

**Inauguration Address
April 28, 2017
President Joe Bertolino**

"HAPPY"

Because I'm happy
Clap along if you feel like a room without a roof
Because I'm happy
Clap along if you feel like happiness is the truth
Because I'm happy
Clap along if you know what happiness is to you
Because I'm happy
Clap along if you feel like that's what you wanna do

- Let's thank my accompanist – Matt
- I'm happy because all of you are here today to celebrate the wonderful community that is Southern Connecticut State University!
- And I might add that this song was recommended by Aaron Tejada, Myles Page and Josh Cortes....other recommendations included songs from Flo Rida, and Boogie Wit Da Hoodie (who was here last week).
- I'm happy because we have important leaders from government who have joined us today – legislators Toni Walker, Hilda Santiago, Gary Winfield and George Logan – who have done so much to support public higher education in general and Southern in particular. Thank you for being here.
- I'm happy to welcome Regents Larry Denardis, Scott Jackson, Merle Harris, Naomi Cohen and President Mark Ojakian from the Connecticut State Colleges and Universities System – thank you for inviting me to lead this wonderful institution and for your on-going support....and by the way to our Regents and President Ojakian, we know our system faces many challenges and that this is a time of great change....I invite you to look out into this audience...Southern is here, we are up to the challenge and we are ready to lead!

- I'm happy because we have guests here who represent the past history of Southern – interim President J. Philip Smith; Krissy Adanti, the daughter of President Michael Adanti, and her two children; and Anne Whitman, the niece of President Hilton C. Buley. I am honored to be this university's 12th president, but I am only a link in a chain of leadership that goes back 124 years.
- I'm happy because I have a great leadership team that provides me with advice and counsel, isn't afraid to rein me in when my grand vision loses touch with reality and has quickly learned it's best not to present me with thorny issues too early in the morning – especially before I've had my coffee (it's not my best time) – thank you Ellen, Mark, Tracy, Bob, Rob and Terricita.
- I'm happy because we have a talented, caring faculty who have been open, honest, supportive and encouraging. I've lost count of the number of meetings we've had, the number of classes I've been invited to they even encouraged me to lead a healthier lifestyle – I mentioned in passing when I first arrived that I needed to lose some weight and get healthier.....the result, the Exercise Science Department assigned me a student trainer, senior Steve Freitas, the Nursing Department assigned me student nurses, the students in Public Health conducted an assessment of my health behavior, and the students from Family Counseling came over to give me a therapy session. I've become a project entitled #ACTIVE JOE!
- I'm happy because of our dedicated staff – they work hard every day to make this university function in the service of our students. From having me participate in our Week of Welcome, to Accepted Students Day, to wheelchair basketball, to shooting t-shirts out of an air gun into a crowd of students. I've lost track of the number of events they have invited me to and the number of events they've involved me with.
- I am happy because our alums, the members of our University Foundation and our community partners have supported Southern at every turn and invited Bil and me to explore New Haven culture and eateries (Pepe's pizza, Modern pizza, Sally's pizza.....even pizza out of a firetruck).

- I'm happy that Southern is centered in the vibrant, multi-cultural urban community of New Haven – a city that I'm happy to now call home. Bil and I have made our home in Morris Cove, New Haven (rumor has it, I'm the first president in some time to live in the city of New Haven).
- Most importantly, I'm happy because I'm here today with students past and present... students from every institution I've ever worked at, including of course our students from Southern Connecticut State University (did you see that large contingent of students that walked in with me today? How cool was that?!) Our students are the reason that we are here and why we do what we do every day.....They haven't been shy to welcome me and ask me to take a selfie or do the dab. I've even been asked to be tie-dyed for charity.
- On a more serious note, there is one former student who could not be here today, but is here in spirit: Jake Gregg, who wrote the inaugural song for my investiture at Lyndon State four years ago. Sadly, after that wonderful event, Jake was diagnosed with leukemia. Jake lost his battle with cancer two years ago but I am honored and glad that his parents, Ann and Scott, are here today to represent him among the group of my former students who have found their way to New Haven. Ann and Scott, thank you for being here.
- Finally, I'm happy to look with love and thanks to my family and friends who have come from near and far to the Elm City, including long time mentors from my first professional higher ed job at East Stroudsburg to my more recent colleagues at Lyndon State (I am particularly touched that virtually the entire senior leadership of LSC are here today). You have supported me, mentored me, counseled me, and I owe you all a debt of gratitude.

- I see Stephan, who was nine when I first met him as one of my first campers when I was a counselor at YMCA Camp Ockanickon – 33 years ago. His eldest son, Matthew is my godson. I see Michael, a student in my first class when I was a high school teacher right out of college – 30 years ago. His son Kevin, who is also here, is my eldest Godson. I see my Goddaughter Teresa, the eldest daughter of a colleague from Barnard....and so many more former students and colleagues.....it means a lot to me that you are here.
- And my family – my parents Joe and Eileen Bertolino, my mother-in-law Linda Gibbons, sister-in-law Jenn and my niece and nephew, the twins, Sidney and Lance, who themselves are headed off to college in the fall. Not everyone could be here today – travelling long distances with two small nephews, a two-year-old and a four-week old grandson is complicated, but they are here in spirit and I am fortunate to have their love and the support of so many.
- Oh yes, and how could I forget the man that I look to every day – the man I have looked to for nearly 25 years – my partner and love of my life, Dr. Bil Leipold. No more eight-hour commutes back and forth to Vermont!

COMMITTEE

- This has been an incredible extended week – and there’s more to come! – highlighting student success, faculty achievement, our dedicated alumni; our commitment to social justice and the wonderful diversity of our campus community. It truly has been a “Celebration of Southern” and an example of how we do, indeed, “Build Community.”
- I wish to thank the inaugural committee, and the staff who helped to make this celebration possible. Especially our front-line teams in facilities and maintenance, university police, food service and communications and marketing.

- And finally, a very special thanks to the team that really runs the university – the President’s Office staff - Charmaine Lloyd, Margaret Huda and Roland Regos – you keep me honest and on time! (well, mostly you keep me from getting lost).

WEDDING ANNIVERSARY

- Now, I need to pause, because there is an event that is happening a few days from now that is far more important than what is happening here today. My parents Joe and Eileen are here, and next Thursday, May 4, they will celebrate their 54th wedding anniversary.
- Faith, family, education...in that order... from a young age, my parents instilled these values into me and my sister, Eileen, who is also an educator. I remember when I was in high school and my father made me take a summer job at a cable television factory. The job was dirty, the factory was hot, I hated every minute of it.
- Later on, when I was getting ready to go off to college, Dad asked me how I liked that job. I was honest – I told him it was horrible. Horrible! He replied: “That’s why your mother and I are making the sacrifice for you to go to college. Don’t forget it.”
- Mom, Dad...I haven’t forgotten and I never will...thank you!

JOE’S REMARKS

- Before my inauguration as President of Lyndon State, my good friend and mentor Dr. Peggy Williams (a former president of Lyndon and the President Emerita of Ithaca College) advised me that this was an opportunity to “say what I otherwise might not have the opportunity to say throughout the academic year, to speak to my values as the president of Southern, to share a different perspective.” That advice still resonates with me today.

- My colleagues here at Southern have heard a great deal from me in recent weeks about the many challenges that face public higher education in Connecticut – enrollment, retention and graduation rates, budgetary issues – and how those challenges impact us as an institution.
- I've already articulated that now is not the time to be afraid or play it safe as we confront these challenges – nothing brings a community together like a little adversity.
- And they've also heard about my vision for Southern – how, drawing on the talents of our community, the strengths of our partnerships and our commitment to student success, we will build on what we do well and become the Social Justice University of Connecticut, and the regional higher education institution of choice for students and community partners.
- I strongly believe that in challenging times, proactive institutions redefine themselves and become leaders amongst their peers. That is my vision for Southern (and if you're really curious to find out more, it's presented in this morning's program – we're proud of that vision)
- There is so much to build on here, because there is so much that has already been accomplished.
- In a commencement speech at Southern in the early 1990s, Congresswoman Rosa DeLauro said that it was at public universities like Southern that the American Dream was most valued and best realized. I couldn't agree more.
- At Southern, as many of you know, our students are drawn from all types of backgrounds – racial, ethnic, religious, gender and economic. Many have had to overcome life's obstacles to reach their goal: working jobs while studying, supporting children or elderly relatives; taking those initial, uncertain steps into higher education as the first in their families to attend college.

- So when we help provide the empowerment to achieve their goal – it is just that, a personal achievement that means a great deal, because these young men and women truly had to strive and sacrifice to get there.
- But the needs of our students and their goals cannot be achieved without an institutional commitment to building relationships, strengthening communities and ensuring that social justice is a core value of Southern!
- As a public university, with the wide diversity of race, ethnicity, economic status and belief systems reflected in our student body, it is vital that we take on the mantle of social justice to ensure that our campus environment is safe, nurturing and welcoming for all.
- Certainly, in recent times, it seems that cultural, racial and economic boundaries have been reinforced nationwide – and campuses are not immune.
- Whatever your views on our country's future, heightened emotions and uncertainty should not provide a convenient opportunity to stereotype and offend individuals who are our classmates, our colleagues, our friends and neighbors. This is not a time to foment division and intolerance.
- Instead, we must learn from the painful lessons of the past and be spurred to give renewed energy to the promotion of the values of peace, acceptance and understanding, both within our own community and beyond.
- As President, from day one, I have stated and continue to state that every voice at this institution matters. That every member of our community should be treated with dignity, respect, kindness, compassion and civility. That we will not build walls, we will create opportunities for substantive debate, educational dialogue and courageous conversations.

- I love to talk with students (I eat twice a week in the dining hall), and every week during my short tenure here I have been inspired and humbled by their personal stories. In many ways, Southern is a working-class university, a real people's university – by the people, of the people, for the people – and that is its true strength.
- I want the members of this community to know that they are valued, that they are not alone. I want folks to feel that they can put aside their differences, reach out to one another and help each other out.
- So here, at Southern, I would like to build an “ethic of care,” as defined by the feminist scholar Carol Gilligan: “an ethic grounded in voice and relationships, in the importance of everyone having a voice, being listened to carefully (in their own right and on their own terms) and heard with respect.”
- I challenge all of us to instill an ethic of care at Southern... by building relationships centered on dignity, respect, kindness, compassion, and civility. We must make every effort to listen, to hear and to understand one another.
- Nel Noddings, a philosopher of education from Stanford (who I had the pleasure of studying with while she was a visiting professor at Columbia) reminds us that “the purpose of education is not only to intellectually stimulate and challenge students to think critically, but also teach people self-respect, how to get along with others and how to celebrate life's celebratory moments – that it is not entirely an intellectual task nor is it aimed at entirely intellectual outcomes.” “Education,” as Ronald Kangas of Wayne State University once remarked, “is more than books. It is taking the time to cultivate friends and understand others.”
- I am the product of a Jesuit education – an alum of the University of Scranton in Pennsylvania. I was taught in the Ignation Tradition (the tradition of St. Ignatius of Loyola) of the importance of *Curae Personalis* –

- This translates as “care for the entire person.” “Curae Personalis” suggests individualized attention to the needs of the other, distinct respect for his or her unique circumstances and concerns, and an appropriate appreciation for his or her particular gifts and insights.
- This value now is applied more broadly to include the relationship between educators and students and professional relationships among all those who work in the academic environment.
- So as Southern becomes a leader - I challenge all of us to ask “good questions” that will allow us to build better relationships.
 - How can I provide value to you?
 - What do you need to be successful?
 - How can I support you and others?
 - What can I do to improve the situation?
 - How can I better understand you?
 - What can I do right now to make a difference?
 - How are we modeling an ethic of care that builds relationships and ultimately makes us a better university and a better community?

Are we exercising Curae Personalis – care for the entire person?

- If we are, we have gone a long way to building a better community, because care for the whole person is the guiding force behind social justice.

STONE SOUP:

- I will conclude, as I like to do, with a fable that many of you will remember from your childhood.
- A kindly old stranger was walking through the land when he came upon a village. As he entered, the villagers moved towards their homes locking doors and windows. The stranger smiled and asked, "why are you all so frightened? I am a simple traveler, looking for a soft place to stay for the night and a warm place for a meal."
- "There's not a bite to eat in the whole province," he was told. "We are weak and our children are starving. Better keep moving on."
- "Oh, I have everything I need," he said. "In fact, I was thinking of making some stone soup to share with all of you." He pulled an iron cauldron from his cloak, filled it with water, and began to build a fire under it.
- Then, with great ceremony, he drew an ordinary-looking stone from a silken bag and dropped it into the water.
- By now, hearing the rumor of food, most of the villagers had come out of their homes or watched from their windows. As the stranger sniffed the "broth" and licked his lips in anticipation, hunger began to overcome their fear.
- "Ahh," the stranger said to himself rather loudly, "I do like a tasty stone soup. Of course, stone soup with cabbage -- that's hard to beat."
- Soon a villager approached hesitantly, holding a small cabbage he'd retrieved from its hiding place, and added it to the pot.
- "Wonderful!!" cried the stranger. "You know, I once had stone soup with cabbage and a bit of salt beef as well, and it was fit for a king."
- The village butcher managed to find some salt beef . . . And so it went, through potatoes, onions, carrots, mushrooms, and so on, until there was indeed a delicious meal for everyone in the village to share.
- The village elder offered the stranger a great deal of money for the magic stone, but he refused to sell it and traveled on the next day.
- As he left, the stranger came upon a group of village children standing near the road. He gave the silken bag containing the stone to the youngest child, whispering to the group, "It was not the stone, but the villagers that had performed the magic."

- A great story – reminding us that by working together, with everyone contributing what they can, a greater good is achieved, and it's a fitting one for a public institution like Southern during these times.
- So now my friends and colleagues, like the villagers, let us all make magic, together at Southern.

THANK YOU