

INSPIRING **HOPE**

**UToledo's Brightest  
Days Are Ahead**

**State of the University**

May 3, 2021



**DR. GREGORY POSTEL**  
**18<sup>th</sup> President**

As I reflect on the last year, I realize how blessed I am to have had the opportunity to join the Rocket community. A year ago, I had no idea my path would lead me to Toledo, Ohio.

When I was approached last spring by colleague and UToledo alumnus Dr. Roderick McDavis about the opportunity to be considered for the interim president position at this great institution, I immediately thought this could be opportunity to give back. To use my medical knowledge and professional experience to help lead a University through a watershed moment in history.

It was a time of fear and uncertainty due to a once-in-a-lifetime global pandemic that exacerbated financial challenges in higher education and healthcare. We weathered the storm with grace and an unwavering commitment to our mission. From rapidly shifting academic courses online, to establishing support systems for our students, to caring for the rising number of COVID-19-positive patients at our hospital, our campus community rallied. We made the impossible happen, together.

I hoped I could have a positive impact on this University's history, even if I was only here for a short time. What I didn't anticipate was the impact this University — and the Toledo community — would have on me and on my family.

I'm touched by the warm welcome we've received. Even through masks, emails and six feet of social distance, it was impossible to miss the genuine sense of community here at The University of Toledo. Rocket Nation truly is a special place, and I'm honored to have been selected to serve as your president as we look toward our bright future.

We faced one challenge after another this past year, but we never lost sight of that which unifies us — the human factor. Perhaps more than at any other moment in our lifetime, we rallied as a community around those who lost friends and family members due to the pandemic. Together, we implemented critical resources to support our students and colleagues facing enormous stress factors.

We got to know each other on a more personal level — we witnessed our students and colleagues juggle the increased responsibilities of caring for their families and friends, all while continuing to care for our students. On more than one occasion, we likely saw each other's children, parents, and yes, pets wander through the virtual screen. We expanded our definition of our Rocket Nation.

And we demonstrated that we care for one another. We checked in with family, friends, students and colleagues to remind them that they had our support. We all faced unforeseeable challenges, but through it all, we witnessed the very best in our campus community. Our UToledo students, faculty, staff and physicians have proven their resilience, time and time again.

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**JACOB CONNOLLY**

College of Engineering and Honors student

## FULFILLING **PURPOSE**

College of Engineering and Honors student Jacob Connolly wasn't the least bit phased by the pandemic. Jacob has been pursuing several research projects on the neurodegeneration of the brain under the mentorship of Drs. David Kennedy and Steven Haller in the College of Medicine and Life Sciences.

His hands-on research exploring the causes of cognitive impairment has not only reinforced his dream to pursue a medical degree and hopefully become a neurosurgeon, but it has earned him a Goldwater Scholarship. The prestigious honor is one of our country's oldest and most competitive honors in the fields of science and mathematics.

I want to congratulate Jacob and his faculty mentors on this outstanding honor — Jacob, you have made all of us very proud, and we can't wait to see where you'll go next!





“...the very  
definition of  
**resilience.**”

**LEAH WILLIAMS**

College of Health and Human Services | Graduate '21

This next student success story is the very definition of resilience. When Leah Williams first transferred to UToledo in 2015, she was focused on completing her social work degree, but life had other plans. Leah discovered that she needed a kidney transplant, requiring her to take a temporary leave from school as she received her transplant at UTMC.

The transplant experience, combined with an internship at UTMC, was life-altering as Leah returned to school with a new focus on becoming a renal transplant social worker. She hopes to work with African Americans and other minority populations that often struggle to navigate the complicated journey toward a transplant.

And I'm proud to say that Leah will be graduating this weekend with her bachelor's degree and returning to complete her master's degree in social work here at UToledo. Leah, you are inspiration for all of us!





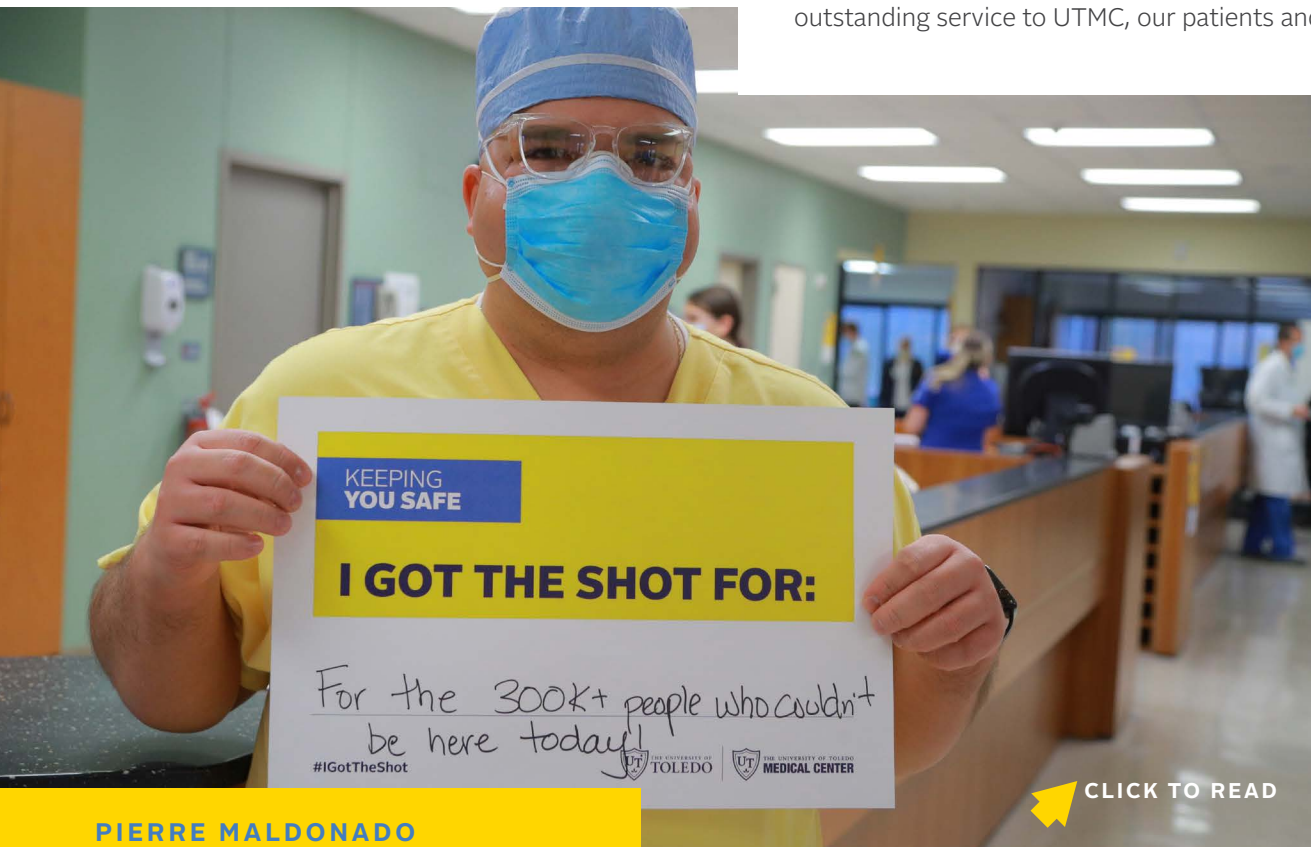
**Getting the vaccine feels like my responsibility** to set an example for others. It's a start to the beginning of the end."

Pierre Maldonado, a 2010 graduate of the UToledo College of Nursing, has worked at UTMC for more than a decade. During the height of the pandemic, he was the lead nurse in the Medical Intensive Care Unit, caring for the most vulnerable COVID patients. His dedication to patient care goes well beyond what is expected but is not uncommon from our caregivers at UTMC. Pierre and his colleagues provided their personal cell phone numbers to patients' families and arranged for video calls so patients could see and talk to loved ones.

Last May, Pierre got sick with COVID-19 himself, ultimately spending eight days in the hospital. After being discharged, he took two weeks off to recover and then returned to the COVID unit. He knew he and other healthcare heroes had a huge role to play in caring for our community during this crisis.

When vaccines first became available in December, Pierre was one of the very first volunteers. "Getting the vaccine feels like my responsibility to set an example for others," he said. "It's a start to the beginning of the end."

An end we're all anxiously awaiting. Thank you, Pierre, for your outstanding service to UTMC, our patients and our community!



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**PIERRE MALDONADO**  
UTMC RN, College of Nursing | Graduate '10





“The pandemic also has spotlighted **innovation** unlike anything we’ve ever seen before.”

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The pandemic also has spotlighted innovation unlike anything we’ve ever seen before. “20,000 Leagues Under the Sea,” a play created by The University of Toledo Black Theatre Ensemble and students in the Department of Theatre and Film, was showcased at this year’s annual Kennedy Center American College Theater Festival for Region III. The students selected this play in an attempt to address the urgent conversation of social justice in our country.

And while this achievement should be applauded in and of itself, it is the unique way in which the students created the production safely during the global health crisis that is even more remarkable. Pre-recording vocal performances and utilizing puppets and an adapted stage design to accommodate social distancing, the Departments of Theatre and Communication and Media Services collaborated to shoot the various components and knit them together for the final performance that was nothing short of breathtaking.

Congratulations to The University of Toledo Black Theatre Ensemble, the Department of Theatre, the Department of Communication and Media Services, and Professor Matt Foss on their innovative solution.





I'm confident that  
**brighter days are ahead  
for The University of Toledo.**"

## ENHANCING **STABILITY**

As Winston Churchill once said, "Never let a good crisis go to waste." The last year has taught us that we are far more adaptable than we may have thought. In fact, our faculty transitioned hundreds of courses to new modalities, including hybrid and online, in a matter of weeks. Our student support services converted their entire operations to an online environment offering virtual advising, tutoring and counseling.

We also were one of the only institutions in the state of Ohio to successfully reopen campus without any major spikes in positive cases of COVID-19, all thanks to the collective efforts of our entire campus community. And as we prepare to welcome back all of our students, faculty and staff beginning later this month, we are confident that our thorough Rocket Prevention Principles will enable us to do so safely.

Expanding upon the University's impressive work on the "Path to Excellence: 2022 Strategic Plan," we have identified several key initiatives focused on increasing efficiencies, addressing operational challenges and embracing innovative ideas to prepare UToledo for the future. And in doing so, we remain focused on our accreditation reaffirmations, including the recent LCME campus visit and our upcoming Higher Learning Commission on-site visit this fall.

We have faced financial uncertainty head on as we create a solid foundation to build future growth together. We've made huge strides toward financial stability of our hospital. And we've worked together with our faculty and staff to prioritize strategic investments in support of our key initiatives for the future of our institution.





## REFOCUSING **PRIORITIES**

One year shy of our sesquicentennial, we are standing at a pivotal moment in the history of The University of Toledo. The challenges of 2020 have gifted us an opportunity to recommit to our mission to improve the human condition in the region and the world. It is more than a mission statement — it's our shared purpose. And it starts with each and every interaction.



Student success must be our primary focus if we are to provide the world with the next generation of leaders. We must ask ourselves, how can we provide each and every one of our students with an even better educational experience? It could be as simple as taking the time to track down an answer for a student rather than simply transferring their call. Or it could be inviting them to join your research team in the lab, further fueling their inquisition. It could be a simple “Hi, how are you doing today?” and taking the time to really listen to their answer.

We must continue to evaluate the accessibility of our academic program offerings. Are we prioritizing our students' needs, and those of our community, appropriately? We've demonstrated that we can be far more agile than most of us anticipated. Let's not lose sight of this ability as we strive to help even more students achieve their dream of a college education and graduate with the skills needed to succeed, not just in their first job, but throughout their career. As a public university, this is our responsibility.

We must remember that our students and their families deserve nothing less than our best. They have entrusted us with their education during these uncertain times. We must continue to provide the level of customer service and support they need to ensure an exceptional education, no matter the circumstances. We must remember our shared purpose and strive every day to provide the best possible support — no matter how small. Doing so will have a ripple effect far beyond what any of us can imagine, and together, we will redefine student-centeredness.





# CREATING COMMUNITY

We are proud to be Toledo's University. We know our impact extends beyond the borders of our campuses. The success of our region is directly tied to the success of our University. How can we best leverage our resources to serve our community?

This year we enhanced partnerships with the Ohio State Highway Patrol through the new Joint Public Safety Center, and with Toledo Public Schools with the new home for Toledo Early College in Driscoll Center on Main Campus. We joined the national conversation on addressing systemic racism with important Dialogues on Diversity. Not only did we partner with our local health department on COVID testing, contact tracing and vaccine distribution, but our healthcare experts — both clinical leaders in our hospital and health professions faculty in our academic programs — answered the public's questions about the pandemic at town hall meetings and through local and national news stories.

And our students continue the tradition of giving back to the city they call home, too. **The Big Event** returned this spring after being canceled in 2020 due to the pandemic. Nearly 300 students logged 350 hours of community service at 26 agencies throughout Toledo as a way to say thank you.

Community engagement is not something “extra” we do if we can find the time. It is part of who we are as a public university. The shared responsibility we embraced to overcome this pandemic should continue into the future. We can solve problems, experience the personal fulfillment that comes from service, and also continue to grow our positive reputation as an engaged university.



We are proud to be  
**Toledo's University.**



“We have proven our resilience, dedication and innovation during a year of relentless challenges.”



## CELEBRATING PERSEVERANCE

While we most certainly have work ahead as we re-envision what The University of Toledo can and will be, we have much of which to be proud. We have proven our resilience, dedication and innovation during a year of relentless challenges. We have proudly taken on a critical leadership role for northwest Ohio during this global health crisis. We are living our shared mission each and every day.

We've all spent far too many hours in front of a screen for virtual meetings and lectures. The end is in sight, and I'm confident that brighter days are ahead as we commit to an increased focus on student success, ensure UToledo offers relevant and in-demand academic programs, strive for exceptional customer service and engage with our community in new and innovative ways.

And it begins with our in-person commencement celebrations this week!

I hope you'll join me in congratulating our 2020 and 2021 UToledo graduates. You have all persevered through unimaginable hardships and I'm confident that you are now prepared to face anything. Your accomplishments — both individually and collectively — inspire hope in all of us!

Indeed, our brightest days are ahead.

Thank you, and Go Rockets!

**CHELSEA HODGE**

College of Arts and Letters, 2021 graduate

