

# MEDIA Coverage



September 21, 2023

## Forward thinking 101: Dale Caldwell is bringing new ideas to his new role as president of Centenary University

*By Tom Bergeron*



Dale Caldwell, the dynamic and innovative new president of Centenary University.

About that reading, writing and arithmetic idea ... Dale Caldwell, the dynamic and innovative new president of Centenary University, has some thoughts.

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Don't be confused, Caldwell isn't moving away from a traditional liberal arts education. Far from it. The ability to think and communicate is just as important now as it was when Caldwell earned his undergraduate degree from Princeton University four decades ago.

But, as he begins his first school year at Centenary, Caldwell is working to establish the small private university in Hackettstown as one that is thinking outside the box to meet student needs in a post-pandemic world. It starts with this:

- Emotional well-being;
- Intellectual curiosity;
- Intercultural competence.

"That's the secret sauce," he said. "Our mission is to focus on developing students emotionally, intellectually and then culturally."

Caldwell explains.

"Emotional well-being," he starts. "You have to be emotionally strong in this world. This is a tough world. And that's how you deal with the bad things that happen. So, we want to make sure that students are there.

"Intellectual curiosity: You want people to be lifelong learners. We're all learning, no matter what age we are. We're learning day in and day out, and we love it.

"Intercultural competence: You have to work with different people. And it's not just about race or gender or sexual orientation. Everybody's different. When you understand this, when you realize two white men can be different and two Black men can be different and that this is OK, you're going to be able to survive and thrive in this world."

Caldwell has more than survived and thrived in his lifetime. A tennis star at Princeton, he went on to become a tennis historian and the USTA Eastern Section president.

He was a star in the classroom, too, earning an MBA from Wharton and a doctorate at Seton Hall.

An accomplished author, he truly is a thought leader and an academic. He is a former president and current member of the New Brunswick Board of Education as well as board president of the Piscataway-based Educational Services Commission of New Jersey. And he came to Centenary from Fairleigh Dickinson University, where he served as executive director of the Rothman Institute of Innovation and Entrepreneurship.

But, more than anything, he is a man of action.

When his appointment was announced Feb. 5, many were surprised that Caldwell — well-known in educational, political and business circles in the state — would make his next stop at Centenary.

## Fun with fundraising

Dale Caldwell, Centenary University's new president, jokes that one of the most important parts of the job is to have good meetings.

"That's it," he said. "That's the job of the president. To have good meetings — with students and parents, with faculty, with the press, with donors."

There's a bit of truth to this. And meetings with the last group — current and potential donors — are some of the most important. Caldwell, who was hired in February and started this summer, said they are going well.

"We have alumni that want to support the university that we're now reaching out to in ways we haven't in the past — and they are responding," he said. "It's tough, because expenses are high. But the nice thing is, there are a lot of rocks we haven't overturned here. So, there are a lot of things we can do to really firm up our financial strength."

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Not Caldwell. He said that, when he saw all the good things that were happening at Centenary — things he says not enough people know about — he knew this was a perfect place for him.

The fact that Centenary only has 1,300 students wasn't an issue. It's an opportunity.

"I wasn't really thinking about applying, but, then, I looked at the things that they were asking for and it was almost like they were like written for me: someone with experience in education, entrepreneurship, fundraising and other things that I have done," he said.

"The more I learned what the school is all about, the more I felt it was tailor-made for me."

Caldwell recently sat with ROI-NJ to explain all his thoughts and plans. Here's a look at some of the conversation, edited for space and clarity.

**ROI-NJ:** A new leader with new ideas for a new age: That sounds great. But it doesn't sound like higher ed, which historically has been slow to adapt. How do you make that work here?

**Dale Caldwell:** It's about changing the mindset of higher ed. I remember when I got my doctorate. I was rewarded for looking in the past. I couldn't present innovative ideas — that's what I wanted to do. If I did, they would have said, 'There's no research to show that it's going to work.'

So, a lot of universities are run based on yesterday. It's like getting a stock tip a day too late. It's the same thing now. Everyone is running around saying STEM is important and STEM is going to change everything. But, now, there's ChatGPT, which is going to take care of a lot of the things that humans took care of before. So, that's why I go back to our three focus areas: emotional well-being, intellectual curiosity and intercultural competence. Let's start there and then go forward.

**ROI:** Give us a roadmap.

**DC:** Let's start with institutes. We've already created the Centenary Learning Institute, where we are going to do executive coaching.

And I'm really excited about the Centenary Entrepreneurship Institute. We have one of the top social entrepreneurship programs in the country, called Enactus. It's an international program where universities compete on social entrepreneurship programs. It's part of Centenary's Consulting Co-op, where students do free consulting for local businesses; perhaps it's social media or marketing. The good thing is that, if you're in the program, it doesn't matter if you're an English major or anything else, you can learn how to work with a business — on finance, on marketing, on real world needs.

## Unique sports live here

Centenary University does not have a football team. At least, a men's football team. The school is one of a growing number to have a flag football team for women, however. It also has a women's wrestling program.

New Centenary President Dale Caldwell, a former college athlete himself, feels it adds to the idea that anything and everything is possible at Centenary — a school that's looking toward the future.

"Those are two emerging sports," he said. "We feel it will be a draw for us."

The same goes for its equestrian program. In addition to a program that puts students into the top veterinary schools in the country, Centenary also has an equestrian program that will compete with schools from around the country in equestrian sports.

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This is a program that should be a no-brainer at every university. We already have it here. We finished in the Top 8 this year, we just didn't tell anybody about it. Now, we're going to formalize it and market it.

**ROI:** What else?

**DC:** Let's work on getting more people their degrees. We're going to introduce a Working B.A. When you look at this marketplace, there are students who don't have money to go to college and are working full-time. So, we have created a Working B.A., so you can work full-time and we can help you get a Bachelor of Arts.

We're going to have Thursday, Friday, Saturday — actually take coursework while they're working full-time. It won't be a full load, but it will be an intensified load.

We're also going to introduce a degree-completion program. That's the next thing that we're doing that's innovative. A good friend of mine named Brian Taylor, a pro basketball player out of Princeton, is friends with a lot of former NBA players who don't have a degree. So, we'd like to have a degree completion program for ex-NBA players — and anyone else who needs it.

It's all about working together to make things happen.

**ROI:** Working together; let's go with that for a bit. You talked about having students interact with the community. How far can that go?



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**DC:** As far as you want to take it. Universities can have great influence, especially on small business. Let's face it, big government can be for big corporations because small businesses don't have as much lobbying money. Everybody loves them, but nobody wants to teach them. Universities can really help them. It's about doing good to do good. And it's more important than ever.

We can talk about humanitarian programs. Think about all the things that the United Nations has done to help groups around the world, like free shoes and free glasses. What they don't realize is that they are hurting local entrepreneurs when they are doing it.

So, why don't we use our entrepreneur program as a humanitarian program? We would love to work with other universities where we go to other countries to help. Why don't we go help people start businesses and then become their suppliers?

What's the phrase? 'Give a man a fish, and you feed him for a day; teach a man to fish and you feed him for a lifetime.' Well, I say, 'Help him create a fishing business and you create an entrepreneur.'

There are so many things universities can do if they work together.

**ROI:** Work together? That's crazy talk in higher ed. Talk about how you are going to work together in a sector that historically goes it alone?

**DC:** Universities have to do more than sit in a room and write research papers that three people read. My nature is collaboration. Higher ed should be a competition to see who collaborates best, not who goes it alone. Michael Avaltroni, the new president at FDU, is a friend of mine. We're already talking about the Family Business of the Year awards that I used to run there. How can we do that together? There needs to be more of that.

**ROI:** Do you think there's an appetite for it?

**DC:** I hope so. I think there is a new class of presidents that realize we have to change. We have to do more in the community. And we have to work together. The old mentality is that we have to do it on our own — because they may get something that we would have gotten. The reality is, there is enough for everybody if we work together.

**ROI:** New initiatives, new partners, new way of thinking. Dare I say, this could be a new legacy for you — a man who has accomplished so much already?

**DC:** I always say, 'You have no idea which way your life is going.' I never expected to be a president of a university. Yet, it's the perfect job for me. I'm going to make the most of it. I learned that from my father, who walked with Dr. (Martin Luther) King on the March on Washington. That has stuck with me.

Those who know me, know that money is not my driver. My driver is to make history. I'm very scared that the world won't be any better because Dale Caldwell was here — that's why I want to help as many people as possible. And this is the perfect place to do it.

## Conversation Starter

Reach Centenary University at: [centenaryuniversity.edu](http://centenaryuniversity.edu) or call 908-852-1400.

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