



Guest Column

The Students' President

BY MIKEL SYKES

Two years ago, Delta State students were asked to provide input into the search process for Delta State's new president.



The search committee was putting together a list of attributes and qualifications that the various constituency groups wanted to see in the new president, and they asked us to contribute to this list. A few of the top items on the students' list included wanting someone who is passionate about Delta State and its students; has an open door policy; attends student activities and functions; and, knows about Delta State and the community. While the students wanted a university president who exemplified all of these traits, we really thought we

would be lucky to find a president who had maybe one or two of them.

Fast-forward to today, and you will find that the student body hit the jackpot when the board hired William N. LaForge in 2013 to be Delta State's eighth president. There is no one who is more passionate about Delta State or who bleeds green more than our president. If you don't believe me, just check out his wardrobe. He has worn a green tie every single day since he arrived on the job. He even wears green on the weekends, whether to sporting events or just wandering around campus. While including a certain color in your wardrobe may seem trivial, it's actually amazing to see the impact it has on the students. The little things do matter.

President LaForge's experience as both president of the Student Government Association and president of the Alumni Associa-

tion of Delta State are both assets to him now. I can't imagine that there are many other university presidents who can boast that record. While a student at Delta State, President LaForge was also the first president of Omicron Delta Kappa leadership honorary society, and he was one of the first four students inducted into Delta State's Student Hall of Fame. As a former SGA president, he knows and appreciates the importance of student input. As a result, he added the SGA president to his Cabinet, and I have a seat and voice at the table each week with the university's top officials.

Although President LaForge lived out-of-state for most of his career, he grew up in Cleveland and he never lost touch with his hometown or with his alma mater. With his Delta roots and lifelong association with this com-

SYKES continued, PAGE A5

THE CLEVELAND CURRENT

SUNDAY, MARCH 15, 2015 A5

SYKES

Continued from Page A4

munity and university, it would be hard to find someone who knows this place and the people better than President LaForge. And it doesn't hurt that he and Cleveland Mayor Billy Nowell have known each other since the second grade.

Since Day 1, our president has been visible and

accessible to students. He attends music recitals, art shows, lectures, athletic events, plays — the list goes on and on. He also interacts with students all across the campus, whether meeting with student groups in the residence halls, eating with students in the dining hall, attending student organization events, or presenting information to students in open forums. Everywhere he goes, he always encour-

ages students to contact him if they have questions or need assistance. And I can assure you they take him up on his offer.

President LaForge is also a very genuine and down-to-earth president. He has a large number of students who follow him on Twitter, and they love that he actually responds to their tweets. In recent weeks, with all of the ice and snow, he went so far as to have each residence hall

provide hot chocolate in the lobby for the residents, and he even joined a large group of students on the quadrangle for a snowball fight. He is also a financial supporter of student organizations and their fundraising activities. There are always student groups set up in the Union who are selling items for their cause or philanthropy, and President LaForge always stops at each table to purchase treats and/or to provide

support for their efforts.

From talking with friends at other universities, I've come to realize just how rare it is to have a university president who truly values and supports its students as much as President LaForge does. He doesn't just provide "lip service" to this politically correct sentiment; rather, he lives it every day with his actions. As SGA President, I have had the opportunity to interact with him

on a regular basis and to see and experience the genuine devotion and sincere fondness he has for our student body. And that's why President LaForge will go down in our history books as the students' president.

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