

Office of the President  
June 17, 2021

Members, Board of Trustees:

UNIVERSITY STAFF EMERITUS BE CONFERRED  
UPON KATHY JOHNSON

Recommendation: that the Board of Trustees confer upon Kathy Johnson the title of University Staff Emeritus in recognition of her many years of service, dedication and loyalty to the University of Kentucky.

Background: Kathy Johnson has provided service to the University of Kentucky for more than 35 years. Ms. Johnson most recently served as News Bureau Deputy Director for Public Relations and Strategic Communications. But that title does not nearly convey the breadth and depth of her service to the university and, as importantly, the profoundly deep impact she had on generations of young people, mostly UK graduates, who sought her mentorship and counsel over decades of work.

Ms. Johnson came to UK after working as a radio journalist. Among her initial assignments was assisting former, long-time University Public Relations Director Bernie Vonderheide in creating editions each week of the Campus Scene – a half-time report at games that featured the people and work of UK. She later fully produced that program that exists even today at UK at the Half.

For many years, she has been the primary contact for UK police and emergency operations officials whenever a safety issue or crisis emerged. From weather closures to safety concerns, Ms. Johnson has been the point person for all crisis communication efforts. In recent years, she has helped lead the development of a new crisis communication plan, which has included expanded training efforts for staff and a new alerts system.

For the last several years, Ms. Johnson has led all campus public relations efforts, overseeing a staff focused on media and communication efforts for colleges across the Lexington campus. During that period, she helped lead the transition of all employee communication from a print to digital format, which includes the daily distribution of an employee newsletter, called UKNow as well as a number of other publications distributed to media, students and friends of the university.

She has led and conducted hundreds of news conferences for the university and is universally held in high regard by media across the region and state for her responsiveness, honesty and integrity as well as her commitment to UK and communicating its mission.

Ms. Johnson was widely known for being the first to arrive at work each morning and the last to leave each evening, such was her commitment to the work of telling the UK story and of nurturing and guiding a staff to do that job as well.

Indeed, perhaps most significant among her many accomplishments and attributes is her commitment to her staff and people across the campus.

Much of the UK Public Relations (PR) staff is comprised of university graduates, many of whom were interns or who came to UK for their first jobs in the PR department. Ms. Johnson has been turned to for years by this staff – and others across campus – for guidance, advice, mentorship and wise counsel. She has been affectionately, for many years, been referred to as the team’s mother for her commitment to the unit.

UK is stronger for that commitment. Her example of compassion and dedication, tireless work ethic and commitment made UK a better place. She set an example of what it means to be a member of our community – someone dedicated to the place and its people.

This community is stronger because of the indelible mark she has made, and the university will be forever grateful for her service. Kathy Johnson has exemplified the idea of doing more and being more for the University of Kentucky and the Commonwealth of Kentucky. She is truly deserving of the honor of University Staff Emeritus, as conferred by the Board of Trustees.

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Action taken:     Approved     Disapproved     Other \_\_\_\_\_