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**QuickTakes!**

## **Stockton Celebrates its Roots, Trunk and Branches with the Inauguration of President Harvey Kesselman**

September 26, 2016

About 1,200 people from Stockton's past, present and future gathered on September 23, 2016 to celebrate the inauguration of Harvey Kesselman, a member of Stockton's very first class in 1971 who rose to become the university's fifth president.

His career parallels the institution's growth, from a small college in the Pinelands National Reserve to a world-class university with locations in Galloway, Atlantic City, Hammonton in western Atlantic County, Manahawkin in Ocean County and Woodbine in Cape May County. A new residential campus being built in Atlantic City will further expand Stockton's impact on the region and state.

Keynote speaker Jon Blair, an Academy-Award-winning film director and producer with long ties to Stockton, said Dr. Kesselman is "uniquely qualified to lead this institution with skill, humanity and devotion, always aware of its special place in this community and its special history at the forefront of liberal arts and professional education."

Mr. Blair shared his memories of Kesselman and those of others, such as Atlantic City Council President Marty Small, who said Dr. Kesselman's intervention helped save his college career when he was in danger of being dismissed for low grades.

"Harvey gave him the choice," Mr. Blair recounted. "Go to summer school, do two classes and get two Bs, or one class and get an A. To cut to the chase, Marty took one class, got his A and the next semester met his wife, graduated later with a 3.0 GPA and the rest, as they say, is history."

Mr. Small "now says: 'If Harvey Kesselman had stuck strictly to the rules, had refused to overrule a decision already made, and not shown a bit of humane understanding and flexibility, I simply would not be where I am today,'" Mr. Blair noted.

"That story in one shape or form can be repeated over and over. Generations of Stockton graduates have seen Harvey almost as a father figure," he said. "What I realized as I have

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heard these stories over the years, and apologies here to you Smurf fans, President Harvey Kesselman should simply be known as 'Papa K!'"

Joe Blair, a Commander of the British Empire (CBE), has won an Oscar, two Emmys and a British Academy Award. He received an honorary doctorate from Stockton in 1994 for his contribution to human rights awareness through his films, which include the documentary, "Anne Frank Remembered." He said creativity, inquisitiveness, idealism, the ability to change and a sense of values and ethics are core values that apply to running an institution of higher education.

"We live in an era when the concept of expertise is denigrated and rejected on the grounds that everything is said just to be a matter of opinion," Mr. Blair said. "The professor of cosmology is given equal standing with the flat-earther. Public discourse is characterized by there no longer being a presumption of good faith between opponents, rhetorical self-restraint is abandoned, and malicious exaggeration or even outright lies, are rampant."

"Graduates from this and other institutions are being parachuted into this world, but I am confident that this place, under Harvey Kesselman's leadership, will help equip them, as well as any Ivy League college could, to deal with and interpret the real world of today, not just rely on emotion."

"Presidential Inaugurations provide institutions an opportunity to reflect on their past, take stock of their present, and consider their future," said Madeleine Deininger, chair of the Board of Trustees and a 1980 alumna. "Stockton University is in the unique position of having our fifth president embody all three."

She welcomed visiting dignitaries including State Senator Christopher Connors, R-9<sup>th</sup>, a 1978 Stockton graduate; State Senator James Whelan, D-2<sup>nd</sup>; President George A. Pruitt of Thomas Edison State University; Michael Klein, executive director of the New Jersey Association of State Colleges and Universities (NJASCU); and Richard Dovey, chair of the University Foundation, each of whom spoke at the ceremony.

Ms. Deininger introduced First Lady Lynne Kesselman, "an alumna from the classes of 1982 and 2005, and an accomplished educator in her own right" and welcomed other members of the Kesselman family, alumni and students.

Faculty Senate President Brian Tyrrell and Student Senate President Maryam Sarhan offered their groups' salutations.

"President Kesselman just has a way of building loyalty through the interest he shows in you, not only professionally but personally," Dr. Tyrrell said. "It is this aspect of Dr. Kesselman's leadership style that I admire most." He also thanked Kesselman, on behalf of the faculty, for giving up the opportunity last year to become president of the University of Southern Maine to stay at Stockton.

“For Stockton students this is a tremendously important day,” said Ms. Sarhan. “I say this because Dr. Kesselman, above all, believes the very essence of what makes Stockton truly remarkable is that students always come first. One of my favorite moments with Dr. Kesselman was when we were taking a stroll on this beautiful campus and he stopped to have a conversation with a student we passed by. When I asked how he knew the student, he said, ‘Oh, I’ve never met him before!’ Dr. Kesselman greets each Stockton student as if he’s known them for years”

“His roots began at Stockton where he was a student, faculty member and now our president. His passion for Stockton, his passion for students, is what will make his mark here very special,” Ms. Sarhan said.

Sen. Connors said Dr. Kesselman “brings to Stockton a vision that is unparalleled. Stockton was an important part of my life. But Stockton *is* Dr. Kesselman’s life.”

The legislator recounted how on his way to the ceremony, he overheard one student ask another, “How did Dr. Harvey Kesselman get here?”

Sen. Connors said the other student responded: “Well, he came from the Mayflower,” which got a huge laugh.

“Let me clarify. Harvey Kesselman was in the Mayflower, not on the Mayflower,” Sen. Connors said, adding that Harvey Kesselman “has the wisdom of a person who had been on this Earth for that long.”

“He’s the right man for the right time,” Sen. Connors said. “Harvey Kesselman will be a great president for Stockton University.”

Thomas Edison State University’s Pruitt, the longest-serving college or university president in New Jersey and a long-time friend and mentor to Dr. Kesselman, said he has known all of Stockton’s presidents, “and the constant through all that change was Harvey Kesselman.”

“Education changed his life and he dedicated his entire professional career to giving back to his alma mater,” Dr. Pruitt said. “I have seen him emerge as one of the most respected educational leaders in the state and nation.”

The NJASCU’s Dr. Michael Klein termed Harvey Kesselman “a born leader” and joked about receiving emails from him at 4 a.m.

“Harvey’s expertise in student affairs, financial aid, and the continuum from K-12 to college make him our go to guy on so many important issues facing public higher education,” Dr. Klein said. “And let’s face it, as we all know, no one works a room like Harvey.”

Mr. Dovey, Foundation chair and a fellow member of Stockton's first class, said he and Harvey Kesselman both heard about Stockton's motto: "Plant yourself where you can grow," and were "hooked."

He talked about how they were both first-generation college students and that scholarships are even more important today. "In each of the last two years, the Foundation has distributed \$1.9 million to the university and its students - \$600,000 of that in the form of scholarships," he said.

"Today, Harvey and I are both presidents, and although my work as head of sewage and trash at the Atlantic County Utilities Authority is admittedly less glamorous than being the head of New Jersey's most distinctive public university, we both grew in our professions through our beginnings at Stockton. I know that Dr. Kesselman, Harvey, has the passion, vision and stamina to ensure that Stockton will continue to provide this type of environment for future generations."

Ms. Deininger presided over the investiture of the president, who has more than 35 years of experience in higher education. He previously served Stockton as provost and executive vice president, dean of the School of Education, interim vice president for Administration and Finance, CEO of the Southern Regional Institute & Educational Technology Training Center, and vice president for Student Affairs.

"I hereby install you as the fifth president of Stockton University and vest you with all the power and authority pertaining to the office. Congratulations!" Ms. Deininger said, to sustained applause.

"To the love of my life, Lynn, the first lady, my wonderful children, relatives, and friends - permit me to offer my deepest gratitude. I love you," Dr. Kesselman said. "And, finally, to my second family - the students, faculty, staff, and administration of Stockton - it is such an honor to share this day with you.

"Listening to today's guest speakers, I thought how fortunate and privileged I am to have been part of this amazing institution for the past 45 years. When Stockton opened its doors in 1971 at the Mayflower Hotel in Atlantic City, there was a real sense that we were embarking on something new, something different - offering the very best of a broad-based, liberal arts and sciences education to state-college students at state-college prices. In effect, providing a top-tier education to those who most needed it but to those who, like myself, could least afford it. That was what we called "The Stockton Idea."

"I was part of that noble experiment, and what brought us here was intangible - the promise of what we could become, relationships formed in an environment that accepted us and an environment that transformed us. An environment where innovation, experimentation and community were central to the Stockton mission. An environment where students could

plant themselves and grow. I promise, to each and every student here today, to uphold and continue that tradition during my presidency,” he said.

Dr. Kesselman cited the establishment of the Performing Arts Center 40 years ago and the Sara and Sam Schoffer Holocaust Resource Center in 1990 as examples of how Stockton engages with the community and provides learning experiences for students. He added that “Stockton has been a friendly home to literally thousands of veterans” since 1971, and is now rated as sixth in the nation by Military Times in its “Best for Vets” college rankings.

“Today, Stockton has just under 9,000 students, over 2,000 full- and part-time employees and nearly 50,000 alumni, including more than 11,000 living here in Atlantic County,” Kesselman said. He noted, “Despite our 45 years of continued expansion and growth, our early commitment to small class sizes and close-knit faculty-student relationships remains a core value, central to who we are and how we educate. The ‘Stockton Idea’ of a liberal arts and sciences education shows in the way our professors know our students – they know their strengths, their challenges, their dreams ... Teaching ... has primacy here. It is a part of our institutional DNA.”

All this has resulted in successful outcomes for students, he said.

“We know the ‘Stockton Idea’ works because nearly 90 percent of our freshmen return for their second year. Even better, just under 60 percent finish their degree in four years, more than 70 percent in six. Nearly 90 percent of our graduates are employed or in graduate school within six months of commencement. These figures are among the best in New Jersey, and far above national averages.”

“Recognizing the long-term and deep impact faculty members have on our students and on this community, I pledge to strengthen Stockton’s commitment to its faculty through further support. This is particularly relevant as our university enhances the manner in which we conduct our outreach, recruitment, mentoring and retention efforts of a diverse population of students, faculty and staff. This is fundamental to the overall learning experience at Stockton,” he said.

“We must continue to view the diversity of our campus community as an irreplaceable educational resource, one that enriches all of our lives. We must commit ourselves to providing the most comprehensive learning environment possible, one that will equip our students to lead and to contribute in a world of multiple perspectives, viewpoints and values. If we steadfastly intensify our efforts to support such inclusivity, then the tremendous promise of our academic institutions, and our nation, will fully actualize.”

The president talked about the expansion on the main campus and the new campus being built in Atlantic City.

“Here, on this pristine 2,000-acre Galloway campus, we’ll be opening two new academic buildings in the next two years, specifically designed to serve the needs of our burgeoning Natural Sciences and Health Sciences programs.”

He noted that plans for Atlantic City “have received significant local, regional and state support. This project is a physical, intellectual and financial demonstration of our long-term commitment to the vitality and prosperity of southern New Jersey. In many ways, it harkens back to our roots.”

Stockton’s growth in Atlantic City “will be – and must be – a collaboration,” with residents, business and community leaders and government officials, Kesselman said.

“Clearly, Stockton’s belief in supporting our region is resolute; it has always been an essential part of who we are. However, our commitment to the teaching-learning process must remain at the very core of everything that we do,” he continued.

“The magnificent faculty that surrounds this platform, and all of the incredible staff and administrators with whom I work each and every day – we are all responsible for inspiring a passion for learning in our students, and teaching them a sense of commitment to the enhancement of our society,” Dr. Kesselman said.

“If we keep all of our actions focused on just these two outcomes, we will have done our job, and have done it well.”

He asked all the alumni present to rise and be recognized, calling them “a living testament to these ideals.”

“I have had a front-row seat as the institution first defined its mission, and I’ve watched it grow and develop and respond to changes in education, industry, our region, and society,” President Kesselman said. “I am deeply humbled and extraordinarily proud to be in a position to ensure that a Stockton degree becomes more valuable each and every day of my presidency.”

“The late Steve Jobs, co-founder and former CEO of Apple, once said, ‘The only way to do great work is to love what you do.’ Ladies and gentlemen, I love what I do and I love Stockton, and together, all of us can ensure that what began as that little college in the pines, warms our memories of the past, fires our imaginations in the present, and lights our dreams in the future.”

Portraits of Stockton’s first four presidents, Richard E. Bjork, Peter M. Mitchell, Vera King Farris, and Herman J. Saatkamp, Jr., were unveiled at a reception following the ceremony. Dr. Kesselman had requested that the presidents’ portraits be painted to honor the contributions of each of his predecessors.

Members of the Bjork and Farris families helped unveil the portraits. View coverage of the [portrait unveiling](#).