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News Briefs

April 01, 2010

Ben Stein makes return trip to campus

When Ben Stein, well-known economist and actor, visited Liberty University in May 2009 to deliver the Commencement address, he was thoroughly impressed with the student body.

“Liberty is the friendliest place I’ve ever been,” he said. “When I came for the Commencement I just fell in love with it.”

Stein phoned Chancellor Jerry Falwell, Jr. recently to request a personal question-and-answer session with a small group of Liberty students. Falwell invited several law school students, representatives from Liberty’s Student Government Association and drama students to attend the event on Saturday, Feb. 27, at the Barrick-Falwell Lodge at the Liberty Mountain Snowflex Centre.

Falwell introduced Stein to about 50 students, who were appreciative of the opportunity to meet one-on-one with someone as prominent and influential as Stein. “He is a welcomed guest on our campus and a student favorite,” Falwell said.

To students, Stein may be more well-known for his monotone professor role in “Ferris Beuller’s Day Off” or the feature face for the Clear Eyes commercial; but what was more prominently discussed at the event were his roles as an economist, lawyer, columnist and political speech writer.

Stein, a Jew, discussed a variety of issues, including entertainment, science, abortion and public service. Yet the idea that God should be at the center of students’ lives was consistent throughout.

“If you are educated to the idea that two plus two equals four, those are fine facts to know, but a much better fact to know is that God is up there to guide you,” Stein said. “If you pick that up and apply it to your life, life just makes sense.”

Winterfest crowd breaks record

More than 8,000 people closed out 2009 at Liberty University's Winterfest, shattering a record for the eight-year-old event.

The two-day festival, which combines a host of acclaimed Christian musical artists, speakers and entertainers, drew 8,035 people on Dec. 30-31, surpassing the previous record of 6,759 in 2006.

"One thing that will never change at Liberty is reaching young people for Christ through music," said Luke Enns, with Enrollment Management at LU.

Musical guests included Skillet, MercyMe, Barlow Girl and Thousand Foot Krutch. Speakers were Matt Pitt, David Nasser and Clayton King.

Enns said 615 students trusted Christ as their personal savior. Liberty personally contacted and counseled 443 of these students. All 615 received a packet including publications by Dr. Jerry Falwell, a Jesus First pen and a daily devotional Bible.

British advisor speaks on climate change

Lord Christopher Monckton, Third Viscount Monckton of Brenchley, spoke at Liberty University's convocation on March 10 about the issue of global climate change.

Currently, Monckton is chief policy advisor to the Science and Public Policy Institute, and served as an advisor to former Prime Minister Margret Thatcher's policy unit.

Monckton spoke to students about popular ideas concerning climate change, and expressed reasons for why they are not to be taken as fact. Specifically, he described Al Gore's Documentary, "An Inconvenient Truth," as a "mawkish, sci-fi comedy horror movie dreamt up by a PR guy."

He exhorted students to challenge popular opinion and ideologies, to review the issues for themselves with real facts, not just what the media presents them.

National Civil War Chaplains Museum opens

The National Civil War Chaplains Museum held a grand opening ceremony on the Liberty University campus on Saturday, Jan. 23.

A valued addition to Liberty's exceptional educational resources, the museum is the only one of its kind dedicated to the role of chaplains, priests, rabbis and religious organizations who ministered to the common soldier during the Civil War. It features treasured artifacts from the Civil-War era as well as testimonies and historical facts from a unique perspective.

Originally housed in DeMoss Learning Center — Liberty's main academic building — the museum relocated next to Doc's Diner on Campus East last fall.

The Jan. 23 ceremony included a ribbon-cutting by Liberty administrators, professors and museum board members, including Chancellor Jerry Falwell, Jr. Representatives from eight different Civil War groups celebrated the event with an honor guard salute, and re-enactors attended in proper Civil War attire.

Visitors then toured the museum, which features a number of exhibits including original soldier's uniforms, life-size wax statues of chaplains, accessories from the war and murals of war scenes by university artist Paul Dinwiddie. Following the tour, guests were treated to a luncheon in the executive dining room at Liberty's Reber-Thomas Dining Hall, where they heard from leaders of Civil War-related groups in the community.

Dr. Kenny Rowlette, director of the National Civil War Chaplains Research Center and Museum Foundation and associate professor of English at LU, said the museum will benefit the region by adding yet another quality Civil War attraction to boost tourism.

"Lynchburg's rich Civil War heritage — The Battle of Lynchburg, Lynchburg as a hospital center during the war, Lynchburg as a prisoner of war center and the legendary CSA units from the city (the 11th VA, Company G and the 2nd VA Cavalry) — make it a 'must-see' destination for any Civil War enthusiasts who are on their way to or from either Appomattox or Richmond," he said.

Liberty University will also benefit, as history students will have a convenient way to be immersed in Civil-War era relics, he said.

The museum was of particular interest to participants at this year's Civil War Seminar, March 26-28, on the LU campus. Hosted by LU's Department of History, the Department of English and Modern Languages, the seminar draws hundreds of people from all over the United States to take part in reenactments and educational lectures about the time period. For information on the seminar, go to www.liberty.edu/civilwar.

Centra Health operates campus medical service

On Jan. 1, Centra Health began operating Liberty University Student Health Services on campus. Centra Health is a regional not-for-profit healthcare system

comprised of Lynchburg General, Virginia Baptist, and Southside Community Hospitals, the Centra Medical Group and several other health care facilities that employ more than 4,000 workers.

Liberty University Student Health Services replaces Light Medical, which has provided medical service for students, faculty and staff at Liberty since 1990.

Lee Beaumont, LU's director of Auxiliary Services, said the change was made in the best interest of Liberty students.

"Everything we're doing is to enhance current services and offer new services to the students," he said. That includes extending hours of operation and adding staff to better accommodate the growing student body. He said Centra is hoping to add more medical services in the future, such as X-rays, so students do not have to go off campus to receive special services. Current staff will remain in place.

The change should help to better coordinate care between Liberty's clinic and other Centra Health facilities nearby.

Light Medical will still operate its off-campus practice at Linkhorne Drive.

Michael W. Smith visits the Center for Worship

Contemporary Christian musician Michael W. Smith visited Liberty University's Center for Worship in the fall 2009 semester just hours before his A New Hallelujah World Tour concert at Thomas Road Baptist Church.

Smith, a Grammy and Dove award-winning artist, met with aspiring musicians and worship leaders in a casual question-and-answer session kicked off by a performance of some impromptu songs requested by students.

A 200-member choir from the Center for Worship also rehearsed with Smith later that day to join him on the TRBC stage that night.

Students asked him about everything from when he was asked to perform at the White House (Smith said he was friends with President Bush's family and had been there a few times, even having a hotdog lunch in the Oval Office), to how he goes about writing songs to when he felt called to perform music as a ministry.

Smith, who has had a successful traveling artist career (with 28 number one songs and career sales over 10 million), has also served as a worship leader at his church near Nashville, Tenn. He told students who wanted to be recording artists that "it's all about the song. You get a song that can change the world, that people will sing, that's key. [And] the big one is accountability — surround yourself with great people, 'cause this business will take you down. You just have to raise the bar."

He advised students to learn to "disappear" when they're leading worship, to let God be at the center and to do it all "with humility."

Smith was last at Liberty University the weekend before its founder, Dr. Jerry Falwell, passed away. He has had ties with Liberty for a long time, though.

"I love it. I have a lot of friends who went to school here. It's kind of good to come to a place where [you hear] it's probably the most talked-about campus, really. And I work with a lot of those people, which is great."

Class of 2005 alumnus Meredith Andrews is now on tour with Smith and spoke with students at the Center for Worship's ministry convocation that week.

Anne Graham Lotz speaks at convocation

Anne Graham Lotz, the second daughter of the Rev. Billy Graham, made her first visit to Liberty University on Dec. 2 as guest speaker at convocation.

For the last 30 years, Lotz has traveled the world teaching the Bible in arenas, prison cells, stadiums, sanctuaries, seminaries and even the United Nations. She hosts a radio program that is heard on more than 700 outlets worldwide.

Although this was Lotz's first time on campus, her family has had many ties with Liberty and the Falwell family over the years. Her brother Franklin Graham spoke at Baccalaureate in 1996. Billy Graham gave Liberty's Commencement address in 1997. Five of his grandchildren and three great-grandchildren have attended Liberty, and another grandchild, Basyle J. Tchividjian, is a professor at Liberty University School of Law.

Graham is a best-selling author of 10 books, including her signature book, "Just Give Me Jesus." She will be returning to Liberty in April to film video curriculum to accompany her recent release, "The Magnificent Obsession." She said the video will include interactive sessions that Liberty University students will participate in.

Hockey team practices at Chancellor Falwell's farm

On Jan. 12, Liberty University's men's hockey team vacated the LaHaye Ice Center on campus in favor of an unusual practice arena.

Head coach Kirk Handy surprised the entire team by holding practice at a lake on Chancellor Jerry Falwell, Jr.'s Bedford County, Va., farm.

"Our players loved it," Handy said. "It made you feel like a little kid again."

The players and coaching staff were excited for the opportunity to skate outside, he said.

"We kept it as a surprise for the team and had them change at the ice center and ride out in LU vans to the farm."

Canadian senior Dave Semenya said it was a very unexpected surprise for the entire team.

"I never thought it would be possible in Virginia," Semenya said. "The ice was surprisingly smooth."

Liberty's men's hockey team finished the regular season with a 29-3 record and made its fourth consecutive appearance in the men's Division 1 National Championships in March.

Students show warm hearts during snowstorm

A Jan. 30 snowfall, which blanketed campus with about 10 inches, caused some services to be scaled back — but that didn't stop students' volunteer efforts.

At Reber-Thomas Dining Hall — the main campus dining hall — a group of 12 students saw that Liberty University Dining Services was understaffed due to poor road conditions, so they decided to stay after their meal and assist with cleanup and dishes.

Doug Pugh, general manager, said he was overcome "with admiration and gratitude." In a letter he wrote to the students Monday morning, he said he was reminded that "Liberty University students are not your 'typical' college kids."

He also announced that Liberty University Dining Services would be adding $25 in meal plan points to each of the volunteer students' meal plans.

When Chancellor Jerry Falwell, Jr. caught wind of the news, he told Pugh that “LU kids never cease to amaze me with their acts of kindness and positive outlook on life. I hear comments from local folks all the time about how they can tell which waiters and waitresses are LU kids when they go out to eat just by how friendly they are. This is the best way to witness for Christ — by example.”

Liberty University Dining Services is operated by Sodexo, which provides food services and facilities management at more than 400 colleges and universities.

Liberty celebrates Black History Month

In celebration of the accomplishments of African Americans to our country, Liberty University’s Center for Multicultural Enrichment (Center4ME) held a series of events throughout the month of February.

The highlight was a Feb. 13 lecture by John Stokes, a national figure in the legendary Brown v. Board of Education Supreme Court trial. The lecture was based on his well-known book titled, “Students on Strike: Jim Crow, Civil Rights, Brown and Me.”

Stokes was one of the original litigants in the case on May 17, 1954, when the U.S. Supreme Court announced its decision that, “separate educational facilities are inherently unequal.” The decision effectively denied the legal basis for segregation in Kansas and 20 other states with segregated classrooms. His presentation was filled with stories from his experiences surrounding the case. He signed copies of his book at the Liberty University Barnes and Noble Bookstore following his lecture.

Stokes’ visit was only one of 10 unique events sponsored by the Center4ME, including a Harlem Nights Ball, a “Being Black in 2010” discussion, a gospel concert and many more.

Students address Council on polling place issue

About 200 Liberty students boarded buses to attend a Lynchburg City Council public hearing on Feb. 23 to voice concerns about moving the Ward III polling place at Heritage Elementary School, where thousands of students turned out to vote in previous elections.

Council decided to keep the polling place at the school, but not before about 30 LU students spoke, many expressing that the alternative site – Lynchburg First Church of the Nazarene on

Wards Ferry Road – was unsafe and would inhibit their access to polls on Election Day. The university had earlier offered two of its properties — Candlers Station shopping center and Thomas Road Baptist Church — as alternative sites, but those options were dismissed.

Student turnout for the hearing, held at City Hall, was so large that many attendees were directed upstairs to the "overflow room." Even Sparky, the Liberty Flames' mascot, joined the crowd.

On May 4, when Lynchburg holds City Council elections, it will be the first time students on campus can vote in this type of election. Students have previously voted in the 2008 presidential election and in Virginia's 2009 elections.

"I think one of the best things that happened tonight is that the city of Lynchburg got to see you as individuals," City Councilman Turner Perrow Jr. told the students.

Student running for Lynchburg City Council

Liberty junior Brent Robertson is running as an independent in the Lynchburg City Council Election on May 4. Robertson was born and raised in Columbus, Ohio, but Lynchburg has become his new home.

Uniting Liberty students with city constituents is one of Robertson's priorities. "I have made it clear I'm not running for Liberty University by any means," he said.

"If Liberty, Lynchburg College and Central Virginia Community College students are able to look at my candidacy and say, 'He stands for things I stand for,' as well as the people of Lynchburg, maybe we are not enemies after all."

Liberty assists local church in building project

At the Feb. 17 convocation, held during Liberty's Missions Emphasis Week, Chancellor Jerry Falwell, Jr., reminded students that reaching the world for Christ "begins at home." Specifically, Falwell was referring to Poplar Spring Baptist Church of Bedford, Va. The church had raised almost $100,000 for a building addition. After the 20 years it took to amass the funds, a local accountant stole the funds, and there was no way of getting the money back, Falwell said.

The chancellor wanted LU to help, but did not know how it could afford to solve the problem. "The numbers were just too big," he said. After further research, however, Vice President of Field Operations Scott Starnes reported back to Falwell that nearly every contractor used by Liberty had agreed to donate the necessary labor and materials to revive the project.

"We just believe that this is our Jerusalem and this is where missions begins," said Falwell.

The Rev. Dr. Herman Robertson, pastor of Poplar Spring, was a guest at convocation. When Falwell announced the news, Robertson thanked the chancellor, Liberty and God “for making this possible.”