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The Cornerstone of Our Success



Jerome A. Gilbert
Marshall University

Dr. Jerome A. Gilbert became the 37th President of Marshall University in January 2016. He previously served as Provost and Executive Vice President of Mississippi State University. Dr. Gilbert was recognized by the West Virginia Martin Luther King, Jr. State Holiday Commission with its "Living the Dream Award" for his significant contributions in the area of education.

West Virginia is a state blessed with exciting, year-round outdoor fun. From snow sports and whitewater rafting to caving, fishing, mountain climbing and more, there is something for everyone. As an avid cyclist, I have enjoyed biking the back roads and beautiful vistas of West Virginia. Each season brings different challenges to a cyclist, but such occasions offer a learning opportunity that many, including me, enjoy. And learning, after all, is what a university president is focused on most of the time.

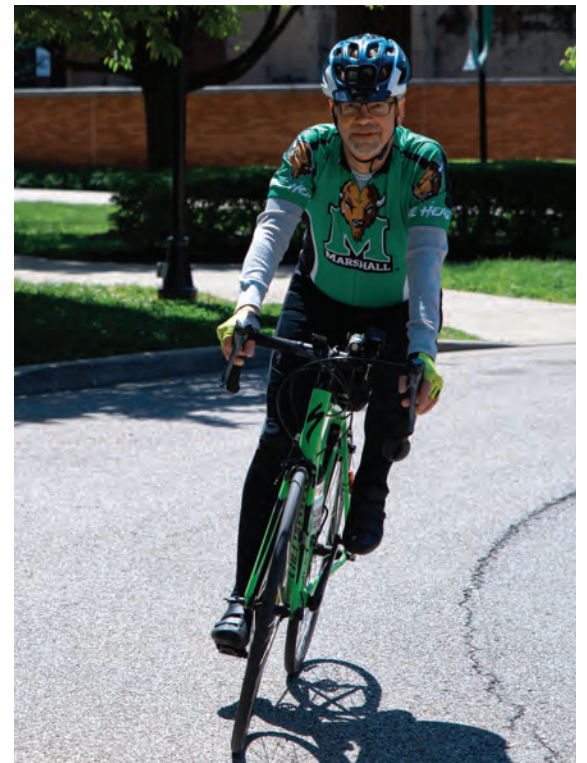
Much like cycling in West Virginia, our state has its share of economic ups and downs. The path is not flat, nor is it easy. But those who travel it and call our beautiful state home have developed strength, perseverance, patience and solidarity. West Virginians know the trip is not a simple one but forge ahead with an eye to success.

It has just been in the last 50 years that interstate corridors from north to south and east to west have opened in West Virginia, laying the framework for easier travel from Morgantown to Charleston and Lewisburg to Huntington. These advancements, coupled with the technology explosion of the 21st century, have allowed partnerships among many entities to form and flourish.

One of those alliances, West Virginia Forward, gathers the brainpower of Marshall University, West Virginia University and the West Virginia Department of Commerce to focus on the economic transformation of the state. West Virginia Forward, led by experts from all three entities, works to develop initiatives from all sectors of the economy and to dissolve any obstacles or boundaries that may hinder investigation and innovation. Key opportunities include workforce, business climate, entrepreneurship and infrastructure.

One great example of this like-minded collaboration is Marshall University partnering with WVU and state leadership in providing research and development support for the new Virgin Hyperloop project in Tucker and Grant Counties. We are proud that West Virginia was successful in landing this innovative project that is going to dramatically impact transportation in the future. I like to say that this is futuristic, but not science fiction!

In addition to state partnerships, Marshall also has many regional partnerships, like the Alliance for Economic Development of Southern West Virginia, to help move our state forward. During the COVID-19 pandemic, the Alliance's 40 Top Virtual Roundtable Series has provided





more than 15 weeks of virtual programming and engaging discussions. Some 1,200 people participated in this past year's sessions, which are booked again in 2021. The success of this project rests with leaders from federal and state government, AARP and the education sector working together for a common goal.

Another exciting program hosted by the Alliance is the annual state update and professional development conference, dubbed "Small Communities, BIG Solutions," because it celebrates what is working well across our state. During the 25+ hours of programming, attendees heard from Tourism Secretary Chelsea Ruby, along with an expert panel on outdoor business opportunities for West Virginia, to help communities and budding entrepreneurs see possibilities for outdoor recreation growth.

From initiatives like our Robert C. Byrd Institute's product development – fishing lures and kayaking anchors – to economic impact studies by the Center for Business and Economic Research, Marshall University is committed to local job growth and economic development.

It is not enough to give lip service to collaboration. We must commit time, talent and resources to working together to move West Virginia forward.

One of Marshall's most successful alumni, former Intuit CEO Brad Smith, understands the significance of collaboration to achieve goals. He pitches in wherever and whenever help is needed in his home state. Brad is recognized and respected throughout our country's business community, even being named to Forbes' 10 Influential American Business Leaders in 2017. When he talks about his success, Brad always talks about having grown up in West Virginia. Marshall is humbly grateful for his guidance, time and efforts to share his deep knowledge of the business sector, as well as his incredible gifts, with our university and others. We are thankful for his inspiration and dedication to West Virginia and its advancement. In the words of another notable entrepreneur, Henry Ford, "Coming together is a beginning, staying together is progress, and working together is success."

Our Marshall family, including our 100,000 alumni around the globe, values every person and strives to create an intellectual community where everyone is respected, safe and ultimately successful.

Such is the cornerstone of our success. 