

# January 15, 2021

# **ESF Board of Trustees Meeting**

**Report of the Board Chair**Today is our Annual Meeting, and in accordance with the ESF Board of Trustee Bylaws, my term as Chairman has come to an end. I have consulted with trustee past chairs to recommend nominees to serve as Board officers. The nominations are as follows:

* Chair: Bill Fisher
* Vice Chair: John Bartow
* Secretary: Joe Rufo

**Motion by Past Chair DeMarchi, Seconded by Past Chair Fitts, approved unanimously.**

The election of two recently appointed trustees, speaks to the talent, dedication, acumen, and passion we have been blessed with in all of our new board members.  Having served on this board at a time when we dwindled from 9 to 5 voting members, it has been my pleasure to work with each and every one of these new trustees since the summer of 2019.  Nothing is more satisfying to a Chair than to leave the board leadership in even more capable hands than your own.  Vita elevated the function of our Board during her tenure, and I strived to do the same.  Both Vita’s and my tenure were not without their challenges and turmoil, yet our future is incredibly bright.  We have remarkable leadership in President Mahoney, and although you have been part of our ESF family for a couple years now, it’s hard to believe that this is actually your first meeting as President.  Hit the ground running you have, and I am very excited to hear your report later in this meeting.

There is so much that we have accomplished over the last 4 years… including a successful adaptation to a pandemic.  Changes in presidents, changes in chancellors, the only thing that didn’t “change” was our commitment adapt to the 21st century.  Administration, faculty, staff and students have all pulled together… as we of course, safely distance.  In July, 2020, a few months into the pandemic, Professor Scott Galloway from NYU published a study where he and his students looked at *Who* [in higher education] *Will Thrive, Survive, Struggle, or Face Significant Challenges?*  Well, you guessed it, ESF is poised to thrive.  Are there some tough days ahead – certainly.  Yet ESF will emerge stronger than ever thanks to its globally relevant mission, nexus between New York City and the Adirondack wilderness, and a willingness to become a more diverse community.  These are all elements this Board has invested in, and will continue to do so, well into the future.

Today is January 15, the birth date of one of America’s greatest leaders, Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr.  On Monday, our nation will observe this national holiday.  My thoughts, however, look back at a year of racial unrest.  It saddens me to think that we as a nation struggle with something that at its essence is so simple.  As I prepared my remarks for today, I read Dr. King’s speech from the March on Washington for Jobs and Freedom, August 28, 1963.  “I have a dream that my four little children will one day live in a nation where they will not be judged by the color of their skin but by the content of their character.”  How is it possible we are still fighting for that dream?  One cannot read that speech without thinking about the events of last week, 57 years later in that same city, on the other end of the mall at the Capitol Building.  With that in mind, allow me to use Dr. King’s words, yet again, with three more quotes:

* “Our lives begin to end the day we become silent about things that matter.”
* “The time is always right, to do what is right.”
* “Darkness cannot drive out darkness; only light can do that. Hate cannot drive out hate; only love can do that.”

Those that know me have heard me say many times, “Leadership Matters.”  Despite the dark clouds that descended upon our democracy last Wednesday, exhibiting a disgusting and embarrassing display of cowardice, in the end we turned away from hate, and did what is right.  It is time to speak up and out against intolerance and violence; and we must seek justice and hold others accountable for their actions, while remembering to hold ourselves to even higher standards.

Before I end my remarks, I want to personally thank three people that have been very supportive to me during my time as Chair, and I’m sure many others within our ESF family can say the same. These folks have, or will soon be departing from their roles at ESF.  First, Dr. Maureen Fellows. Maureen, I’ll always remember the discussions we shared about the joys of baseball. Thank you for all that you have done for this College over your decades of service.  Tom LeRoy.  I appreciated Tom’s quiet, but steady and strong leadership of our University Police force. Tom always kept the safety and interests of our students front-and-center.  And, Kevin Hayden, who has had one of the toughest jobs on campus. I know Kevin will take his expertise to SUNY Upstate where we will undoubtedly be partnering more often. I’m sure I speak for our entire Board and the entire ESF community when I express our deepest gratitude to these three people, as well as all the others who have left our family over the last year.

Thank you for the honor and privilege of being able to serve this Board, and the College of Environmental Science and Forestry.