

## Jim Tressel Fund Raiser for Berea Kiwanis and School District As published by Cleveland Plain Dealer and Cleveland.com

**BEREA** -- Mary Nedbalski needed to hear Jim Tressel's words as he spoke before the large group of student leaders at Berea High School last week. It gave her hope.

"I want to travel. His speech reassured me I can do great things even though I come from a small town," said the Berea High student who is a Key Club member. "I hope he returns to Berea. He would be a very powerful figure in the community."



**Jim and Dave Tressel**

Jim Tressel, who was raised in Berea and graduated from Berea High and Baldwin-Wallace College, returned last week for two speaking engagements and a VIP event at the Cleveland Browns training facility. The VIP and evening talk were fundraisers to help the school district's Education Foundation and Berea Kiwanis Club.

It was on the day the former Ohio State University head football coach was announced as the University of Akron's vice president of strategic engagement. He begins that post May 1. His thoughts that day, however, concentrated on students, leadership,

commitment to success and helping

Berea's educational community.

As he took the stage before student leaders from Berea and Midpark high and Roehm and Ford middle schools, he reminisced about the last time he stood there. It was in spring, 1971. He was in the play "The Boyfriend" and had one line, which was in French. And he repeated it to the students.

He referenced the district's consolidation plan that will see, in part, only one high school and one middle school.

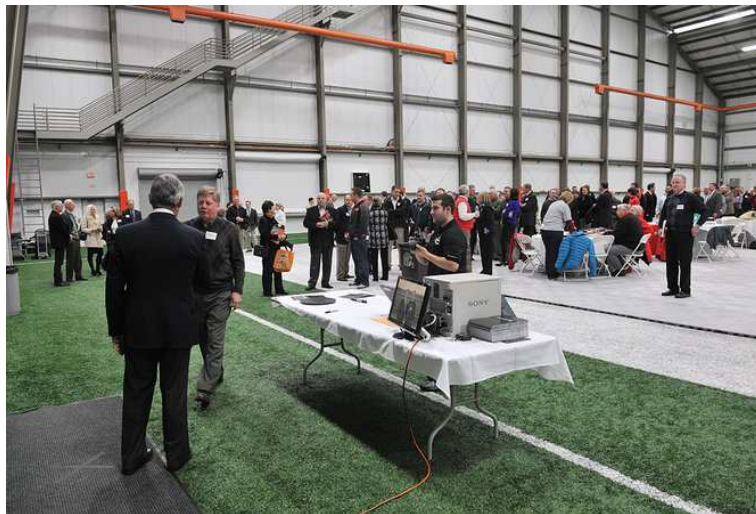
"It is a thrill to be back on the stage with this group," he said. "There will be some changes happening over the coming years here. The one thing in life that is constant is change. And when we have change, we need great leaders who are willing to make a difference. You can be those leaders."



He introduced several Midpark and Berea High graduates who succeeded in many fields — athletics, entertainment, aerospace, culinary, corporate work, writing, art and others.

"So we are pretty blessed," he said. "This is evidence you can be and do anything you want in so many different fields being from the Berea school district."

He told the students as he spoke with those in the U.S. military stationed throughout the world, he saw the importance of leadership in the United States and in the world. He told them they were "awfully fortunate" with the "leadership, conveniences and opportunities" available in the U.S. Leadership and being thankful were two components on which he concentrated during his one-hour appearance.



**Attendees stand in line to meet Jim Tressel inside the Cleveland Browns training facility during a VIP appearance**

"We all have hardship, tough situations. But when you list the blessings and the opportunities for the future versus our setbacks, your obstacles will never come close to those blessings," he said.

He returned to speaking about leadership.

"I believe the greatest need we have right now in this world is leadership. Those who can provide the greatest difference and make the greatest difference in this

world are those your age. Prepare to lead in this very competitive time," he said. "You have to

remember that leadership is not a position. It is not a rank. It is an action. It is a willingness to serve others so the whole group can be successful."

Berea grad Alex Stepanovich who attended Ohio State and played NFL football, spoke also, calling Tressel a friend and mentor. An OSU coaching change and other incidents occurred while he was in college. He considered transferring — but he remained.

"Stick with your commitment. Work hard. You can't stop change," he said. "You can be leaders."

Tressel spoke about the district's football Grindstone trophy. Next year is the final year for the annual rivalry with consolidation. Midpark has won the game 25 times; Berea, 24. Tressel, who may attend the Oct. 28 contest, said the winners always will remember that game.

"I want you to be leaders and to get along. But when that night arrives, there will be hitting going on. Won't that be fun to see that come out," he said. "And when it ends, you walk arm and arm and create something at this school that no one will forget."

Midpark's Dan Proffitt said Tressel shared his knowledge, which he appreciated.

"He talked about accepting change and that is something we have to understand," he said. "It can happen anytime and you have to be ready. I will remember that."

Tressel later told the *News Sun* he "probably not" will return to coaching. He has a 37-year coaching career.

"I have so much to learn and so many opportunities to grow into this new position. That won't happen overnight," he said. "So I see this chapter of myself as the education/administrative piece as a long, long chapter. I don't know how long. If I can get another 10 years in this education/administration role, that might be enough. We'll see."

He said his wife Ellen had to buy him a blue jacket last week due to his new post. Blue is one of Akron's colors.



"I have to change my whole wardrobe," he said.

For someone who did not like to read while in school, he challenged himself to finish 100 books. He just completed number 30 — John Steinbeck's "Travels with Charley: In Search of America." He called it a "great" book. He also said Andy Andrew's "The Traveler's Gift" was one of the best fiction pieces he has read. He had his OSU team in the spring of 2011 read it. Tressel would assign a book to read each spring for the teams he coached.

"We were going through some issues," he said. "I felt they needed that book. It's about lessons in life and the decisions you have to make."

He said students have no idea the type of challenges they will face in their lives. But they are part of life.

"I have no 'woe is me.' I am blessed," he said. "You will have adversity. It is how you choose to handle it. That will be the source of strength and guidance."

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