

“Architect and ambassador of local and global good”

2021 SACHEM AWARD – JAMES T. MORRIS

Governor Eric J. Holcomb

June 25, 2021

Remarks as prepared for delivery

Thank you, Quinn and Tamika, and good morning to all!

I can't think of a more fitting place for us to add another chapter to our Hoosier history than here, at the Indiana State Museum, where the bridges between our past, present and future can be traveled like nowhere else.

Speaking of history, just over 50 years ago, the late Governor Ed Whitcomb introduced the very idea of the “Sachem,” with the mission of identifying and assembling Hoosier leaders possessing unique wisdom, judgment and grace.

But the concept wasn't continued after Governor Whitcomb left office, until 2005, when Whitcomb pitched it to a man who later succeeded him (and preceded me) in this role, Governor Mitch Daniels.

Mitch took the Sachem and recreated it as the state's highest single honor, reserved only for Hoosiers whose virtue and lifetime accomplishment have made incredible impacts in the lives of their fellow citizens.

Legends like Bill and Gloria Gaither, who have been a comfort and inspiration to so many globally and they need no introduction.

We're honored to have Bill and his band here with us today.

And, during these past four years, it's been a true privilege for me to give the Sachem to special people, like...

Eva Mozes Kor, the Holocaust survivor, who has now passed on to Glory, leaving us a legacy of forgiveness and love that continues to challenge and change hearts.

And, Sergeant Sammy Davis, whose heroism on the battlefield is only matched by his heroic duty off it, advocating for our nation's veterans to this day.

And, Dr. George Rapp, a global humanitarian and medical pioneer who invented new treatments, and built new medical facilities that have saved lives around the world.

And last year, to Reggie Jones, Sr., who built from scratch so much more than a successful enterprise, he's lifted the lives and spirits of countless others through mentorships and scholarships.

And here we are today, adding yet another to this list of model citizens, whose names are rightly forever engraved in our state capitol building because they will forever represent the very best among us.

It's both a personal and professional honor to bestow our state's highest honor, for only the 16th time in Indiana history, to Mr. James T. Morris.

Talk to Jim Morris for a few minutes, and you'll instantly be put at ease, for although he's a man of great intellect, talent and accomplishment, he also possesses deep integrity, compassion, humility and warmth.

If you know Jim personally – you're lucky – and you know he bleeds the "Cream and Crimson" of his Alma Mater, I.U., and that no one loves the city of Indianapolis or the state of Indiana more than he does, and no one's more passionate about combating hunger locally and around the world.

And during his lifetime of service, few have accomplished more to benefit all three.

That's because Jim is "far-sighted," as in, he sees and seeks a better and brighter future for all his neighbors, and he excels at bringing people together to accomplish a common goal, for the common good, and often achieving uncommon results, like no one I've ever met.

And, along the way, Jim Morris never forgot his Wabash Valley roots or the lessons his mom taught him growing up in Terre Haute...

Or the oath he pledged on his way to becoming an Eagle Scout, to "help other people at all times," which no surprise, became his life's mission.

So, after he earned his degree at Indiana University, his unquenchable desire to serve his community led him to become chief of staff to a legendary statesman, and future Senator, Indianapolis mayor Richard Lugar.

It's difficult imagining a better role model than Lugar, for young Morris.

No one placed a higher value on treating people with civility and respect, traits Jim saw first-hand daily and has emulated in his own life ever since.

And while Mayor Lugar charted a course that placed Indianapolis on a more prosperous path, Jim Morris wasn't just taking notes, he was becoming a respected leader in his own right, an architect and implementer of transformative visions, casting his own shadow.

Revolutionary ideas like creating a public university in the heart of Indy's downtown.

Jim not only saw the need for what would become I.U.P.U.I., he pushed it, and made it a reality.

And if we traveled back in time, although he's too humble to admit it, we'd find Jim Morris has always focused on someone else, and on the next generation, helping build Indianapolis into the global sports capital and world-class city it is today.

We'd see him quietly devoting his time and talents to the U.S. Olympic Committee, the N.C.A.A. Foundation, Gleaners Food Bank, United Way of Central Indiana, and the world-renowned Riley Children's Hospital...

Or serving as a trustee, for Butler, Indiana State University, and his beloved Indiana University, where Jim would teach as a professor of philanthropy and public administration for well over a decade.

Looking back, we'd see him helping stand up the Indiana Sports Corporation, or literally pacing off footsteps at the future site of the Hoosier Dome to ensure it would fit, or helping bring the Pacers and then the Colts to Indy.

We'd see him giving back to Scouting, by serving on the national advisory board for the Boy Scouts, and agreeing to serve as chairman of the Governor's Annual Luncheon benefiting Scouts, a role he's graciously reprised each year, for two decades now, raising over a million dollars a year to give Hoosier scouts the same opportunities he enjoyed!

And, looking back, we'd find Jim helping found the Indianapolis Children's Choir, housed on the campus of Jim's other alma mater, Butler.

We'll hear from them today via video, a testament and treat to his ongoing "Butler Way" efforts!

And, of course, there's his past and present-day work with the Pacers and Fever, the Big Ten, the Women's Final Four, and high school basketball tournaments, that bring millions of visitors to Indy each year – and more importantly to Jim – these events have inspired and given so many opportunities to so many Hoosier youth.

I've simply not met anyone who is more actively passionate about serving and lifting-up disadvantaged children, and giving them the confidence they need to succeed, than our friend Jim Morris.

But what really sets him apart, in my view, is his intense over-drive to do something about it.

Garrison Keeler said: "Nothing you do for children is ever wasted."

You'd be hard pressed to find anyone who's lived those words the way, our friend, Jim Morris has, and does.

In fact, there's nowhere Jim won't go if there's a way he can improve on the life of a child, especially those harmed by violence or scarred by hunger or poverty.

We know that, because in 2002, Jim relocated to Rome (as in Rome, Italy!) to serve as Executive Director of the United Nations World Food Program, the world's largest humanitarian agency...

Where he led the first U.N. humanitarian missions to Sudan and Darfur and traveled to 80 nations around the globe coordinating efforts to reduce hunger and bring aide to those children affected by poverty, and hunger, and drought.

Across Southern Africa, Jim spearheaded the effort to bring U.N. and humanitarian agencies together to better fight food insecurity and HIV/AIDS.

And by the time he returned "Back Home Again in Indiana," that program had fed the entire population of Iraq, and had provided meals for tens of millions of impoverished adults and orphaned children across Africa.

Everyone of us could recount stories like this for the remainder of the day, and only reveal the tip of the “Morris iceberg,” for we all know how lives are changed through the efforts of a dynamic leader like Jim, who has extended his arms around the world and gave us all one big hug.

Because whether he’s donning a chef’s hat and serving meals to the hungry, or leading the Indianapolis Water Corporation, or steering one of the nation’s largest charitable organizations – the Lilly Endowment – bringing people together, and never letting go, is perhaps what Jim does best.

But I’d bet he’d be the first to admit, he had a lot of help along the way.

Maybe his love and loyalty for I.U. runs a little deeper because that campus is where he met the love of his life, his beautiful bride.

He’s had no greater supporter or stronger partner, than his soulmate and wife of 56 years, Jackie.

Jackie and Jim have accomplished so much, and have helped so many, together.

Anyone who knows them would agree: They do everything together, side by side, cheering on the home team, and maybe jeering the refs when there’s a bad call!

Especially Jackie!

And some of their greatest accomplishments are here with us today: They’re the parents of three children, Tim, Todd, and Jennifer (all, of course, I.U. grads!).

We’ll get to hear from them in a few moments.

And they’re the proud grandparents to eight, including one who will be a junior at I.U. this fall.

I don’t know if it’s “Morris-mandatory,” but it sure sounds like there’s an I.U. pattern here.

So, in closing, I know this is far from the only award Jim Morris has received, displayed, or has framed on his walls.

You’ll know what I mean if you’ve seen his walls.

His efforts have earned him 18 honorary degrees, and recognition from the Indiana Black Expo, to the Emperor of Japan, to the president of Italy, and by a President and Vice President of the United States.

But as many titles as he has earned, the one that means the most to him, I suspect, might be, that of “Eagle Scout.”

And that tells you all you need to know about Jim Morris’s character.

The impact of Jim’s unselfish, visionary, and moral leadership is literally, this city’s skyline, from the Indianapolis Zoo across the street, to moving the N.C.A.A. Headquarters here, and as far as the eye can see in every direction.

Matched only by his global reach, extending to villages all across Africa, in the lives of millions of youth, who now have a better shot at life because Jim Morris cared about them, and took action at his every opportunity.

Like his candlestick collection, he never lets go!

Jim, thank you.

Thank you for being an architect of Indiana’s future, and a consummate global ambassador, who continues to bring great credit upon our state.

For ALL these reasons and so many more, it’s my honor to present the 2021 Sachem award to Hoosier great, Mr. James T. Morris.