

Armacost: ‘No better place to be’ than UND

Annual event brought a crowd to hear what’s going on at the university

BY DELANEY OTTO
Grand Forks Herald

GRAND FORKS — University of North Dakota President Andrew Armacost proclaimed there is “no better place to be” than UND to business leaders and community members present for the annual Wake Up to UND breakfast on Friday, Sept. 26.

Agriculture, health care, campus advancements and a new enrollment record all were part of the presentation that showcased UND’s accomplishments, opportunities and resources to Grand Forks and East Grand Forks businesses. It was wrapped in the university’s yearly word, “community,” and a quilt symbolizing it.

“You are in a town with an amazing university that has amazing things,” Armacost said. “Sporting events, cultural events, just things that you can participate in. There’s no better place to be than near an environment like that.”

The event was held in the Memorial Union ballroom, with a buffet breakfast and handouts, including the 2024-2025 school year in review and a Fighting Hawk bobblehead. The Hawks in Harmony faculty and staff choir sang before Armacost took the stage. In his presentation, Armacost touted the new record of 15,844 students on campus this fall; the university’s moonshot goals of bringing humanity into the continuing advancement of artificial intelligence and creating four businesses based on UND research; and growing research expenditures at the university.

Mike McLean, of JLG Architects and the Grand Forks-East Grand Forks Chamber board

chairman, opened the event, touting the years of collaboration between the university and chamber. The entities have collaborated on a number of legislative priorities, he said, bringing in more than \$1 billion in investments to the community over the last decade.

“Your presence speaks volumes to the strong connection between the University of North Dakota and the Grand Forks and East Grand Forks business communities,” he said to the audience.

Two business leaders took the stage with Armacost to speak about their own professional partnerships with the university. John Oncken, CEO of True North Equipment, talked about the return-on-investment calculator his company has been working on alongside UND students and in partnership with John Deere. It’s an effort funded between True North and UND. Oncken said there is a certain energy at UND, adding that there

are opportunities for businesses to reach out and collaborate with the university community.

“We’re blessed to have them,” he said.

His own business has been “fortunate to create some ideas and do some things at UND,” Oncken said.

Joshua Deere, president of Altru Health System, also spoke about having UND as a partner. Deere said partnering with UND allows Altru to get students into communities to provide health care to rural areas. Altru allows more than 150 students to be in its spaces each day, said Marjorie Jenkins, vice president for health affairs and dean of the School of Medicine and Health Sciences.

“There are new opportunities, new programs that we can develop together that are only going to help our state,” Deere said. “Why not be a partner to train those that are going to be serving in our rural communities? We have a unique



Eric Hylden / Grand Forks Herald

UND President Andrew Armacost, left, and True North Equipment CEO/owner John Oncken talk technology on Friday at Wake Up to UND in the Memorial Union.

advantage in the state of having tons and tons of physicians in small, rural communities. That’s different from the rest of the U.S.”

There may also be an increased interest in rural health care by students. Abby Lund Da Costa, a part of the medical doctor class of 2026, said she sees future students sharing in her own experiences and choosing rural health in North Dakota.

“I would love to serve rural North Dakota. That is my ultimate career goal,” she said. “I feel that the state that raised me and gave me all the

opportunities that I’ve had deserves my service.”

When asked how businesses can collaborate with UND, Armacost suggested engaging with the Center for Experiential Learning about internships, speaking with deans about projects and visiting the Center for Innovation to contemplate a startup. But the single best place, he said, is the website und.edu/idea, an idea gathering place that also lists points of contact.

“Every nook and cranny on the campus should breathe the spirit of innovation and creativity,” he said.

TEACHER CONTINUED from A1

with math and reading. Bradner said she is an outstanding teacher and has had a profound impact on students.

In a media release from the North Dakota Department of Public Instruction, Tunseth, in her Teacher of the Year application, said she believes all students are capable of success.

“Many of the students I work with have experienced repeated challenges in school, which can lead to disengagement and a belief that they are not capable,” Tunseth said.

“My core belief is that all kids can experience success every single day, and it’s my responsibility to create the conditions for that success.”

Also in the media release, Baesler said Tunseth is an excellent representative for the state.

“Mrs. Tunseth’s teaching style is inspirational. When a student is having difficulties, she is able to transform their outlook on education. Her love and dedication for teaching and her students are evident,” Baesler said. “She works hard to bring parents and families into her classroom instruction, because she knows

that family involvement is a key part of student success.”

Tunseth is one of 48 County Teachers of the Year and was named a finalist for the North Dakota Teacher of the Year for 2026 in July. The North Dakota Teacher of the Year program has been naming top teachers since 1963. Tunseth will become a candidate for the national Teacher of the Year award.

In a previous interview with the Herald, Baesler said having a North Dakota educator win the national Teacher of the Year award would be encouraging for students and educators across the

state.

“To have a North Dakota winner representing North Dakota as a National Teacher of the Year would just be beyond what I think our state needs. Our state would just blossom under it,” she said. “... It gives young people the opportunity to celebrate the profession that they see every day, and hopefully encourage and maybe kindle a spark in a young person’s life that they want to choose teaching. Because these teachers are the rock stars and they deserve to be celebrated.”

Tunseth was one of four finalists for the

Teacher of the Year award. The other finalists were Emily Dawes, a literacy specialist from Grand Forks; Hannah Sagvold, a business education teacher from Lisbon; and Leah Wheeling, a physical education and digital literacy teacher from Bismarck.

Jennifer Odell, North Dakota Department of Public Instruction Teacher of the Year program coordinator, said the winner is chosen by an eight-member committee whose members look at each candidate’s impact in and beyond the classroom.

“We’re looking for the extending influence

beyond the classroom and how they serve as an advocate for the education profession,” she said.

Tunseth will officially start her term on Jan. 1, 2026. In the media release from the Department of Public Instruction, Armstrong said Tunseth is “an inspiration for educators everywhere.”

“We’re fortunate in North Dakota to have teachers like Mrs. Tunseth, who care deeply and go the extra mile to create a bright future for our children,” Armstrong said. “We congratulate her on this deserving honor as Teacher of the Year.”

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