

Sent: Friday, May 01, 2009

Subject: In A Flash - Weekly Message From President Lefton

Good day,

I want to speak directly to Kent Campus students. Although I do so in my role as president, I also remember a past role as the parent of college students. In each of these roles, my top priority has been ensuring the safety, security and well-being of people I care about.

When our daughters were about to enter college, Linda and I did what most of your parents did: We spoke to them about the importance of balancing the wonderful freedoms of college life with the serious responsibilities of adulthood. And we let them know that we trusted them to exercise common sense -- and to listen to their inner voices -- as they made decisions from choosing class schedules to choosing friends to choosing how many (if any) beers they would drink when they went out with those friends.

Despite last weekend's College Fest -- an off-campus, unsanctioned block party on College Avenue that only got ugly late in the day when a small number of individuals made some very poor choices -- I trust that you and the vast majority of Kent State students also use sound judgment in your daily lives. I say that because, after three years here, I know the caliber of Kent State students. You are hard working, compassionate and determined to make the world a better place. I also know that, in the spirit of college students everywhere, you want to have as many experiences and as much fun during your college years as possible. Nothing wrong with that. In fact, your university and the city of Kent want you to enjoy your time here and to feel welcome on and off campus -- it's a big part of the reason we are working on projects from extending the Esplanade into downtown to providing space downtown for student-conceived businesses.

Of course, being part of a university community is a two-way street -- one that calls for mutual respect between students and their nonstudent neighbors. Many students and staff members invested significant time and effort in reminding College Avenue residents of that fact prior to College Fest (e.g., Student Affairs staff members joined members of student government and Kent City Council in "walkarounds," talking to area residents about the wisdom of keeping the celebration lawful and laid-back.). That's because even though off-campus events such as College Fest are not sponsored or sanctioned by the university, and do not fall under the jurisdiction of our university police department, Kent State operates under the belief that everything possible must be done to ensure the well-being of students on and off campus.

As we saw, the well-intentioned, proactive efforts of the university and the city could not prevent the unhappy outcome of College Fest. So although you'll find students and staff walking around the Lincoln and Sherman street areas in an attempt to avert problems this weekend, it's unlikely they can do so if even a few party-goers act inappropriately (Given a party theme like "Drinkin' on North Lincoln," you don't have to be a rocket scientist to predict the odds of that happening).

So if you are considering joining one of this weekend's big blasts, I urge you to also weigh the following facts:

- * City police will make the safety and security of everyone present "job one." That means state and city laws will be strictly enforced -- no debates, no second chances.

- * You will be breaking the law if you engage in under-age drinking; walk or stand in a public area with an open container of alcohol; or violate the city noise ordinance.

- * The events will again attract irresponsible people who have a lot less to lose than you do if they act inappropriately or illegally.
- * If you act inappropriately, you not only are likely to be arrested, but your behavior may be captured on videotape by local news media and/or posted on YouTube for eternity.
- * If you are arrested, you could jeopardize your ability to compete for scholarships, internships and jobs now and in the future.
- * If this weekend's parties end badly, your alma mater's reputation and image will be damaged, which can lessen the value of your degree.
- * Even if you behave responsibly -- and despite the university and city's best efforts -- no one can fully guarantee your safety if chaos arises in a large (and not entirely sober) crowd.

With all that in mind, I ask you to think long and hard about whether you want to risk your safety this weekend (or any weekend). If you do choose to attend an end-of-semester party, I urge you to heed the instructions made famous in the landmark TV series Hill Street Blues: "Let's be careful out there."

Lester Lefton