

Great City, Great University

Gerald D. Jennings, M.S.'76, has been mayor of Albany since 1994. Currently serving his fourth term as the chief executive of New York's capital city, the Albany native turned to politics after 21 years as a teacher and administrator in the city's school district. Jennings represented the 11th Ward (the Pine Hills neighborhood) on the Albany Common Council for 13 years prior to winning his first mayoral victory in November 1993. He recently mused about the role he has played in the future of both Albanys – city and university.

Q. You're a hometown boy, aren't you?

A. I was born and raised in Albany. My mom, who raised my older brother, sister and me by herself, really stressed the importance of getting an education, and of hard work. At 14, I started working as a counselor in a city program at the CYO (Catholic Youth Organization) Center on First Street; I did that for several years. I played high school sports, and these involvements kept me busy and out of trouble!

Q. Why did you want to teach?

A. I decided to become a teacher because I admired the teachers I had. I earned my teaching degree at SUNY Brockport, and my master's in educational administration at UAlbany. I began teaching at age 21, and then became an administrator when I was 25. It was an incredibly rewarding experience. I have devoted my professional career to kids because they're extremely important to me.

Q. Why did you make the jump to politics?

A. At Albany High, the kids are a microcosm of the city. They told me what they were seeing, and I wanted to make a difference for them. That's one of the reasons I ran for mayor.

Q. How would you describe your experience at the University?

A. I met a lot of great people at UAlbany. They talked with me about my career and my goals, and they encouraged me to pursue my interests and opportunities.

Q. How do you use your experience as a student, a teacher, an administrator, and now as mayor to try to make life better for the young people of Albany?

A. Through our collective work and youth programs, we employ about 1,500 people each summer. We partner with not-for-profits; for instance, we place students in internships at the Albany College of Pharmacy and Albany NanoTech. I want them to obtain positive exposure – to see the proverbial light at the end of the tunnel. I want them to appreciate that if they get a proper education, work hard, and listen to adults who want them to be successful, they will succeed.

Q. How, in your estimation, has UAlbany evolved over the years?

A. At the high school, UAlbany students would be in the building and serve as tutors for our kids. It was good experience for the students from the University; it gave them some perspective in the classroom, and broadened their horizons.

I represented UAlbany on the Common Council, and, as mayor, I've seen how critical the University is to the city's growth. UAlbany is a great partner; we have nurtured a tradition of working together, and I want to see the University continue to grow. We have a University that we can be proud of, and the application and enrollment numbers are a testament to this. Students not only receive an outstanding education, but also are provided an opportunity for personal and professional growth. In addition, the University has expanded many programs, and introduced others, such as the UAlbany-Albany High School Alliance for Young Talent. Its Division I sports program has garnered national attention, as has the New York Giants' training camp, held on the uptown campus each summer. Discussion of [UAlbany's proposed] stadium is long overdue.

“Jerry is a man of his word ... When he tells you that you're going to accomplish something together and you make a commitment, he always follows through. It always happens.”

– Michael Castellana, B.S. '84, M.B.A.'92; President and CEO, SEFCU



Gary Gold '70

“He understands the value of being accessible, whether it’s to a college or high-school kid, in the corporate boardroom or around a neighbor’s dining-room table. I think he has a unique perspective on making people comfortable.”

**– F. Michael Tucker, President and CEO,
Center for Economic Growth**

Teamwork is the key to getting things done. He’s basically been the catalyst to provide for an environment of teamwork.”

**– George Philip, Esq., B.A.’69, M.A.’73,
Interim President, University at Albany**

Q. What would you like to see the city and the University accomplish together in the immediate future?

A. The City of Albany benefits from having young people here. We have to create opportunities for them, and we're working with the University to do that. We don't want to continue to export our young people from New York State or the Capital Region after they graduate. We should provide good job opportunities for them; that's the goal.

We want our young people to remember that they received a good education and got a great start here. We have to continue to make an impact on the people who live, work and visit here. One of Albany's greatest assets is the University. It's one of the selling points I use with businesses and with individuals who are thinking of relocating.

For his service to his city and his *alma mater*, Albany Mayor Gerald D. Jennings was honored at a black-tie gala Dec. 8 at SEFCU Arena, and at a special presentation the following day during the winter commencement ceremony.



Mark Schmidt

More than 400 guests attended the gala, which featured a video tribute to Jennings and musical performances by the Brian Patneau Quartet and UAlbany's own Earth Tones. The program also included the announcement that an endowed scholarship fund had been established in Jennings' name. *The Gerald D. Jennings Class of '76 Scholarship Fund* will benefit deserving students from the City of Albany; financial need and academic achievement will be taken into consideration in determining award recipients.

On Dec. 9, the mayor received the Medallion of the University, UAlbany's most prestigious award for extraordinary service and leadership. "I am proud to have graduated from the University," Jennings noted after the presentation, "and I have been privileged to partner with UAlbany for the betterment of the city, its people and the entire community."

Contributions are being accepted for *The Gerald D. Jennings Class of '76 Scholarship Fund*, which currently totals \$60,000. For more information, or to make a donation, please visit the University at Albany Web site at www.albany.edu/givingopps.htm, or call the Division of University Development at (518) 956-8062.



Mark Schmidt

UAlbany students Jacob Crawford, Michael Cassidy, Kim Cutler, Brian Tregerman, Jonathan Tiech and Colin Ebel congratulated Jennings at the gala.

The next day, he received the Medallion of the University from Interim President George Philip.

"I'll call him a University-community citizen. Frankly, his achievements have benefited not only the lives of Albany residents; they've also benefited and enhanced the lives of the faculty, students and staff of this great University ...

He's a very strong leader – an exquisite collaborator, innovator and thinker, all wrapped in what I think of as the 'Three T's' about Jerry: tall, tan and tailored, all year long."

– Canon Kay C. Hotaling, B.S.'67, M.S.'70, University at Albany Alumni Association Board Member