

State of the School Address
President Harry T. Lester
November 12, 2008

Teaching. Discovering. Caring.
Envisioning the next 35 years for Eastern Virginia Medical School

Good evening. My name is Harry Lester, President of Eastern Virginia Medical School. Thank you for joining us tonight.

Before I begin, I would like to recognize a few special guests... Members of our Board of Visitors who volunteer their time to provide guidance for the Medical School and members of the Board of Trustees who volunteer to serve on the EVMS Foundation. Please join me in thanking these board members for their generous service.

Let me single out two people from among those distinguished groups: Wayne Wilbanks, Rector of the EVMS Board of Visitors, and Bob Aston, President and Chairman of the EVMS Foundation. It is an honor to work with these dedicated gentlemen. Their leadership makes a profound difference in EVMS. Please stand and be recognized.

EVMS exists today because of strong community leadership. Thirty-five years ago, our region faced a critical shortage of health care providers. This pressing need led the community to create a medical school... but it wasn't easy. Fortunately, our community believed so strongly in the need that it raised the necessary funds and gained support in the General Assembly for the creation of the Eastern Virginia Medical School.

Thirty-five years later, we've come full circle. Our region... and our state... face a shortage of health care professionals... So much so, that Governor Kaine's task force on health care and the American Association of Medical Colleges have issued a call to increase the number of doctors and physician assistants being trained in the Commonwealth.

Eastern Virginia Medical School stands ready to answer that call. Over the next three to five years, we will increase the number of students in our M.D. and Physician Assistant programs by 30 percent.

The State has recognized our willingness to be part of the solution. As you have no doubt heard, earlier this year the Governor and the General Assembly included EVMS in a bond package that provided \$59 million toward a \$79 million education and research facility that will help us meet our promise to increase class size.

Over the next few months, we will plan what we need in the new building to accommodate more students and to further the remarkable research that takes place here at EVMS. We expect to break ground by next fall and plan to occupy the new building by August, 2011.

Two very special guests are here tonight. These two gentlemen were responsible for the General Assembly's approval of EVMS being included in the bond package. Senator Ken Stolle and Delegate Johnny Joannou. We thank both of you for all that you have done for EVMS. Please stand. Ladies and gentlemen, please join me in a really significant round of applause to recognize their leadership. Thank you.

Let me recognize one more special guest, Norfolk Mayor Paul Fraim. For 35 years the City of Norfolk has been a wonderful partner of the medical school. We thank you and the City for your continued support. Please stand and be recognized.

This was truly a banner year for EVMS. Not only were we included in the bond package, but recently the State Council of Higher Education for Virginia approved a review of EVMS that defines the medical school as a "state-assisted, independent, community-based medical school." Translated, that means the school may receive additional state support in return for increased oversight of our operations by state-appointed membership on our Board of Visitors.

Any way you look at it, that's a good deal for EVMS and for the people of Hampton Roads. Thanks again to our friends Sen. Stolle and Del. Joannou.

All of this puts us in an enviable position. I am pleased to report that EVMS is strong, healthy, and poised for significant growth. The school is blessed with strong leadership starting with our Dean, Dr. Gerald Pepe... our senior management team... our many fine department chairs... our faculty and staff... the people that work at EVMS strive to take EVMS to the next level of service for our community.

In our 35 years, EVMS has matured and built a strong foundation. Just ahead, the Board of Visitors will be working with the administration and faculty to develop a new strategic plan... We're going to dream big, but realistically. We're going to figure out where EVMS should be in 3 years... in five years... in another 35 years.

Excellence in people and programs has become what EVMS is known for. Consider some of our EVMS Health Services faculty such as those in the Division of Maternal-Fetal Medicine... a unit of the Department of Ob/Gyn... led by Dr. Alfred Abuhamad who was recently named one of the country's top physicians for women by *Women's Health Magazine*. If you live within 80 miles of EVMS and are experiencing a high-risk pregnancy, you come [here](#) to see [our](#) physicians.

Our surgeons staff the Level I Trauma Center at Sentara Norfolk General Hospital... the only Level I trauma facility in the region. Our five fellowship-trained trauma and critical care surgeons... led by Dr. Len Weireter... have remarkable levels of expertise in injury care and are available around the clock.

And our EVMS super star surgeon, Dr. L.D. Britt, continues to excel on the national stage. He was recently elected as Chair of the Board of Regents of the American College of Surgeons. We are very proud to have Dr. Britt represent EVMS in such a prestigious position.

Or consider the work of Dr. Barry Strasnick. Several years ago, Dr. Strasnick convinced the state legislature to mandate hearing screening for newborns. As a result, the average age of detection for hearing loss has dropped from 3 years to 3 months of age. The earlier the diagnosis, the more effective the treatment. The earlier the treatment, the fewer developmental delays a child experiences.

Our students are making a difference too. For the past three years, the EVMS International Medicine Society... a group of students... have given up their Spring Break to travel to Honduras to provide medical treatment to some who have never had this kind of care before. Last year, 51 students and volunteers made the trip and provided care to more than 2,000 patients – in one week!

Closer to home, our students volunteer at a free clinic, they provide a variety of free health screenings around the region, they provide assistance to seniors with Medicare applications. They are involved in any number of other community causes. They do these things not because they are required... they serve because they care... because they choose to give back to our community.

Simply put: Each of our lives is better because of EVMS. Our community is better because of EVMS.

Here at Eastern Virginia Medical School, we do three things: Teaching. Discovering. Caring.

Our impact in each of those areas can grow significantly... but we have some challenges to overcome and some work to do to make that happen.

I told you that the State provided \$59 million dollars to EVMS for a new building. That's wonderful... but the building will cost \$79 million. We'll need to come up with the \$20 million difference.

We had a successful Annual Fund campaign this year raising nearly \$725,000. But if we want to increase our research efforts... if we want to increase the scholarship opportunities available to our students... if we want to recruit other high-profile faculty members... we need to raise more money.

We are very appreciative of State funding. But for the second time this year we are working to trim half a million dollars from our budget based on changes in the State's revenues. By December or early next year more cuts in State funding will be coming. We will do what is necessary to be fiscally responsible and keep ourselves positioned for growth. But raising private money becomes ever more important.

Part of our strategy is to raise our public profile. We don't want to be the "best kept secret" in Hampton Roads. We want everyone to know the profound impact EVMS has on the region. We want citizens across Hampton Roads to understand their connection to EVMS.

To ensure that is the case, we have re-energized our communications and development departments and recruited new leadership. You'll be seeing some very visible signs of these changes soon. For example:

- First, A new logo and brand that better identifies what EVMS stands for
- Second, A new feature magazine that provides a closer look at our students and the education they receive, the ground-breaking research that takes place on campus, and the high-quality, patient-centered care offered by our EVMS Health Services personnel.
- Third, An informative new website coming in early 2009, and
- Importantly, stronger development efforts aimed at boosting community financial support for our work.

Another component critical to our success will be maintaining and expanding strategic partnerships... partnerships like the ones we have with local hospital systems such as CHKD, Bon Secours, the V-A Hospital and Sentara Healthcare. Friends from those partnerships are here tonight. Please let me say a sincere "thank you" for what you do for EVMS.

Sentara is our primary hospital partner and, in recent years, we have developed a solid affiliation agreement with them. The closer working relationship that has come about because that agreement has opened our eyes to just how important EVMS and Sentara are to each other... how both of us can grow because of our affiliation.

Today Sentara and EVMS senior management meet regularly. Likewise a new Joint Operations Committee has provided very productive collaboration. Just this year we have worked more effectively on faculty recruitment and graduate medical education. I expect our strong partnership will continue to grow.

In the end, it's all about partnerships. Partnering with local hospitals... partnering with city officials and state legislators... partnering with community members. Without those relationships, Eastern Virginia Medical School cannot continue to excel in its mission of Teaching, Discovering and Caring.

We need for all of you to be advocates for EVMS. Eastern Virginia Medical School has the potential for a very bright future. Your investment in EVMS today... whether it be financial... or active, vocal support of our goals... or political capital... will pay tremendous dividends for the region and the Commonwealth.

Together, we can ensure the next 35 years are even better than the first 35. Tonight, I'll make a commitment to you. As we work together to expand our programs and build a bigger and brighter future for EVMS, I can assure you that one thing won't change... While we will expand the number of M.D. and P.A students we serve... and while we will increase our research... we won't lose sight of who we are.

Eastern Virginia Medical won't abandon its roots. We will maintain our community focus... We will retain our collegial, supportive atmosphere... We will continue to hold high standards for ourselves and for our students... These are the hallmarks of who we are.

And now, it is my privilege to introduce you to our Dean and Provost, Dr. Jerry Pepe, who will tell you more about our vision for Eastern Virginia Medical School and how we plan to continue our strong tradition of Teaching, Discovering, and Caring.

Dean Pepe's dedication to our school is legend... He has been a part of EVMS for 30 years and been NIH grant funded for that entire time. He is well-liked and well-respected by his peers. I can think of no better partner for the president's office.

I continue to be amazed by the way he manages to do all that is required of a Dean and continue his research. He's always working...like he is tonight.

Please welcome my colleague and my good friend, Dean Pepe.