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Ringeisen retiring as chancellor of University of Illinois Springfield

Photos



University of Illinois Chancellor Richard D. Ringeisen announced his retirement during a press conference Monday, March 1, 2010 on the UIS campus. Rich Saal/The State Journal-Register

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People take it for granted now that Springfield has a four-year university, University of Illinois Springfield chancellor Richard Ringeisen said Monday.

Ringeisen said that's the proudest achievement he'll take away when he steps down as UIS chancellor in October.

At times battling tears, Ringeisen, 65, on Monday announced his retirement after more than nine years at UIS.

"It sounds like a cliché, I guess, but I just feel it's the right time," Ringeisen said.

When he came to Springfield in April 2001, he said, the school was just beginning an expansion that would include residence halls, new sports programs and the addition of the first freshman class in school history.

UIS's fall 2009 enrollment of more than 4,900 was a record.

"We've done so much to make the transition from an upper-level university to a full-fledged, four-year institution," said Ringeisen. "Newcomers to Springfield take it for granted now that there's a four-year institution out here on the south side of town."

Another tough budget year

Already coping with a system-wide hiring freeze and furloughs, Ringeisen said he wanted to stay through Oct. 31 to see the school into the new fiscal year.

"It will be one of the most difficult years in our history, and we've been through some pretty bad budget years already," said Ringeisen.

He said the school anticipates another 15 percent cut in state funding for operations next year, but no decisions have been made as yet on additional steps to reduce spending.

"We're all hopeful it's going to improve, but we're not optimistic," said Ringeisen.

The U of I board of trustees is scheduled to consider his retirement at a March 10 board meeting, but spokesman Thomas Hardy said a timetable has not been set for selecting a new chancellor. Hardy said the first priority is to find a successor for Joseph White, who resigned as U of I president at the end of the year.

"We hope to get someone identified by late spring or early summer, and on the job by the new academic year," said Hardy. "The next step for the president (in the UIS search) is to have a consultation process with the board of trustees, faculty and other members of the campus community in Springfield."

Campus Senate vice chairwoman Lynn Fisher said she's glad Ringeisen will stay into the new fiscal year.

"It's not an easy time in the history of the institution to retire. I know he wants to spend more time with his grandchildren and his family, and I suspect he's being generous staying into October," said Fisher, an associate professor of anthropology.

She said the primary concern among staff, faculty and students is that UIS maintain the progress made in the last nine years.

"The question looming over all of us all today is continuing with that mission in challenging budget times, and how do we achieve those goals?" she said.

Closer to family

Ringeisen and his wife, Carolyn, plan to move to North Carolina after his retirement to be closer to family. But they said they will retain ties to Springfield.

“We’ve loved our time in Springfield. We have made many friends in Springfield, and it’s been fun to watch the university grow,” said Carolyn Ringeisen.

While he expects another difficult year for state funding, Ringeisen said he is encouraged that \$23 million in private pledges and gifts have been raised toward a \$28 million UIS share of a “Brilliant Futures” campaign being undertaken throughout the University of Illinois system. The campaign goal is more than \$2.2 billion.

“All I really want to say is that I am absolutely confident that UIS has a great future,” said Ringeisen. He added that he believes UIS has now firmly established itself as a standalone school in the U of I system.

“We have arrived. There’s nobody on campus that feels like the little brother anymore,” he said.

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Richard Ringeisen’s tenure at the University of Illinois Springfield

* Hired April 2001, succeeding Naomi Lynn; previously served as vice chancellor for academic affairs and chief academic officer at East Carolina University

* Established Capitol Scholars Honors program, admitting first freshmen students, in 2001; freshman class expanded in 2006

* Enrollment of 4,288 in fall of 2001 increased 16 percent to 4,961 in the fall of 2009.

* Faculty increased from 170 to 211

* Added men’s basketball, women’s softball, men’s and women’s golf, women’s soccer and men’s baseball (starts 2011)

* Joined NCAA Division II for sports and Great Lakes Valley Conference

* College of Management and Business accredited

Fifth leader

Richard Ringeisen is the fifth leader of University of Illinois Springfield and the former Sangamon State University. The others were:

* Naomi Lynn, president of SSU and chancellor of UIS, 1991-2001

* Durward Long, president of SSU, 1984-1990

* Alex Lacey, president of SSU, 1978-1983

* Robert Spencer, president of SSU, 1969-1977.

Source: University of Illinois Springfield

New facilities

New facilities during Chancellor Richard Ringeisen's nine-year tenure at the University of Illinois Springfield:

- * Lincoln Residence Hall, the university's first residence hall, completed in fall 2001
- * The Recreation and Athletic Center, opened in fall 2007
- * New townhouse complexes, adding 380 on-campus beds (number of residential students tops 1,100)
- * University Hall, opened in 2004
- * The Quad and the Colonnade, completed in summer 2005
- * Founders Hall (second residence hall), opened in fall 2008
- * The Alfred O. and Barbara Cordwell Thirkildsen Field Station at Emiquon, designated in summer 2009
- * New Peoria Center, downtown Peoria, fall 2009

Pending projects include a new public safety building for the UIS campus police. State funds for that project have not been released, and no timeline has been set for that project.

Mixed reaction among students

Students had mixed reactions Monday as news of Chancellor Richard Ringeisen's retirement spread across the campus of the University of Illinois Springfield.

Most, though, hoped his successor will keep students' needs a priority.

"I think people are thankful for everything he's done," said Derek Felix, UIS student representative to the University of Illinois board of trustees. "He's taken us from one extreme, of having no undergrads really on campus, to a full-fledged four-year university with all of the new dorms and townhouses and (recreation) center.

"He's really been a part of what I feel has been the infant stages of UIS growth and being what eventually will be a great university."

As student trustee, Felix said he's worked a great deal with Ringeisen and appreciates his respect for students.

“He’s always tried to work things out with us if we had any problems. He’s just a great man to work with, and he’s a really great guy. I’m personally sad to see him go,” he said.

Junior political science student Brandon Fink said he’s unsure how Ringeisen’s departure will affect UIS. He learned of Ringeisen’s departure through an email sent to students before Monday’s news conference.

“I guess for me it’s just kind of a wait-and-see reaction and see how smooth the transition is and what the chancellor does in his remaining time here and how effectively he’s able to deal with our budget situation,” Fink said.

Fink said he hopes the next chancellor will not see growth as the primary goal.

“I get a sense from students that the quality of campus life could be improved from what it is now,” he said. Fink added that he believes there’s a disconnect between the school’s online course community and students at its physical campus.

Freshman Henry Micah said he hopes Ringeisen will be succeeded by someone who’s more in tune with modern student issues, such as LGBT (lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender) rights.

“A younger person to step into that position would be good for campus,” Micah said.

“I think there’s a lot of things that need to be improved upon on this campus because it is a newer entity of the University of Illinois. I personally am not staying (at UIS) because it is such an underdeveloped university.”

Felix said UIS’s next leader needs to have a strong vision for the future that will continue to make the school a nationally recognized small liberal arts university.

“I would definitely hope the next chancellor is bold -- and really a voice within not only the U of I system, but within other student universities,” he said.

-- Amanda Reavy