



THE NEWCOMEN SOCIETY OF ALABAMA

honors

The University of Alabama at Birmingham

Dr. Ray L. Watts

President, University of Alabama at Birmingham

“UAB Past, Present and Future: Fueling Innovation and Pushing Frontiers”



THE UNIVERSITY OF
ALABAMA AT BIRMINGHAM.

WEDNESDAY, NOVEMBER 7, 2018



INTRODUCTION OF RAY L. WATTS, MD

President of UAB

Newcomen Society Dinner

By Josh Carpenter

Director of Economic Development, City of Birmingham

November 7, 2018

Good evening, Chairman Harbert, thank you for the opportunity to introduce this year's Newcomen Society honoree, Dr. Ray Watts.

A little over a year ago, I was doing some research on UAB's history. I came across an often-referred to speech made by Joseph Volker, UAB's first President. The speech was delivered to this Newcomen Society when Volker was the 1971 honoree. Two thoughts emerged as I read Dr. Volker's vision, detailing the still nascent plans of a vibrant urban university and academic medical center in downtown Birmingham.

First, I reflected on how Volker's speech was received among the business community at that particular time. Some may have whispered cynically at the audacity of a project of that magnitude on Birmingham's Southside. They might have wondered aloud how a troubled city and a fledgling institution might become the "mutually reinforcing agents of change" Volker envisaged in an era of such anxiety and tumult. Volker must have known he'd be met with skepticism, but that didn't stop him from dreaming big and inspiring others to dream alongside him. My guess is that Dr. Volker also felt that there were many Newcomen Society members who shared his hope and ambition for UAB, as its members do today.

The second thought that occurred to me as I read that 1971 address was that UAB—and Birmingham—is fortunate to have someone who shares Volker's vision at the helm of the institution nearly 50 years after its founding. Today, UAB has positioned itself as the crown jewel of Birmingham and the pride of our state. This was no accident. Leadership has been essential.

Dr. Watts has demonstrated the energy and the resolve to not only realize the potential of what Joseph Volker saw, he has also propelled the institution to new heights, generating world-class scholarship, discovering new frontiers in research, providing healthcare for the community and the state, all while catalyzing the regional economy.

UAB's role in the economy has become abundantly clear to me in my position at the City, but perhaps no one understands its centrality better than Dr. Watts. While the forces of globalization, automation, and recession have battered Birmingham's core industries throughout the last five decades, UAB has steadily grown. It now stands as a bulwark against economic uncertainty. The state's single largest employer, UAB conducts \$455 million worth of business with more than 1600 suppliers, and it is responsible for supporting nearly 65,000 jobs. It is a hub of innovation, boasting more than \$500 million in sponsored research and nearly 50 patents annually.

So, in a city once an infamous home of injustice, Birmingham is refashioning itself with a compelling vision of economic opportunity and shared prosperity. UAB is at the core of that movement. Through Dr. Watts' leadership, many in this room have come to understand that Birmingham's competitiveness is only as strong as our next generation, so in a space that physically abuts the Civil Rights District, public, private, academic and civic partners have joined together to create workforce development initiatives that provide young people with pathways into promising careers. This effort lies at the heart of a growing Innovation District that draws in—and builds upon—the talent in our neighborhoods to fuel start-ups and grow established companies. This ecosystem seeks to translate ideas into innovation and accelerates that innovation into the commercial arena. These ideas and investments were set into motion by Dr. Watts, and he continues to be the biggest champion of our innovation economy.

One of the greatest pleasures of my professional life was working closely with- and learning from Dr. Watts at UAB. He was and is a mentor for me, and I feel profoundly fortunate to have sat at his feet to learn many lessons on leadership. I often ask him questions about his leadership philosophy or how he might handle certain situations. Through those conversations, I have distilled three tenets to his leadership:

The first is to be committed to your values, no matter what. Despite juggling an enormous workload, Dr. Watts carves out time to see patients because he

is relentless in following through on his commitments. Those patients—and relatives of those patients—are grateful. Many have stopped me to quietly heap praise on his careful attention to their loved ones at challenging moments for their families.

The second is to remain curious and open. Whether it is gardening, reading the latest issue of a scientific periodical or discussing a book on urban economics, Dr. Watts's mind is consistently engaged with the task of better understanding the world around him, and he pushes others to do the same. This continuous learning provides him with a broad view of the world, so he is anchored even when he makes difficult decisions.

The third is the most important. Invest in people. Whether it is his employees—whom he regularly calls UAB's most important asset—an unemployed factory worker, or an uninsured patient seeking care at the hospital, Dr. Watts believes people can thrive if they are given the right opportunities to succeed. Consequently, under his leadership, UAB has created new models of healthcare delivery to improve access, opened its doors to non-traditional learners, and invested in employees by extending domestic partner benefits, instituting merit pay, and raising the minimum wage for workers.

His leadership philosophy, governed by those abiding convictions, is the foundation stone of UAB's next 50 years.

Finally, no introduction of Dr. Watts would be complete without mentioning his family. He is a loving husband, devoted father, and doting grandfather. He and Nancy have meant a lot to both Nicole and me, personally, and we feel fortunate to join them and their children in celebrating this great honor. Please join me in welcoming to the stage UAB President, and the 2018 Newcomen Society Honoree, Dr. Ray Watts.

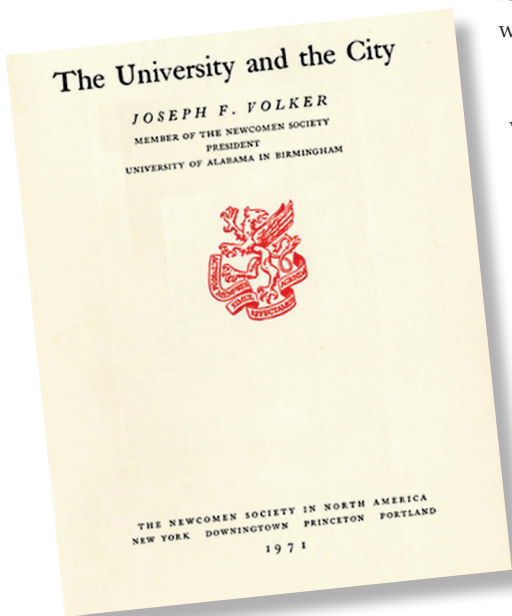
UAB PAST, PRESENT AND FUTURE

Fueling Innovation and Pushing Frontiers

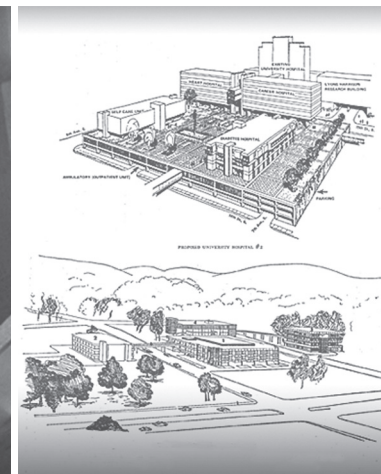
By President Ray L. Watts
The University of Alabama at Birmingham

Thank you, Dr. Carpenter, for that kind introduction.

Good evening. I want to thank Chairman Raymond Harbert and Newcomen Society members for your partnership and support in so many important efforts at UAB and throughout our community and state. UAB is deeply honored tonight to be recognized among such a distinguished group of organizations that have played central roles in the progress of Birmingham and Alabama for over 81 years. And I'm honored tonight to represent all of our remarkable people who make UAB what is today.



This is an honor that UAB shares with the University of Alabama System (also a Newcomen honoree, in 1994) and we are grateful for the continued support of our Board of Trustees in all of the progress and accomplishments I will highlight tonight. We are pleased to be joined by Interim Chancellor Finis St. John, President Pro Tem Ronald Gray, UA Trustee Marietta Urquhart, and UA Trustee and Newcomen Society board member Stancil Starnes.



PHOTOS: UAB ARCHIVES

Tonight UAB comes full circle in a sense. As Dr. Carpenter mentioned, UAB was a Newcomen honoree once before in 1971, shortly after its founding as an autonomous campus, and the keynote was delivered by the university's first president, Dr. Joseph Volker. Tonight, as UAB is on the cusp of our 50th Anniversary in 2019, so much of his visionary speech has been realized on a scale that even Dr. Volker and his faculty could not have imagined.

I will reference lines from Dr. Volker's Newcomen Address throughout my own tonight, as the now seventh president of UAB. In 1972, as a native son of Birmingham, I was drawn to UAB's entrepreneurial and "can do" atmosphere as a freshman in engineering, and in my role as a student leader I had many meaningful conversations with Dr. Volker.

I begin those references to his 1971 address with his title that is every bit as apt and relevant today. He called it simply, "The University and the City." He discussed at length the shared destiny of UAB and Birmingham, and the early progress and great promise of what he twice called the "extraordinary partnership."

That extraordinary partnership—vital from the very beginnings of UAB—is stronger than ever today, and I am honored to help carry it on as president, in the footsteps of Dr. Volker and other visionary leaders who succeeded him. We are delighted to have two of those former UAB presidents with us tonight: Dr. Charles (Scotty) McCallum (president from 1987-1993) and Dr. Claude Bennett (president from 1993-1996). Thank you both for being here tonight and for all you have helped UAB accomplish for the betterment of our community.

At the heart of our shared success—past, present and future—are core values common to UAB and the Newcomen Society. The Newcomen mission is to promote free enterprise, a system that is driven by entrepreneurialism, ingenuity and innovation. These values have also driven and distinguished UAB from its origins, even before it was called "UAB."

I would like to talk this evening about those origins and storied history but also about where the university is today and where we are headed together— in keeping with Newcomen's Latin motto, "As we look backward, let us look forward."



PHOTOS: UAB ARCHIVES

The Distinctive Origins of UAB

The distinctive character of UAB is reflected in its distinctive origins. Its development did not proceed neatly along a linear track from a single cornerstone or founding date; it was more organic than that. It is the story of various entities and efforts coalescing over the better part of a century, sometimes in fits and starts, from modest beginnings through a remarkable evolution.

In 1936 a modest “extension center” of the University of Alabama opened in an old clapboard, two-story house on 6th Avenue North (about a block from where the Birmingham Public Library stands today), with an enrollment of 116 students. The Center offered six general education courses, seven in business, five in pre-engineering and five in pre-law. Programs, facilities and real estate grew as demand increased and, in 1966, the programs were elevated to the four-year College of General Studies and relocated on the Southside, housing seven divisions: allied health sciences, business, education, engineering, humanities, natural sciences and mathematics, and social sciences.

The origins of the medical school and medical center stretch even further back, and farther south—to 1859 Mobile, where the Medical College of Alabama opened in a rented building. In 1920 the College was transferred from Mobile to Tuscaloosa, where it was housed in a barracks building and reopened as a two-year program. In 1945 the new, four-year Medical College of Alabama opened in Birmingham, with a freshman class of 52 students and research grants totaling \$8,900. That same year, Hillman Hospital (which had opened in 1903) and Jefferson Hospital were merged to form The University of Alabama’s Jefferson-Hillman Hospital—the nucleus of our contemporary academic medical center. In 1948 the school of dentistry opened with Dr. Volker as its first dean and the schools of nursing, optometry, health professions and public health followed over the next few decades.



PHOTOS: UAB ARCHIVES

All of these and other developments coalesced to form the comprehensive university that would become the UAB we know today. In 1969 Governor Albert Brewer announced the establishment of The University of Alabama System, with the “University of Alabama in Birmingham” as one of three autonomous campuses. What followed was UAB’s rapid ascent to global renown, a singular story in higher education.

The DNA of UAB: Collaboration, Innovation and “Operation Bootstrap”

During UAB’s development and the early formative years, research funding was very scarce and lab space was limited. This necessitated “sharing” among senior and junior faculty alike, both space and knowledge. So when the National Institutes of Health (NIH) and the National Science Foundation (NSF) started looking to fund emerging “interdisciplinary” research, UAB faculty were already doing that kind of research—because they didn’t have the funding to do it any other way. A disadvantage became a competitive edge, as UAB was ahead of the curve on interdisciplinary research.



“The entrepreneurship of the young investigator” enabled them to “develop these ideas, even though this was a sort of frontier-type institution... There was the element of operation bootstrap.”



PHOTOS: UAB ARCHIVES

Their efforts were driven by what one faculty member called “the entrepreneurship of the young investigator” that enabled them to go after NIH’s “pool of money and develop these ideas, even though this was a sort of frontier-type institution at that time....[T]here was the element of operation bootstrap..... but if you had the people [i.e., talent], you could develop the research...”

And develop it we did. That “entrepreneurship” and collaborative culture was coded into the very DNA of the university, which was evolving into a “frontier institution” of a different kind—pushing frontiers across all disciplines, and at the intersection of disciplines.

Realizing an “Unlikely and Ambitious” Vision

Even so, UAB was still an upstart in 1969 and success would require a vision that was bold and audacious. Dr. Volker delivered such a vision at his first official faculty meeting called to chart the course of the new university. One faculty member recalled that “it all sounded extremely unlikely and ambitious”—a fledgling university on a shoe-string budget aiming to become an international powerhouse in education, research and scholarship, and patient care. But indeed even those high expectations were far exceeded.

Over the next five decades UAB would grow from: 560 faculty members to more than 2,300 today...5,300 students to nearly 22,000...4,800 employees to more than 23,000...15 city blocks to over 100...An operating budget of \$49 million to more than \$4 billion across the university and health system...and \$18 million in annual research expenditures to a record \$562 million in this past year.

Our faculty have made tremendous breakthroughs with global impact, among them: Leading an international team that discovered the origin of human immunodeficiency virus (HIV) in west Africa...Developing the fiber optic endoscope...Engineering lighter, stronger military gear, as well as synthetic diamonds...Advancing marine biology and medicine in the icy depths of Antarctica, where two geographic features now bear the names of UAB faculty...Revealing thousands of buried pyramids and settlements in Egypt using satellite imaging...Pioneering software and partnering with the FBI to find cybercriminals around the globe...And developing potentially life-changing therapies for diabetes and cystic fibrosis.



At the same time, UAB’s physical campus has been *transformed dramatically*. It has grown from modest beginnings with buildings of a more utilitarian design and minimal green space into what we see today—**one of the most vibrant, state-of-the-art and sustainable urban campuses in the nation**, now home to some 4,400 trees and driven by leading-edge Information Technology, including a supercomputer that is among the very fastest in the Southeast. In the last few months, we have opened new, world-class facilities for our Collat School of Business and Bill L. Harbert Institute for Innovation and Entrepreneurship as well as our outstanding School of Nursing. These facilities are part of a remarkable period of growth over the past five years, which has included the opening of our new Hill Student Center, a 714-bed freshman residence hall, and our Football Operations Complex and Legacy Pavilion, as well as campuswide beautification, improved wayfinding and vastly expanded green space.

All this growth and success has resulted from that same culture of collaboration and innovation that launched UAB and remains to this day. **Our students are fully engaged in that culture daily, on campus and in our community, “where the city is their classroom.”** [Video: “UAB Story”]

The Tradition Continues: Setting and Exceeding Ambitious Goals

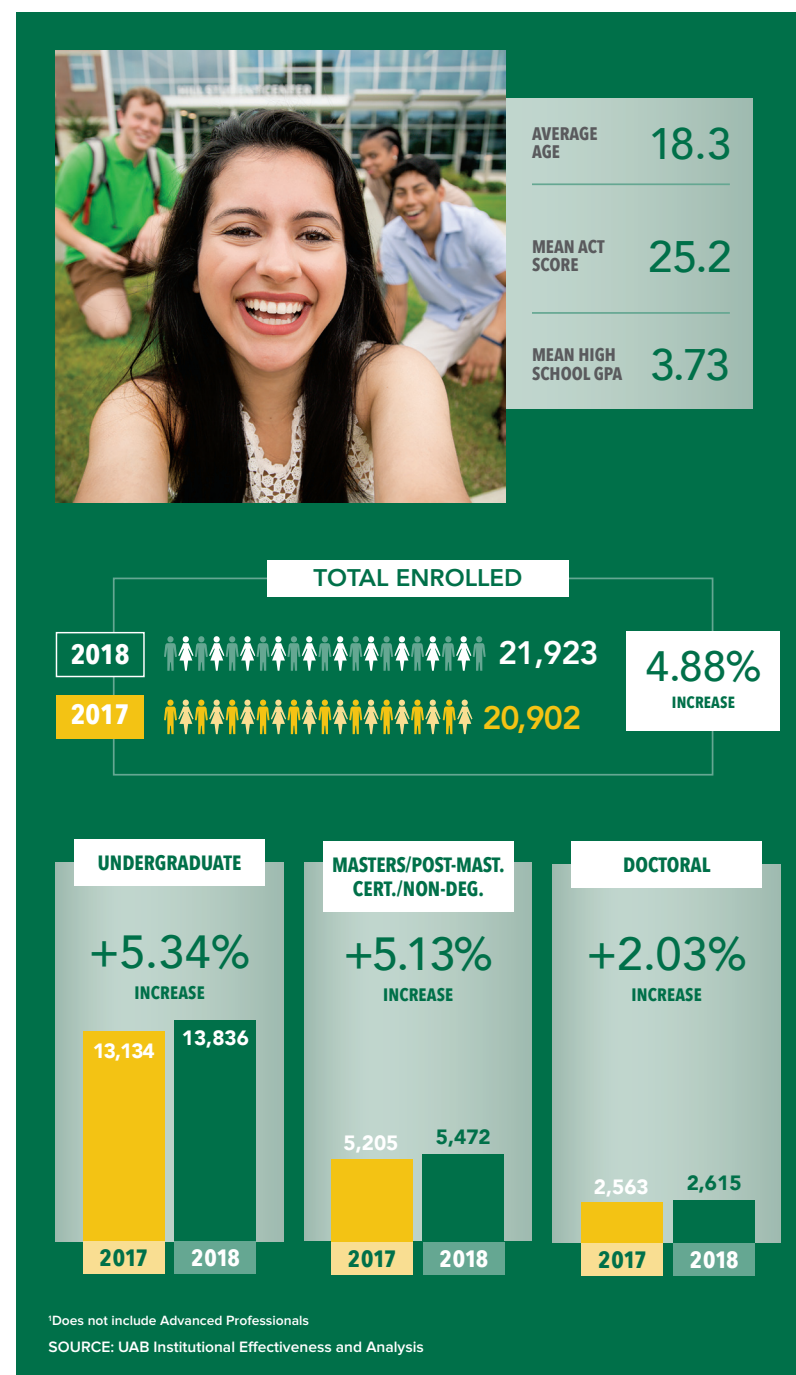
That video conveys UAB’s youth, dynamism and impact, locally and globally. These qualities were recently recognized when **UAB was named the Top Young University in the nation** (50 years old or younger) and 10th globally in The Times Higher Education World University Rankings.

UAB carries on that tradition established in Dr. Volker’s day of setting and surpassing even more ambitious goals, in all pillars of our mission: Education; Research, Innovation and Economic Development; Patient Care; and Community Engagement.

In **Education**, we have just achieved our third consecutive year of record enrollment, with an increase of nearly five percent (1,021 students) over last fall. This includes growth at the undergraduate, graduate and doctoral levels, and in our Honors College.

We had originally aimed in 2015 to break 20,000 in enrollment by 2020. Instead we reached that benchmark three years early in 2017 and now—still two years out—we have exceeded our original goal by nearly 2,000 students. At a time when enrollment at many colleges and universities nationally is declining, we have increased our enrollment by more than 17 percent over the past five years. We have again seen an increased average American College Testing (ACT) score and high school grade point average (GPA) among our freshmen. We are recruiting some of the most talented and motivated students from throughout Alabama, across the U.S., and indeed the world, to our campus.

At the same time, we are maintaining our nationally recognized diversity and widened access to educational opportunity. Nearly 29 percent of our first-time freshmen are first-generation students—and the number of such students, over



these three record years since fall 2015, has grown by 50 percent.

We at UAB know that removing barriers to prosperity is largely a matter of opening avenues to education. Doing so requires strong partnership and alignment among higher education and kindergarten through 12th grade (K-12), our local communities and state, and business and industry. UAB is pleased to work with a host of partners across these constituencies.

Educating and Training Tomorrow's Entrepreneurs

It also vital to Alabama's future that we equip students for success in emerging new fields and **promote entrepreneurialism**. UAB continues to develop novel academic programs and research opportunities that do just that.

In recent years we've **created new undergraduate majors** in Immunology, Genetics and Genomic Sciences, and medical sociology. This fall we launched a new bachelor of science (B.S.) in Bioinformatics and a master's in Data Science. Next year we'll offer a new joint master's in engineering and business that will meet the industry need of training engineers as effective managers in a business environment.

Our **graduate programs** continue to rank highly in *U.S. News & World Report*, with 13 of our programs in the top 25 nationally.

Our **Honors College** offers personalized or specialized curricula with the advanced research opportunities and mentoring typically associated with graduate level programs. Last year, Honors College students earned 26 prestigious national and international awards supporting research or study in 15 countries on 4 continents, including six Fulbright Scholarships (a UAB record). In our Science and Technology Honors Program, students have published a total of 217 articles in peer-reviewed journals and presented at numerous national and international conferences. *All as undergraduates.*

We continue to train the young entrepreneurs of tomorrow through a host of programs and internships. Our **iLab** program—a partnership with business incubator Innovation Depot—has launched 18 student-led companies, two of which have moved into their own space at the Depot and four of which have

raised outside investor funding to grow.

We are grateful to Newcomen board member Claude Nielsen and Kate Nielsen for their generous support of the new *Nielsen Innovation Lab* in our Collat School of Business. This collaborative teaching space (modeled after space at Stanford University's Design School) hosts student entrepreneurship clubs and classes on innovation and business incubation, providing students hands-on business experience working on faculty- and student-led startups.

In our *Solution Studios* program, students collaborate with physicians and nurses in UAB Hospital to identify real-world clinical problems and then work in teams to develop medical innovations and devices to solve those problems. Students in this program have produced seven intellectual property disclosures so far. *Again, as undergraduates.*

A Powerful Research and Development (R&D) Enterprise and Profound Economic Impact

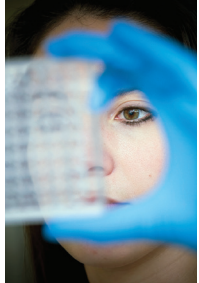
These and many other students are engaged in UAB's globally competitive R&D enterprise, which drives the second pillar of our mission: Research, Innovation and Economic Development.

Our **annual research expenditures are at a record-high of \$562 million**, and 2019 numbers indicate significant continued growth. As you can see, that record amount makes us very competitive in terms of overall federal funding and specifically NIH funding. **UAB ranks 8th among all public universities in NIH funding**—in the top 2 percent—and the **School of Medicine ranks 7th among all publics**.

Over the past five years, our research expenditures have increased by 23 percent and, over the past ten years, by 50 percent (adjusted for inflation). This is a testament to the talent and dedication of our faculty and students whose leading-edge research continues—year after year—to secure increasing amounts of this very competitive funding.

We are also commercializing our research discoveries more effectively than ever through our Bill L. Harbert Institute for Innovation and Entrepreneurship. As can be seen, we are accelerating the growth of

RANKED AMONG OUR PEERS



Highest-ever
R&D expenditures:
\$562M

FEDERAL FUNDING

UAB
TOTAL
\$399M

UAB
NIH
\$244M

UAB
SOM
\$195M

AMONG PUBLICS

#15
(Top 4%)

#8
(Top 2%)

#7
(Top 8%)

OVERALL

#33
(Top 4%)

#23
(Top 4%)

#23
(Top 16%)

start-up companies (9), revenues (\$6.07M), licenses (42), and patents (38). In 2017, UAB ranked 66th in the world for U.S. utility patents issued (based on FY16 numbers). These numbers will continue to grow fueled by our **new UAB Commercialization Accelerator** launched last year. Our **Alabama Drug Discovery Alliance** with Southern Research has approximately 16 investigational new drugs with significant commercial potential in the pipeline.

All this R&D contributes to **UAB's tremendous economic impact on Alabama**, which now exceeds \$7.15 billion annually. UAB remains the largest single employer in Alabama with more than 23,000 employees. Another striking impact number (not on screen here) is that UAB generates nearly \$20 million per day for our state's economy—so this is a high-performance economic engine that's humming along at about 833 thousand dollars per hour.

We want the road ahead to be even more prosperous, as we partner to grow a more robust, innovation-based economy for our region and state. To that end, we continue working with the City of Birmingham, Jefferson County Commission, Birmingham Business Alliance, The Community Foundation of Greater Birmingham and other important groups.

Key in this effort are our corporate partners, several of whom are represented

on Newcomer's board. Another critical partner is Innovation Depot (ID), the largest high-tech incubator in the Southeast serving 112 companies last year, which had a substantial impact in terms of generating new jobs (1,064), sales revenue (\$155M) and funding (\$58M). Over the past five years, the Depot has had an economic impact of more than \$1.6 billion.

This is central in **fostering a vibrant innovation ecosystem** that nurtures our home-grown start-ups and attracts other companies and entrepreneurs from outside our state. The Velocity Accelerator at ID has run two cohorts, graduating 16 startup companies to date—11 local, 4 from 4 different states and one international (from Slovakia)—that have created 70 jobs and raised over \$7.8 million in capital.

UAB BOOSTS ALABAMA ECONOMY

ECONOMIC IMPACT

\$7.15
BILLION



UAB SPENDING

\$455
MILLION

with suppliers
in 6-county region

1 IN 4

BIRMINGHAM
RESIDENTS



...ARE UAB EMPLOYEES,
STUDENTS OR PATIENTS

1 IN 6

RESIDENTS IN THE 6-COUNTY REGION



CREATING JOBS

1 in 31

ALABAMA JOBS
SUPPORTED BY UAB

NOW
HIRING

RETURN ON INVESTMENT

For every **\$1** in state funding,
UAB generates **\$25**

54% increase since 2009

At the Vanguard of Precision Medicine

UAB also continues to translate our research into the highest quality patient care for our community, state and beyond. We have one of the most outstanding academic medical centers in the world, collectively

HIGHEST-QUALITY PATIENT CARE

U.S. News & World Report 2018-2019 Best Hospitals report ranks UAB Hospital #1 in Alabama, with 10 UAB specialties listed among the nation's top 50.

#10
Rheumatology

#13
Nephrology

#16
Pulmonology

#18
Cardiology and
Heart Surgery

#25
Gynecology

#28
Diabetes and
Endocrinology

#29
Ear, nose
and throat

#34
Urology

#34
Neurology and
Neurosurgery

#42
Geriatrics

called UAB Medicine. Working with our longtime partner Children's of Alabama, UAB and Children's had our most-ever combined patient visits last year with more than 1.7 million.

In the recent *U.S. News & World Report* "Best Hospitals" rankings, UAB has 10 specialties among the nation's top 50, topping all of our peer institutions in the Southeast except Duke University Medical Center. Children's had 8 programs in the top 50.

UAB has performed the third most organ transplants in the world and we are conducting the world's longest live-donor kidney chain that recently surpassed 100 transplants, giving patients around the state and nation hope and a new lease on life.

And **we are at the vanguard, nationally and globally, in the field of precision medicine**, led by Dr. Matt Might who directs the "Hugh Kaul Precision Medicine Institute." Precision Medicine uses genomic and other data "to deliver the right treatment to the right patient at the right time."

[Video featuring Dr. Matt Might, Director of the Hugh Kaul Precision Medicine Institute at UAB]

Last year we announced the **Alabama Genomic Health Initiative**, funded by a \$2 million annual appropriation from the Alabama

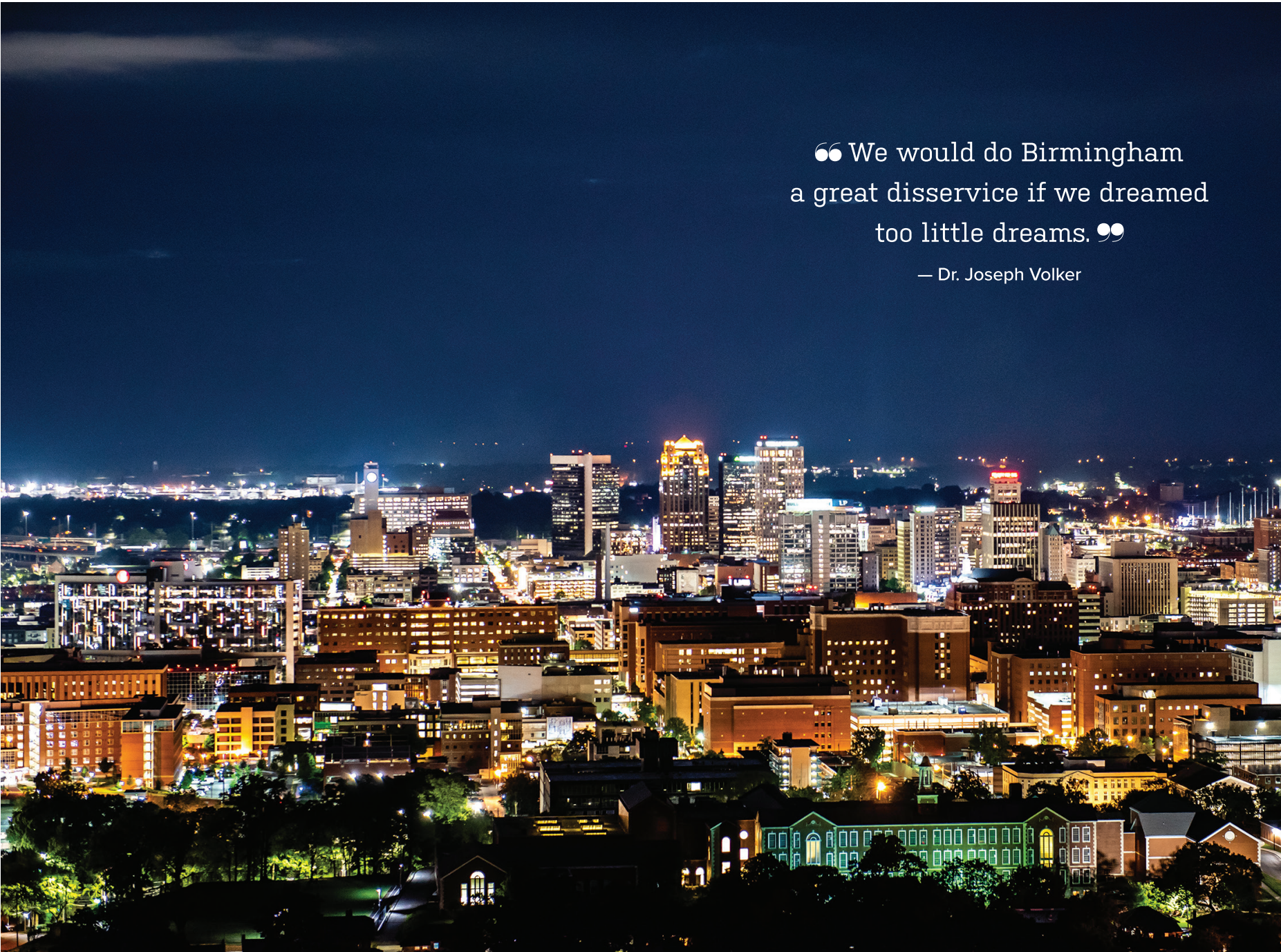
Legislature to UAB. Over 5 years we will sequence the genomes of 10,000 Alabamians from across every county in the state. This is one of the nation's first statewide efforts to harness the power of genomic analysis to help identify those at high risk for a genetic disease and to drive continuing research into genetic contributors to health and disease. And this past summer, **UAB was chosen as the lead institution for the Southern Network of the new NIH "All of Us" program**, which will build one of the world's largest and most diverse databases for health research ever assembled (1,000,000 Americans). We'll be using leading-edge informatics and genomics to accelerate discoveries and open new doors in the prevention and treatment of a host of diseases.

Longtime Community Engagement, Overwhelming Community Support

While UAB has a substantial national and global impact, our first priority is our community and state. The Community Engagement pillar of our mission actually undergirds every pillar of our mission—as we partner in advancing better education, health and quality of life, and a robust economy.

We are deeply grateful for that partnership—the partnership, support and advocacy of everyone in this room. The *Campaign for UAB*—the largest and most comprehensive philanthropic initiative in the history of our university—is now on the home stretch at over \$971 million toward our \$1 billion goal, with the leadership of co-chairs Johnny Johns and Mike Warren and many Newcomen board members who serve on our Campaign Executive Committee.

The profound impact of the *Campaign* is incalculable, but we can, to some degree, take its measure in the 211 new endowed scholarships and the 6,400 talented and deserving students receiving scholarships just in this academic year; the 33 new endowed chairs and 58 new endowed professorships that are supporting and recruiting top faculty; state-of-the-art new facilities opened over the past five years and new innovative programs and groundbreaking research conducted therein; captivating performances at the Alys Stephens Center for the Performing Arts and arts outreach in our community; world-class exhibits at the Abrams-Engel Institute for the Visual Arts; and quality programming of WBHM that reaches 110,000 weekly public radio listeners in

A nighttime photograph of the Birmingham, Alabama skyline. The city is illuminated with various lights, including streetlights, building lights, and a prominent clock tower. The sky is dark, and the overall scene is a vibrant display of urban lights.

“ We would do Birmingham
a great disservice if we dreamed
too little dreams. ”

— Dr. Joseph Volker

the heart of Alabama and many of our service members overseas tuning in for a taste of home.

That is some indication of the impact and the power of our partnership.

We are also grateful for the continued collaboration with the City of Birmingham, the Jefferson County Commission and the State of Alabama. There is greater alignment than ever between our city and our university, as we work hand-in-hand to advance our shared goals. Recently Mayor Randall Woodfin described this symbiotic relationship very succinctly: “UAB is Birmingham and Birmingham is UAB.”

The Duty to Dream Big

In thinking of that historic partnership and all that it has accomplished, we are reminded of Dr. Volker’s oft-quoted line, “We would do Birmingham a great disservice if we dreamed too little dreams.” I’ve always found this phrasing interesting; it’s really more about the cost of dreaming small. Today, UAB dares to dream even bigger because striving for excellence in all that we do is our duty and we will not let Birmingham, the state, or our nation down.

Over the decades, this “extraordinary partnership” has fueled the renaissance of our region—socially, culturally and economically. From a steel-based economy to a knowledge- and technology-based economy, and the burgeoning of a decidedly international university and city.

UAB and Birmingham are dedicated to equal opportunity for all, and we are deeply committed to making significant progress each and every day on behalf of all the people we serve. Faculty, staff and students carry on daily that decades-old culture of collaboration and innovation—in the sciences and medicine, technology, education, business, the arts and humanities, and other fields—powered by an unrelenting *will* to push frontiers. [UAB “Powered by will” video]

It is that *will* to excel and exceed expectations, push back boundaries and think in new directions that propels UAB into our future.

Forging the Future of UAB and Birmingham

We have collaborated campus- and community-wide on our strategic plan, *Forging the Future*, that charts our course for the next five years. Through a series of town halls and listening sessions led by our Strategic Planning Council, we have developed a plan that defines our **mission, vision, values and goals**; outlines **institution-wide strategies** for achieving those goals; and establishes **metrics to measure our progress**.

Initiatives from The School of Medicine and UAB Health System’s AMC21 Strategic Plan and the strategic initiatives of other academic and administrative units are interwoven into this over-arching, institutional strategic plan.

As part of *Forging the Future*, our faculty and academic leaders are developing a **new Signature Core Curriculum** for our undergraduates. Our current core curriculum was established in the 1990s and obviously the needs and goals of students have changed significantly since then. So we are designing a new curriculum that will equip students with the skills and competencies to succeed in today’s 21st century global, knowledge economy.

Another element of our plan is something our entire campus and community can be excited about and rally behind: it’s called the **Grand Challenge**. We will identify a complex and multifaceted societal problem and harness our unique expertise to solve it. Our faculty, staff, students, administrators, and alumni will work in concert with entrepreneurs and business leaders, elected officials and civic leaders, foundations, outreach organizations, government funding agencies, and other external partners.

The solution we develop will have an impact around the nation and world for generations to come. We will embark on initiating our grand challenge in summer 2019—fittingly in UAB’s 50th anniversary year.

To support our growth in world-class educational programs, research initiatives, healthcare delivery, and innovation and technology transfer, we must continue to invest in the physical assets of our campus (building renovations and new construction) as well as the most advanced technology

to support our multi-faceted mission. Over the next five years we anticipate constructing many new facilities and completing major renovations to support our projected growth.

A Common Destiny and an Extraordinary Future

UAB and Birmingham have, over five decades, thrived on challenge. Even as resources were limited initially, there was an abundance of talent and will to fuel the tremendous progress that continues to this day. I want to thank and give credit to all of the dedicated people at UAB who carry on our complex mission daily with competence and compassion, including our exceptional leadership team who is leading us to the highest levels of achievement in our history, outpacing most of our peers. In partnership with our community, we have made remarkable strides recognized the world-over because we have made those strides together toward a shared vision.

Dr. Volker concluded his Newcomen Address as follows: “The destinies of cities and their universities are inseparable. One cannot flourish unless the other prospers. Birmingham and UAB have made an impressive start toward these goals....God willing, we will move forward together to become a great city and a great university.”

Today in this Magic City, once a boomtown born of blast furnaces and steel, we are working another kind of “magic” with resources all the more essential in a knowledge economy: bright minds sparked by the entrepreneurial spirit and an unyielding resolve to succeed and excel.

On behalf of UAB, thank you very much for this honor.





THE NEWCOMEN SOCIETY
OF ALABAMA