



219 of 250 DOCUMENTS

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HEADLINE: President Aims High For U-Md.; New Top Terrapin Pledges to Listen

BYLINE: Desson Howe, Washington Post Staff Writer

BODY:

New University of Maryland President Clayton Daniel "Dan" Mote Jr. knows that behind the tide of smiling staff, trustees, students and benefactors that greeted him last week lies an ocean of expectations.

The former University of California-Berkeley administrator, who raised \$ 174 million there last year, speaks in general terms of his agenda, which includes raising the standards of faculty, students and programs, and boosting the university's cachet by decreasing the percentage of applicants it accepts.

But his first priority, Mote said, would be the university community's concerns.

"Someone once said being a university president is like being the caretaker of a cemetery," said Mote, revealing his penchant for humorous asides. "You've got a lot of people under you, but nobody's listening. I have to be very careful about listening to them."

Mote is charged with a daunting mission: to bring to the flagship College Park campus of the University System of Maryland the kind of national renown enjoyed by its well-heeled peer universities in California, North Carolina and Michigan.

He also will try to wring more public money from the General Assembly; to develop a donor base that will enrich the campus with new buildings, chairs and scholarships; to hire the best professors possible; and to give a University of Maryland degree the kind of value that will keep the registrar's phones ringing off the hook.

Key to his fund-raising efforts, Mote said, will be building a solid, highly motivated donor base, so "you can have a really vibrant place that people are excited about."

Although one of 35 state residents has attended the University of Maryland, Mote said, only 7 percent of alumni donate to their alma mater. While at Berkeley, Mote boosted alumni donations from 7 percent to 16 percent in 10 years.

President Aims High For U-Md.; New Top Terrapin Pledges to Listen The Washington Post September 08, 1998, Tuesday, Final Edition

If a donor offered the university \$ 5,000 with the intention of never giving again, Mote said, he'd refuse it. Donors "should be thrilled to support us, not obligated," he said. "What counts is . . . building a relationship that will go on for this person's lifetime and probably their children's. It's like a religion, almost."

The College Park campus is abuzz with hope, but students, administrators and faculty are keenly aware of the challenges before Mote. His predecessor, William E. Kirwan, left Maryland for Ohio State University this summer in large part over frustration with what he considered inadequate state funding and uneven support from the university system, which has consolidated 11 colleges and universities into one often bickering body.

With many of his boxes still unpacked after last month's move from California, Mote greeted the campus last week with an inexhaustible handshake, an attentive ear and a ready response for everyone.

Last Wednesday, Mote and his dog parked themselves outside the Student Union building to greet students and listen to their comments. And Thursday, at an ice cream reception outside the administration building hosted by student government President Jonathan Busch, Mote glad-handed his way through a crowd of several hundred students and staff and faculty members.

He also used the occasion to announce a recent gift of \$ 5 million from Maryland graduate Jeong H. Kim for scholarships and student programs in information technology, and to correctly predict Saturday's victory for the Terrapin football team over James Madison University.

"This is a campus on the move; there's no doubt about it," he told the crowd. "Higher education in Maryland is going to be among the most important among the universities in the United States."

Robert Rodgers, a 25-year-old computer sciences major, urged him to build a new computer sciences building and hire more professors. And Ray Weil, a professor of soil sciences, told Mote that the commuter-heavy university student body needs a greater intellectual atmosphere as well as a campus-centered sense of community.

"We can do it," Mote told Weil with a wink.

"Any president gets tremendously distracted raising money," Weil said later, expressing concern over the many hats Mote will have to wear. "Between raising money and sports, you can lose the whole university."

In an interview, Mote said he was not happy with the increase in College Park's tuition fees to \$ 4,050 a year, and said he would raise considerable revenue for the college in other ways.

"I really think he is the person to take the university to a higher level," said Marvin Breslow, a professor who was on the search committee that hired Mote and who came to the ice cream reception to greet the president. "We'll all know better a year from now, but we're all hopeful."

GRAPHIC: Photo, CRAIG HERNDON, New U-Md. President Clayton Daniel "Dan" Mote Jr. chats with senior Katie Rockwell at an ice cream social. Mote said he will lead "a campus on the move."

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