

Syracuse University

Remarks by Chancellor Kent Syverud

Delivered on February 2, 2017

Location: The Explorer's Club, New York City

Remarks: Gravitational Waves Anniversary Celebration and Alumni Event

Chancellor Syverud was introduced by Stephanie Cook, Executive Director for Development in New York City

Good evening. Thank you to the extensive network of Syracuse University students, alumni, parents and friends who are joining us tonight.

I am happy this week to discuss something off this planet.

I'd like to acknowledge some special guests, who are here with us tonight, including University Trustees Sharon Jacquet and Winston Fisher. Several members of the College of Arts and Sciences Board of Visitors are here as well.

They are:

- Rich Babinecz
- Laura Feldman
- Rick Dobbis
- Eric Gleason
- Connie Matteo
- Jan Raymond
- Paul Swartz

I want to thank everyone who helped organize tonight's event, especially:

- Karin Ruhlandt, dean of the College of Arts and Sciences;
- Alan Middleton, chair of the department of physics;
- The Office of Alumni Engagement;

- The Advancement and Communications teams in the College of Arts and Sciences; and
- The Lubin House team.

I've been chancellor for three years. People often asked in my first two years, what makes a great research university.

In the past, I have said it is students, faculty and staff, working together to better understand the world. Of course, I was mistaken. Physicists corrected me in the most polite way. They said nothing to me, but showed me.

In the last year, I have had to amend that statement. A great research university involves students, faculty and staff working together to better understand the Universe.

And we are joined by those researchers tonight.

A year ago, one of the most remarkable scientific accomplishments of the past 100 years was announced: the laser interferometer gravitational wave observatory, or LIGO, detected and measured gravitational waves.

In the National Press Club in Washington, D.C., on the campus of Syracuse University and in labs and classrooms across the globe, thunderous applause broke out, as the importance of this long-awaited discovery was acknowledged.

Thanks to many people, some of whom are here onstage, Syracuse played a significant role in the discovery of gravitational waves.

LIGO's scientists detected gravitational waves not once, but twice in the fall of 2015. Afterward, they spent five months triple-checking their data before going public with the news.

Their discovery caps a 60-year experimental quest. It also confirms the existence and properties of gravitational waves, first predicted by Albert Einstein in his General Theory of Relativity—a mathematical explanation of how gravity works.

I am proud that Syracuse has long been a world leader in gravitational physics. Our Gravitational-Wave Astronomy Group, co-led by professors Peter Saulson, Duncan Brown and Stefan Ballmer, is composed of nearly two-dozen students and research scientists.

Syracuse is part of the LIGO Scientific Collaboration, a community of more than a thousand researchers from over 90 institutions in 15 countries. Syracuse, in fact, helped create the prototype for the LIGO Scientific Collaboration in the '90s.

Transformational research like LIGO is a key priority of our Academic Strategic Plan.

The University is working to seed interdisciplinary research collaboration across the schools, the colleges, and the disciplines—because today's complex challenges require multiple perspectives and areas of expertise.

Syracuse University is also expanding opportunities for students—including undergraduate students—to be a part of this work. Hands-on research helps our students grow as scholars and to master the workplace after graduation.

Our graduates are making a major difference in research. One of those graduates—Gabriela Gonzalez—embodies the Syracuse commitment to and vision for research excellence.

Born, raised and educated in Argentina, Gaby came to Syracuse to pursue her PhD, with Peter Saulson as her advisor. She went on to work with the LIGO group at MIT, later joined the faculty at Penn State, and then Louisiana State, expanding her contributions to the LIGO collaborative.

Last year, Gaby was named one of the “Ten People who Mattered” by the scientific journal *Nature*.

Gaby credits her advisors at Syracuse University for showing her the value of patience and hard work. She said “They taught me it’s the road, not the destination.”

Last week our graduate Gaby and her Syracuse faculty advisor Professor Saulson were announced as the recipients of the 2017 National Academy of Sciences Award for Scientific Discovery – one of the very highest honors of the Academy.

I am proud of our students, our graduates, and our inspired research faculty and look forward to hearing from them tonight.

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