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Heritage University President Honored with Paley Memorial Award for Excellence in Higher Education

WASHINGTON, DC – John E. Bassett, Ph.D., president of Heritage University in Toppenish, WA, is the recipient of the 30th Annual Henry Paley Memorial Award presented during the 2016 Annual Meeting of the National Association of Independent Colleges and Universities (NAICU).

Named for the late Henry Paley, president of the Commission on Independent Colleges and Universities of New York from 1975 until 1984, the Paley Award recognizes an individual who embodies his spirit of unfailing service toward the students and faculty of independent higher education. The recipients of this award have set an example for all who would seek to advance educational opportunity in the United States.

"John Bassett's legacy is one of accomplishment -- from leadership roles on multiple college campuses and at national higher education organizations, he has strived to improve higher education, especially the liberal arts, for every student," said David L. Warren, president of NAICU. "John provided extraordinary leadership to the NAICU Board as Chairman. Through his wise counsel and uplifting sense of humor he guided the Association to significant advances in the growth of federal student aid appropriations and tax benefits for students and families, and to the reduction in costly and inappropriate regulation. And of special importance, he remains both an important colleague and valued friend."

In accepting the award, Bassett said: "This is very special and it was a huge surprise. I have always been committed to education of the highest quality for all people willing to work hard to achieve their dreams. Leadership positions have been most attractive when they involve a big challenge to effect change and make a difference. Besides, as a colleague recently said to me, John, you are always trying to drive in fifth gear."

A scholar, author, and professor of American literature, Bassett earned a doctoral degree in English from the University of Rochester and completed master's and bachelor's degrees at Ohio Wesleyan University. He spent 14 years teaching and researching American Literature on the faculty at Wayne State University before

becoming Head of the Department of English at North Carolina State University from 1984 to 1993. His eleven books and more than 30 articles include contributions to the understanding of William Faulkner, Sherwood Anderson, Mark Twain, Southern Writers, and the Harlem Renaissance.

In 1993, Bassett was appointed founding Dean of the College of Arts and Sciences at Case Western Reserve University (CWRU), bringing together the sciences, social sciences, humanities and arts into a single college. Previously, the center of the university consisted of its professional schools with the basic arts and sciences relegated to a secondary role. In addition to bringing a planned \$50 million campaign home at \$93 million, he succeeded in making the new college recognized as a very important core part of CWRU.

After his appointment as President of Clark University (MA) in 2000, he built on the leadership of his predecessor, Richard Traina, and helped the university be recognized as, in words of the late Senator Ted Kennedy (D-MA): "the national model for how a university should relate to and interact with its community."

Bassett oversaw significant improvements to academic quality, campus infrastructure, fundraising and strategic planning, including upgrades in information technology and alumni programs, recruiting 83 new faculty members, surpassing a \$100 million capital campaign goal by \$6 million, building a new science facility, and renovating several other key buildings on campus. He also oversaw Clark's partnership with the innovative University Park Campus School, a small urban public school (grades 7 through 12), nationally recognized as one of the 100 best public high schools in the country. Through the University Park Partnership and the Jacob Hiatt Center for Urban Education, Clark demonstrated that a high quality liberal arts research university can extend its resources outward in ways to improve both city and college, and to develop a brand attractive to hundreds of perspective students each year.

After retiring from the Clark presidency in 2009, Bassett took on the challenge of advancing Heritage University to a new level. Founding president Dr. Kathleen Ross snjm, built Heritage to provide access to higher education to underserved populations, mostly Latino and Native American, in the Yakima Valley. Bassett has strived to maintain the university's core values and mission while raising quality, creating higher expectations for all, and re-branding the school as one where all students from the Yakima Valley will find a high quality education. Its College of Education and Psychology has become acknowledged as a state leader in preparation of teachers and in English-language-learner education; and it is building similar recognition in educational leadership and administration, and in early childhood education.

Concurrently, he has been active nationally, serving on multiple higher education boards and committees. He served as the 2010-11 Chair of the NAICU Board of Directors, and worked tirelessly as a member of its Accountability Committee. He also served as the 2014 board chair of the Council for Higher Education Accreditation and three years on the Commission on Advancement of Racial and Ethnic Equity for American Council on Education.

As a member of the Association of American College and Universities' President's Trust, Bassett was at the fore of a movement among higher education leaders who advocated for a strong liberal arts education. The President's Trust endeavored to offer students "significantly expanded economic opportunities, while also fostering intellectual resilience, civic capacity and knowledge of the wider world."

The awarding of the Paley Award to Dr. Bassett earns Heritage University the distinction of having its two presidents receive this prestigious honor, as Dr. Ross received the award in 2010.

For more information or to set up an interview with Dr. Bassett, contact David Mance at (509) 865-0731 or mance_d@heritage.edu.

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