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2016 Was a Transformative Year for UCF

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2016 Was a Transformative Year for UCF

By Gerrod Lambrecht
UCF Forum columnist
Wednesday, January 4, 2017

Since everyone likes to come up with “top stories of the year” lists, I thought I would do one with a little UCF twist.

Even though lists like these are always subject to debate and discussion, 2016 was certainly a transformative year for the university. Here is one person’s opinion on what the top stories affecting students, faculty, staff and alumni were for 2016:

1. The announcement by the UCF College of Medicine that it plans to build a teaching hospital, and the college’s partnership with Hospital Corporation of America, pledging to bring an additional 550 residency positions to Florida, which could turn out as many as 150 doctors per year. I had the opportunity to work with some of Dr. Deborah German’s staff in 2016. It has been a pleasure to work with them, and their enthusiasm and dedication was obvious. What Dean German has done with the medical school in just 10 years is impressive, and I am excited to see what the future holds for this dynamic organization.
2. The impact of newly hired UCF coaches on the women’s basketball, men’s basketball, baseball, and football programs in 2016. Since his hire in December 2015 as director of athletics, Danny White has hired Katie Abrahamson-Henderson, Johnny Dawkins, Greg Lovelady and Scott Frost. Their impact on the programs has been swift and dramatic. Basketball Coach Abe has the women off to an impressive 10-4 start. Coach Dawkins has the men’s team off to an equally impressive 12-3 start. While we have not seen Coach Lovelady’s impact on the baseball field yet, we have sure seen it off the field. Shortly after Lovelady was hired, the baseball program secured a \$1.5 million gift to transform the baseball complex. The gift from John Euliano of Winter Springs, vice chair of the UCF Foundation board of directors, will be a game changer for the program, and we all look forward to seeing Coach Lovelady in action beginning in February. Coach Frost’s first season following his

hire and 2015's 0-12 campaign saw the Knights finish the regular season at 6-6 and return to a bowl game. It will be fun to watch how the programs will continue to develop over the next few seasons. The future seems very bright.

3. The Big 12's decision not to expand. While I am sure that there is still a certain level of disappointment around UCF that the Big 12 did not expand and that UCF was not included, it was impressive to watch the university's professional approach to the process. Meanwhile, UCF's future in the American Athletic Conference is on a very positive path. The performance of all of our athletic programs seem destined for greater success in 2017 and moving forward. I believe that the AAC will continue to distinguish itself as an elite conference in the years to come. UCF will continue to position itself as one of the top schools in a conference sure to be soon considered one of the best in the Group of Five making a run for inclusion in the Power Five.
4. UCF's response to the Orlando Pulse nightclub shooting in June. I am not sure that any top-story list would be complete without mentioning UCF's response to the horrible tragedy that occurred at the Orlando Pulse nightclub. From UCF's candlelight vigil to the #OrlandoStrong concert to the blood drives, anyone associated with UCF should be proud of the university's response. The compassion and support exhibited was humbling to observe.
5. While it is not a UCF-specific story, Donald Trump's victory over Hillary Clinton in the presidential election was generally unexpected and has seen dramatic reaction since Election Day. Speculation is rampant on how and what he will do as president. No matter what side of the political spectrum you are on, the election has elicited an unprecedented response for a man who has not even taken office yet. The campaign was certainly unlike anything I have seen in my lifetime, and I am relatively certain his term will follow suit. No doubt, it will be an interesting first 100 days in office beginning Jan. 20. Whatever his impact on the country – and education – may be, I hope that a certain level of civility of discourse will return to politics in our great country.

I look forward to how these stories will continue to develop in the New Year. One thing is for sure, however...UCF's position as one of the nation's leading institutions of higher learning is evident. May 2017 be a blessed year for everyone.

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