Dear alumni and friends:

Today marks Rice Day, the 102nd anniversary of the formal opening of Rice University on Oct. 12, 1912. For many, this day is yet another great opportunity for our community to reflect on how Rice has made an impact in our lives, to share our pride in the university with our friends and colleagues in our hometowns, and to reach out to fellow Owls around the world in a spirit of celebration. I hope you will take the opportunity to do all of these things and to connect with our network of Owls in your own way.

For me, this is a perfect occasion to share a sneak peek of an upcoming initiative that seeks not only to strengthen and grow this very network, but also to harness the considerable talent and influence of our community toward a common purpose — educating our remarkable students.

When I speak with Rice alumni, parents and friends around the world, the conversation invariably turns to our students. Many of you are passionately interested in the experience our students are having today: their new learning opportunities in changing classrooms, their work with faculty in labs and other research venues, their embrace of long-held traditions, their opportunities for international experiences, their participation in intercollegiate and recreational athletics, their passion for community service and, perhaps above all, their aspirations to achieve their great potential and make a positive difference in the world.

Members of the Rice family believe that our students are at the center of our Rice culture and community. We are united in the belief that this university prepares young people to be leaders in many different ways. These are bright, motivated, talented young people. To thrive as an institution and to fulfill our responsibility to them, we must nurture their strengths and provide them with the knowledge, experiences and skills to succeed. In short, all of us, whether we’re here on campus, in San Francisco or in Shanghai, have a tremendous role to play in continuing to shape the Rice student experience.

In less than a month, during Homecoming & Reunion Nov. 7-9, Rice University will launch the Initiative for Students, a universitywide volunteer and fundraising effort, for which I hope I can count on your support. There are many facets of the student experience, and each student’s journey at Rice is unique. However, we have identified three core elements that, with strong volunteer and philanthropic support, can strengthen all that we offer.

The Initiative for Students will focus on these three pillars:

- **Remarkable talent:** We will pave the way for the most talented students to find their place at Rice, regardless of their financial backgrounds.
• **Unparalleled education**: We will engage our students in a world-class academic experience by investing in exceptional teaching and learning programs and by expanding student research opportunities both on and off campus.

• **Extraordinary impact**: We will give every student the chance to connect their learning with hands-on experiences that shape and improve their analytical, entrepreneurial and leadership abilities.

To attract and support talented students, we will raise funds for more endowed and current-use scholarships. To provide an unparalleled education, we will create more access to research opportunities for undergraduate and graduate students across the university, increase funding to faculty for teaching and learning excellence and innovation, and invest in academic programs. To create students of extraordinary impact, we will offer new internships and mentorships that provide real-world experience for students, encourage leadership training that prepares them for a wide range of pursuits, and support programs that send our students abroad to expand their worldview.

Taken together, these efforts are designed to give our students the educational edge they need to put their knowledge and skills to the test. We believe this “owl edge” should be cultivated throughout a student’s journey at Rice, from before they step through the Sallyport during O-Week, to their academic and research experiences on campus, to the extracurricular and off-campus opportunities that give them the best possible preparation for success after graduation. I encourage you to watch a brief preview video at [http://owledge.rice.edu](http://owledge.rice.edu) to see for yourself what our current students’ journey through Rice looks like and to witness the incredible enthusiasm and creativity of our young innovators and thinkers.

As I mentioned, this initiative also is a call to strengthen and expand our alumni network. When you reflect on your own path through life and career after graduation, think about those who opened a door for you or shared some invaluable insight. An internship opportunity can lead to the exploration of a career aspiration and, more often than not, to a career. A well-timed informational interview can create a new sense of possibility for a student or young graduate. If each of us took just one opportunity to pave the way for a fellow Rice graduate, our network would leap forward and our community grow stronger across the nation and the world. The Initiative for Students is the opportunity for you to step forward, connect and help a young fellow Owl see what you see.

This focus on the student experience comes at a time when we must demonstrate the value of higher education as never before and ensure that every student learns how to think in the classroom and apply their knowledge in the world. Our students are what distinguish Rice, and we must ensure that our students have every opportunity to fulfill their potential. To echo what
I stated in my centennial address, we must produce students who will make great contributions as if the world depended on it, for it surely does.

Thank you for everything that you already do for Rice and our students. I look forward to embarking on this new initiative that calls upon all of us to do even more to develop the potential of our students and, through them, multiply the difference Rice makes in the world.

Warm regards,

David W. Leebron
President