

MEDIA Coverage



TAPinto
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October 17, 2023

‘He’s Never Been Happier:’ New Brunswick’s Caldwell Eager for Inauguration

Centenary University’s 15th President Working to Raise Enrollment, Endowment.

By Chuck O'Donnell



Dale Caldwell, a longtime member of the New Brunswick Board of Education, will be inaugurated as the 15th President of Centenary University this weekend.

When Ashley Caldwell delivers the keynote address at her dad’s inauguration ceremony this weekend, the one thing that she wants everyone to know is that she’s never seen him happier.

“Taking the job as president at Centenary University, I think he saw an opportunity there,” said Caldwell, a Rutgers sophomore. “He saw the opportunity to change so many young people’s lives, to make the university an even better place to learn and grow. He may be suited for the job, but the job also suits him.”

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Dr. Dale Caldwell – university president, father, pastor, New Brunswick Board of Education member, educational trailblazer, entrepreneur and much more – is set to be formally installed as the 15th president of the Sussex County private liberal arts university Saturday at 1 p.m.

Yes, Caldwell admitted this week that he's very happy as he made the 59-minute drive from New Brunswick – where he spends his weekends – to the 6,000-square-foot president's residence in Hackettstown. Getting ready for the inauguration has been a time to reflect on past achievements, such as his longtime service as board president of the Educational Services Commission of New Jersey.

But more than anything, he's eager to share the progress made since taking office July 1, and the work he's put into making his mark on the school and initiating a change in the culture around the bucolic campus where about 1,300 students study everything from biology to business administration.

He has put much of his focus on the Campaign for College, an initiative to raise \$8 million earmarked to help the many students who find themselves tapped out as they reach the summit of their educational journeys. To help reach the goal, Caldwell hired Jordan Glatt, a former Summit mayor with connections to the Gov. Phil Murphy's office, as vice president for advancement and special assistant to the president.

"I didn't fully understand the difference between a college dropout and a college honors graduate could be \$3,000," Caldwell said. "Many students are close to graduating, but they don't have the 1, 2, 3, 4, 5 thousand dollars they need to graduate. It really opened my eyes that we can get more students graduating with this fund."

Along with trying to fill Centenary's coffers, he's working to raise the school's profile and its enrollment numbers.

To get the word out about this hidden gem, he and the school have been featured in articles in *USA Today*, *Fortune* magazine and other regional news outlets. The school that offers a Master of Arts degree in happiness studies was also the subject of a recent feature by *NPR*. He talks about initiatives such as reaching a deal with a school such as Middlesex College that would allow some of, if not all, students' credits to transfer.

"One of the mistakes Centenary has made is that it has recruited from inside the Skylands region (Sussex, Warren, Hunterdon and Morris counties) predominantly," he said. "So, my involvement has been in New Brunswick. There was one student from New Brunswick at Centenary, who happens to be my daughter's boyfriend."

Otherwise, Caldwell feels like he's been well received by the students, staff, and faculty, and that's not that surprising to those who have known him the longest.

Mark Finkelstein, who served for 27 years as the superintendent of the Educational Services Commission of New Jersey, said people have always rallied behind Caldwell's leadership.

"I think the important thing for people to know about Dale, especially going into his new position, is the reason he's so effective as a leader is his intelligence," Finkelstein said. "He's an idea person. I know that he's taking on several new goals, several new challenges. Number one, increasing student enrollment, number two, increasing the endowment. He comes up with many ideas. He's a very strong collaborator. As a result, he gets to work with many different people who see his enthusiasm, see his intelligence and want to work with him."

They've apparently wanted to work with him since Caldwell laid out a cutting-edge mission statement for Centenary that is built on three skills he said are critical for success, no matter your major or future profession: emotional well-being, intellectual curiosity, and intercultural competence.

These three tenets are the basis for everything that happens at Centenary, even how the professors instruct the students in, say, intro to law enforcement or biomechanics of exercise. Gone are the days of boring lectures. They're replaced by faculty members who engage and challenge students in hopes of making them lifelong learners.

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“I’ve been told Dale Caldwell has already made a tremendous impact at Centenary University as a consistent presence on campus and in the Hackettstown-area community since he came on board this summer,” New Brunswick Mayor Jim Cahill said. “It comes as no surprise that Dale is taking with him the same enthusiasm, talent and knowledge that has made him such a superb educational leader in New Brunswick, where he has served on the local school board for a quarter-century.

“Dale has focused his distinguished career on promoting both equity and entrepreneurship in New Brunswick, which transfers well to his next chapter as a university president,” Cahill added. “On behalf of the city, I congratulate Dale on this well-deserved, landmark professional achievement.”

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