ESF Board of Trustees Meeting

May 8, 2020

# **Chair’s Remarks**

**Matthew J. Marko, P.E., BCEE**

As everyone is well aware, since our last Board meeting on February 28, the entire world has changed. Instead of the pomp and circumstance of graduation ceremonies, we are facing numerous challenges associated with the COVID-19 pandemic. Regretfully, with over 328,000 cases of novel coronavirus and 19,877 deaths in just New York State alone, it is inevitable that members of our ESF community – students, faculty, staff, alumni, foundation members, trustees, and others, have all had some direct impact from this insidious disease. Please know you are in our thoughts and we wish you the best. I would also like to recognize and applaud our first responders, including our own University Police officers, for the immeasurable positive impact and sacrifice they make every day. Another thank you to the many members of our College community who have volunteered to assist those in need.

In March, we witnessed our campus migrate from social distancing, to a completely remote learning experience. The words “never been done before” seem to be heard nearly every day. And yet, we did it; we adapted, and we continue to meet the coronavirus challenge head on. There has been pain, there will be more pain, but let me remind you that ESF endured the Spanish Flu of 1918, the Great Depression, World War II; and we will emerge from this. If you look at my remarks from the last three years, I talk a lot about change, and how hard it is. Be there no mistaking this now, there will be change.

Governor Cuomo put it best in a speech on Friday, March 27.  He said, *“*you are living a moment in history. This is going to be one of those moment they're going to write and they're going to talk about for generations. This is a moment that is going to change this nation. This is a moment that forges character, forges people, changes people -- make them stronger, make them weaker -- but this is a moment that will change character.”

I really wish we had time to hear the entire speech. It was truly remarkable and in many ways, a call to arms. Ask yourself, as I have asked myself – what are you doing during this difficult time to embrace change and come out better for it?

We, as an institution, have changed; there will be more change. We will also be better for it as we will emerge leaner, more nimble, and pound for pound stronger. Nothing has changed with the FACT that our college provides a product that is highly valuable and needed now, more than ever. Today we will be talking about some of the actions we are taking to sustain ourselves through New York State on PAUSE, the opportunities that are before us, and how we will emerge in the “new normal.”

Another subject that I know people are interested in getting an update on is the Presidential Search. I am pleased to inform you that since our last Trustee meeting, the Search Consultant has been contracted, the Search Committee formed, and we have met now twice. We are developing a website that will provide status updates to the campus community as we progress. The timeline we have developed will ensure that the 5th President of ESF is on campus for the start of the Spring, 2021 semester.

I also want to update you that in accordance with our bylaws, we will need to elect Board Officers at our next annual meeting, which is typically in February. A new Chair will be elected as my term comes to an end. Therefore, I will consult with Past Chairs DeMarchi and Fitts, to seek nominations, and present the candidates to the Board at our Fall Meeting.

I will end by thanking our faculty, staff, and administrators who have gone above and beyond during the last half of this semester. While not at all a desirable situation, you pushed through your comfort zone and gave your all for our students. And finally, to our students, thank YOU as well. You hopefully learned what is possibly the most important lesson of all, articulated well by author and educator Charles Swindoll, that “Life is 10% what happens to you and 90% how you react to it.” Never, absolutely never, underestimate the power of a positive attitude. …Congratulations to the Class of 2020. We know this is not how you wanted to end your time at ESF, but here we are. Better days are ahead, and we look forward to celebrating with you in the future.