors. It has been built the old fashioned way: through long-term engagement, attention to detail and hard work.

Dr. Authement knows how to order priorities, make adjustments, get results – and survive. No mean feat in Louisiana, or any place else in higher education for that matter. He is not an easy man to work for because he believes in equality: He believes that everybody should work as hard and as smart as he does. If we did, he implies, we would be contributing to the building of a great institution, and that would invest our lives with meaning. And so it does.

It was extraordinary to be on his team. What kind of team was it? It was a track team, and I had a 10-year run. Others fell out earlier, some continued the pace. But the best run of all was that unprecedented, intense long-distance run – the one that transformed the University. ■

1993	1994	1995	1996	1997	1998
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Office of Minority Affairs created Enterprise Center of Louisiana, a business incubator, opens 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> USL becomes third university in world to offer doctorate in Francophone studies 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Louisiana Legislature creates the University of Louisiana System; paves way for USL name change 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> University receives \$10 million federal EETAP grant, biggest research grant in school history Ragin' Cajuns® becomes federally registered trademark 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Enrollment reaches all-time high of more than 17,000 <i>Investing in Our Future</i> campaign begins <i>Investing in Our Future</i> fund drive chairmen establish endowed chair in Authement's name 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Estuarine Habitats and Coastal Fisheries Center opens