



COLLEGE 360°  
Cleveland Northeast Ohio Akron

Speech delivered by Thomas V. Chema,  
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## Achieving Greatness

Thank you, Kevin. I'm really thrilled to see so many friendly faces in the audience – people who I know truly love this region, have worked to make it prosperous, and will keep working until we get it right. We have much to be thankful for, but much to do. Let me tell you what I see in our future.

**Over the next few weeks tens of thousands of potential emissaries** for Northeast Ohio will fan out across the United States and much of the globe. They are the 170,000 plus students enrolled in Northeast Ohio's 24 colleges and universities. They come from all 50 states and more than 100 countries – from Alabama and Alaska to Zambia and Zimbabwe. They are part of a 2.2 billion dollar economic force in Northeast Ohio – the higher education economy.

Our would-be emissaries will receive nearly 22,000 baccalaureate or graduate degrees this year alone. They are an economic force. They directly spend more than a quarter of a billion dollars during the school year on everything ranging from food and transportation to concert tickets and clothing.

That's direct spending by the students – it's not counting tuition or visits from mom and dad.

More important than their spending habits is what they think, say and do about Northeast Ohio. For they will indeed help determine our future.

Will it be a future filled with innovation and prosperity – like the one our forefathers experienced in the first half of the last century?

Or will our future be much like our recent past – plagued by a shrinking economy, poverty and exodus?

I am here today to lay out a challenge to our community that can apply to regions across our country. And to articulate the opportunity we have to meet that challenge.

Most importantly I am here to enlist all of you in an effort that will help restore our region to one of leadership in innovation and prosperity. This effort is called **College 360°**. We derived the name from the fact that Northeast Ohio's great assets offer college students a complete, 360 degree life experience – if only we can create an environment where they can fully embrace that experience.

What *College 360°* is proposing is the region's first comprehensive brain gain strategy targeted at young adults. The goal is three-pronged: to enroll, engage and ultimately employ more young adults here in Northeast Ohio.

For those 170,000 already enrolled here, *College 360°* will work with their colleges and universities, entertainment venues, employers and others to directly engage them in the full breadth of the Northeast Ohio experience, to increase their affinity for life here.

Because they are an untapped market. They are a source of volunteers. They are a source of energy and exuberance. They are a source of sales. They are a source of employable talent. Tap into them and watch the bounty flow.

You will be hearing much more about *College 360°* as we begin to spread the Regional Brain Gain gospel to parents, students, counselors and others in the months ahead. I want to use the privilege of this platform to inspire all of you to embrace the messages and mission of *College 360°* and to develop ways to make this initiative come alive in the region.

*College 360°* offers a message of hope that is founded in the reality of the greatness of our region. We can offer a stimulating life experience to college students. We can attract the best and brightest. And we can retain them. That is our belief and our conviction. And we will not rest until we achieve our objectives.

Even we university presidents realize that students are looking at much more than classrooms and dorm rooms when they choose a college. They want a place that can connect them to the people and places they care about. They want a place that will open doors to new opportunities and experiences.

And yes, they want a place that will help them get a job that will help them pay for the college experience and ultimately, make a contribution to our society. In short, they want to go to a great place, not just a great college or university.

In my previous lives as an attorney, economic developer, state regulator I did not have a full appreciation of the size and contribution these students collectively make to Northeast Ohio. Nor did I fully appreciate the potential role these students could play in the revitalization of Northeast Ohio.

Yet, these people will be our future leaders – or the leaders of some other region.

They are the visionaries that will take the research being done at the Center for Regenerative Medicine run by Case and the Cleveland Clinic and translate it into life-saving treatments.

- They are the innovators who will commercialize research being done at Kent State's Liquid Crystal Institute into next-generation television screens that will be made of thin sheets of plastic.

- They are the compassionate who will work in our inner cities to end health care disparities.
- They are the risk takers who will master new technologies to revolutionize how we teach our children in the classroom and in the home.
- They are the adventurers who will explore the outer reaches of space from a NASA Glenn lab.
- They are the pioneers who will produce the first fuel cells to power our cars. Fuel cells first developed at the Stark State College of Technology's Advanced Fuel Cell Prototyping Center.
- They are the entrepreneurs who will use research from Hiram to develop businesses to produce, store and sell biodiesel fuel.
- They are Team 360 – a group of 14 students from our region's universities who are helping us shape the initiative so it meets the needs of our core audience. These are among are best and brightest and I welcome some of Team 360 here today.

I am selfish; I want all of these students to stay in Northeast Ohio. But what is even more important, is that we as a region provide an environment that embraces and engages these students and offers them a full and complete – a 360 degree – college experience during their time here.

If we provide this *College 360<sup>o</sup>* experience to the students, then I am confident that when they return home – whether that home is in Columbus, Cleveland, Kansas or the Congo, they will spread the word of the greatness that is Northeast Ohio.

Most conversations in Ohio regarding higher education quickly turn to the sorry level of state support. Unquestionably that is a major, vital issue to the long-term health of our region and our state. And I don't want anyone to think otherwise. But today I want to focus on what we can do now with our current strengths. Our current assets. Indeed, our current greatness.

We can:

-Increase awareness of the value of higher learning.

We can:

-Leverage our assets to elevate the quality and value of higher education in Northeast Ohio and its impact on our economy.

We can:

-Enhance Northeast Ohio's global reputation as a destination for higher learning.

## **Value of Higher Learning**

Everyone wins if we can persuade more residents of Northeast Ohio to go to college. Let's boil it down to a matter of dollars and cents. The average income differential between a college graduate and a high school graduate is \$28,000. That money adds up in the form of wealth creation and (in case there are any state legislators in the audience) tax revenue.

For every 2% gain in a community's percentage of residents with a college degree, the average income in that community grows 1%. Sadly, only about two out of every ten Northeast Ohio have a college degree.

In high growth regions four out of 10 or more have college degrees. It comes as no surprise that both Northeast Ohio's average income and its level of educational attainment are below the national average.

Yes, affordability is an issue. But so are values and perceptions. We must instill the mind-set that a college degree is the path to prosperity – for individuals and for our region.

We must change the perception that colleges are remote, distant and somehow separate from our daily lives.

I am convinced if we can more tightly weave Northeast Ohio's 24 colleges and universities into the daily fabric of our region then we will see more students enrolling in our area colleges.

We will see more students engaged in the activities in our cities and towns – activities that range from volunteering with the Red Cross to checking out an Akron Aeros game at Canal Park. And then we will see more students eager and willing to stay in Northeast Ohio to continue those experiences.

Developing a regional Brain Gain strategy is essential for the long-term prosperity of Northeast Ohio. A study of the best performing cities by the Milken Institute concluded that:

Quote - "A region's most important source of competitive advantage is the knowledge embedded in its people. The knowledge, skills, experience and innovative potential of talented individuals have greater value than capital equipment." – End Quote.

That says it all. In the knowledge economy, brain power is where it's at. Obviously this doesn't just apply to Northeast Ohio. It is a global issue that gets to the core of our nation's ability to maintain its position as the world's largest and most vibrant economy.

In 2003 the National Science Board issued a dire warning that our nation could be placed at risk because it isn't graduating enough U.S.-born engineers and scientists.

In his new book, *The Flight of the Creative Class*, Richard Florida argues persuasively that top talent is migrating to open, diverse and tolerant cosmopolitan centers the world over.

Increasingly those centers are found not in the U.S., but in Europe, Asia and even South America. The United States no longer has a lock on this highly mobile talent pool.

This globalization of the race for talent and prosperity is also the subject of New York Times columnist Thomas Friedman's new book *The World Is Flat*. Friedman details how global economic forces have in essence flattened the world to a point where regions on opposite sides of the globe are competing for the first time on a level playing field.

The talented people of Bangalore and Beijing now have an unprecedented opportunity to innovate and create wealth in their own home regions – rather than having to move to the United States to achieve those dreams.

The competition is getting tougher. Demand for talent is on the rise. And what that means for us is we must increase our own home-grown supply of talent and innovation. And we must take steps to make sure talented people from all over the globe see the value in getting that full 360 degree college education that is available in Northeast Ohio.

The goal is simple, we must enroll more students from Northeast Ohio and from around the globe at our region's colleges and universities.

### **Leverage Our Assets**

As I noted earlier, in my previous work I did not develop a full appreciation of the impact of higher education on the economy of Northeast Ohio. And I'm willing to wager that many of the students at Hiram, Oberlin, Case and elsewhere do not have a full appreciation of what Northeast Ohio has to offer them.

This is no fault of theirs or even of the universities. For sometimes I think we lead the nation in best kept secrets.

But if we all embrace this notion of Northeast Ohio offering a 360 degree experience for college students it will no longer be a secret that this is a place where you can:

-Hike the trails of one of the country's most popular National Parks and research how to clean up the air in urban America.

A place where you can:

-Ride terrifying roller coasters and get internships with the companies that keep those roller coasters on the tracks.

A place where you can:

-Visit halls of fame for music, sports and invention and hear the world's finest orchestra, watch sports' fastest rising star and participate in cutting edge research ranging from nanotechnology to brain surgery.

The challenge as a community is to work together to introduce college students on campuses across Northeast Ohio to the cornucopia of assets and opportunities that are nearby – but outside of their comfort zone.

Higher education cannot do this without your help.

The concept and framework for *College 360°* was developed originally by the Northeast Ohio Council on Higher Education. NOCHE is a consortium of 24 of our region's public and private universities and colleges and the private sector.

Its mission is to promote alliances among institutions of higher education and related entities in Northeast Ohio that ultimately result in an improved quality of life and economic growth in the region.

I would like to personally thank NOCHE's chairman, Robert Rawson of Jones Day, and its executive director, Chuck Hickman, for providing leadership and encouragement needed to nurture *College 360°*. *College 360°* is an initiative that applies to our entire region, not just higher education.

But each great program needs a champion and Bob, Chuck and the rest of the team at NOCHE have been that initial champion. Now it is time for all of Northeast Ohio to embrace this opportunity to attract, engage and retain more college students.

Remember, I'm selfish. I expect you to be selfish too. I expect you to ask, what's in this for me? Here's how I'd like you to ask that selfish question: How would I or my organization benefit if we had regular contact with bright, eager, and engaged college students?

What if we joined forces to organize our selfishness and planned how best to tap into this market?

Imagine how differently Northeast Ohio would be viewed if we become globally known as the region that provides the most internship opportunities to college students?

Or the place that offers the best college discounts at restaurants, theaters and concert halls? Yes, we must strive to be recognized as the best. The competition is tough and getting tougher. We must strive for greatness. Neither failure nor mediocrity is an option.

### **Enhancing our Reputation**

Expanding and enhancing the way we engage college students into the life and times of Northeast Ohio won't be done overnight. But we must start now and we must start telling our story now.

We must begin delivering the message locally, regionally and ultimately globally, that Northeast Ohio is indeed the place where one can experience a full 360-degree college experience. *College 360°* will help develop and tell those stories.

*College 360°* will use magazines, web sites, the news media and other vehicles to start spreading the word. We are working with Collegia – a firm that specializes in connecting colleges with communities to spread the word.

But we all must tell these stories. We must believe that we can do this. That we can be a global destination for higher learning. And tell each other and the world that this is our goal and we will do what it takes to achieve it. We can choose to tell the stories of our greatness or we can languish while gazing at our navel. *College 360°* chooses to tell about our greatness.

So what is the result if Northeast Ohio values higher education and exceeds the national averages for educational attainment?

What will it mean if we leverage our assets and engage college students in the fabric of our lives?

And what does it mean if we persuasively tell the world that Northeast Ohio is a destination for higher education?

We rarely engage in envisioning an optimistic future for Northeast Ohio, but I'd like you to indulge me for a moment and imagine:

- A region that so supports education that our high school graduation rates lead the country and local universities – despite their expansion efforts – become more and more selective of the students they accept.
- A region so overflowing with connected, engaged young minds that innovative solutions to challenges ranging from early childhood education to converting used vegetable oil into fuel are mastered here.
- A region where employers easily recruit the next generation of talent because they're already wandering their halls or are hanging out in the café downstairs.
- A region with a vibrant arts and entertainment community in part because of the strong support and involvement of young adults.

Clearly *College 360°* cannot create such a future on its own. But together, we can. Northeast Ohio has the assets. We have the resources. We have the capabilities. And *College 360°* can indeed play an essential role in turning this scenario into more reality than fiction.

This is a region full of greatness. We need to share this greatness with the 170,000-plus college students who are here today. We must encourage others to gain access and contribute to this greatness by achieving a college degree. And we must begin to tell the world about this greatness.

If we do, we will indeed achieve greatness very familiar to our forefathers and very different from our recent past. Thank you very much.

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**“*College 360° . . . Cleveland/Northeast Ohio/Akron*” is a four-year, regional brain gain initiative supported by various community sectors to increase the region’s supply of college-educated workers. *College 360°* will develop messages and implement activities which promote Northeast Ohio as a premier destination for learning, living and working.”**

#### **COLLEGE 360° STRATEGY GROUPS**

**ENROLL.** Attract greater numbers of students from across Ohio and out of state to the area’s colleges and universities; capture increased visitor and student traffic for lodging, entertainment and dining venues (Tremont, Downtown Akron, Ohio City, and others).

**ENGAGE.** Link those students with activities that draw them off-campus and expose them to the area’s rich resources that will not only enhance their college experience, but lead to a deeper personal appreciation for Northeast Ohio as a place to live, work and play.

**EMPLOY.** Connect these students with internships, professional mentors and employers to ensure that their first career step is a short one, keeping the best and brightest in Northeast Ohio.

**For more information on *College 360°* contact:**

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