On February 1, 2009, Jimmy G. Cheek stepped onto the campus of the University of Tennessee, Knoxville, as its seventh chancellor. It was the culmination of a long and distinguished career in higher education. Now, eight years later, his influence can be seen all across Rocky Top. He will be the first to say he didn’t do this alone—but even so, his leadership inspired all of us to step up and work together to achieve goals that we never imagined were possible.

If we’ve learned anything from Chancellor Cheek, it’s to set goals, work hard, and honor achievement. He loves to acknowledge and applaud the extraordinary accomplishments of our students, faculty, staff, and alumni. This report is a tribute to his leadership and a celebration of his legacy—a legacy that will provide a firm foundation for future leaders and pride for Volunteers everywhere.

“Under Dr. Cheek’s leadership, the University of Tennessee, Knoxville, has experienced a transformation. The research enterprise has grown exponentially, our partnership with Oak Ridge National Laboratory has never been stronger, and the creation of the Institute for Advanced Composites Manufacturing Innovation is one of many stellar research collaboration initiatives.

“The campus has undergone a $1 billion makeover and achieved record-breaking fundraising, including the naming of two of its colleges. UT Knoxville is well positioned for the future, and I thank the chancellor for his valued service and wish him the best as he returns to the faculty.”

—Joe DiPietro, President, University of Tennessee System
Students are the heart of any university. They are why we exist. Over the past eight years, we've transformed the student experience using a more student-friendly formula. One Stop streamlined services and removed barriers. Innovative systems help make sure students can get the courses they need to graduate on time. Hundreds of students take advantage of living and learning communities, which help bridge the gap between their social and academic experiences.

Students tell us our traditions are a big reason they choose to attend UT. Events like Torch Night and Aloha Oe, which build community and make memories that span generations of the Volunteer family, are once again a big part of the student experience.

"Dr. Cheek has always valued the student perspective and he has worked to make our student experience a memorable one. I am extremely fortunate and grateful to have worked alongside Chancellor Cheek. He has been a wonderful experience, making sure to transform our university into a model institution. He has led us to become better students, and I am honored to be a part of this journey."

—Carson Hollingsworth
Student Body President

Journey to the Top 25
Nobody ever said getting there would be easy, but having a challenge and a vision has made us a better university in every way. In 2010, then-Governor Phil Bredesen challenged us to compete with the best to become a Top 25 public research university. The challenge was accepted: in everything we did we measured ourselves against the very best. We’re not there yet, but we’re better than ever, and getting closer to our end goal. We are turning out a highly qualified workforce and better citizens for the state of Tennessee and beyond. It’s not just a journey, it’s an adventure.

"I admire Chancellor Cheek very much. I especially admire him for his response when I proposed that the university work to become one of the top 25 public research universities in the United States. The usual response to such a challenge is defen- sive—‘those rankings don’t really measure what is important,’ ‘the state doesn’t give us enough money,’ and so on. Jimmy Cheek’s response was just the opposite. He took ownership of the issue and the challenge, and worked hard and creatively to make something happen. Sometimes he did it out front, and sometimes behind the scenes, but always effectively. I’ll miss him in the chancellor’s office, and believe that our great university has been fortunate to have had his years of leadership.”

—Phil Bredesen
Former Governor, State of Tennessee

"The University of Tennessee, Knoxville, has been on an ambitious path the last few years under the journey to top 25, and Jimmy’s leadership has been key to setting and pursuing those visions. As the Dri to 25 has moved forward, we have relied on Dr. Cheek as a higher education leader who is focused on student success and high-quality academic research, and as an example to our faculty inside."

—Bill Haslam
Governor, State of Tennessee

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Building for the Future

We are home to scholars, leaders, visionaries, innovators, and motivators, all working together to make UT a better place. Our students and faculty deserve to study, work, live, and play in up-to-date buildings. We have invested in excess of $1 billion in recent years to upgrade facilities and grounds, including six new academic buildings, a new student union, residence halls, and athletics complexes. We also have made great strides in making the campus more pedestrian friendly and much more beautiful.

"Under Jimmy Cheek’s leadership we have over $1 billion dollars in construction. His leadership and vision are transforming this university. Thank you, Jimmy."
—John D. Tickle ('65) | UT Board of Trustees

When you step foot on our campus, you know you’re in Big Orange Country. From branded signage to Big Orange Fridays, it’s all a part of how we let the world know who we are and what we accomplish.

"Big Orange. Big Ideas." promotes our groundbreaking scholarship and research, and the Power T now represents our entire campus. We speak with a consistent voice about the diverse accomplishments that make up a great university.

"Every big idea needs a champion. Chancellor Cheek was our biggest advocate as we worked to develop a brand that highlights our passion to be a Volunteer. We wanted everyone to know that our big ideas will change the world. We now tell those stories under the banner of Big Orange and the strength of the Power T. Whether you are on or off campus, the impact of our research, engagement, and discoveries is now more recognizable than ever. Chancellor Cheek’s leadership was essential to that transformation."
—Margie Nichols ('75, UT Martin) Vice Chancellor for Communications & Marketing Emerita
Discovery

UT has experienced significant growth in its research and discovery. We’ve seen an 83 percent increase in federal research expenditures and a 49 percent increase in total research expenditures. Our close relationship with Oak Ridge National Laboratory is a true game changer and allows us to attract some of the world’s leading scientists, including scholars who are part of the Governor’s Chairs program. We now have 15 Governor’s Chairs in 11 departments. The Bredesen Center for Interdisciplinary Research and Graduate Education is UT’s fastest-growing doctoral program; it attracts top-notch graduate students from the best universities in the country.

“Dr. Cheek has been a wise counselor and an effective and enthusiastic supporter of the diverse partnerships that combine the complementary strengths of the Oak Ridge National Laboratory and the University of Tennessee to deliver scientific discovery and innovation. His unwavering support was essential to the creation of the Institute for Advanced Composites Manufacturing Innovation, a $450 million public-private partnership that is providing opportunities to develop the workforce, create jobs, and increase global manufacturing competitiveness in advanced polymer composites with benefits for Tennessee and the nation.”

—Thom Mason | Director, Oak Ridge National Laboratory

“Chancellor Cheek’s commitment for UT to be a Top 25 public research university is well documented by his engagement and interaction with the Governor’s Chair program. During his tenure, the number of appointments to Governor’s Chairs has rapidly expanded, so actively consulted with us to ensure he understood the pulse of the campus and support needed.

“The leadership and commitment to enhancing the quality of the students, staff, and faculty at UT were instrumental in my decision to move to Knoxville from Berkeley, and a crucial component of my continued success.”

—Brian Wirth | Governor’s Chair for Computational Nuclear Engineering

The Additive Manufacturing Integrated Energy (AMIE) project is the world’s first zero-energy, 3-D-printed building. Designed by UT architecture students, the project is a collaborative venture by UT, ORNL, and architects from Skidmore, Owings & Merrill.
Great faculty and staff create the learning environment that attracts the best students. It’s their contributions in teaching and research that make us a top-tier university. Since 2010, faculty members have received more than 60 prestigious national awards, and four have been named to national academies. This year marked the sixth year that faculty and staff received pay increases, bringing their compensation closer to those at other top universities. Since 2012, UT has invested $56 million in market and merit raises to narrow faculty and staff salary gaps.

In the most recent employee engagement survey, from 2014, two-thirds felt positive about their compensation, benefits, and work-life balance—up more than 10 percent from the previous survey. More than three-quarters of our faculty and staff agreed that their unit is a good place to work.

“Chancellor Cheek’s leadership has invigorated the campus and inspired excellence in teaching, research, and service. His vision—a great university requires great faculty, staff, and students who work together towards a shared vision of excellence.”
—Carol Tenopir | Chancellor’s Professor, College of Communication & Information

Our students are already Top 25 caliber. Every year the incoming class sets new records for its accomplishments. Our most recent class has an average ACT score of 27 and an average high school GPA of 3.89, and 10 percent of its members are enrolled in our honors programs.

UT’s commitment to access is unmatched. About 31 percent of incoming freshmen were eligible for Pell grants. The class represents 41 states and 11 countries, and minority students make up about 18 percent.

As our reputation grows, so does the number of great students who want to attend UT. Thanks to an improved graduation rate, each incoming class for the past six years has grown.

“Chancellor Cheek’s commitment to supporting student success has changed the quality of the educational experiences for both students and faculty at the University of Tennessee. He empowered and funded initiatives of the Provost’s Office, including One Stop Student Services, and the Volunteer Scholarship. The investment in admissions and advising will impact the recruitment, retention, and graduation of accomplished students to success. He leaves a legacy dedicated to student success.”
—Susan Martin | Provost & Senior Vice Chancellor Emerita
It’s Great to Be...

Our student-athletes excel in the classroom and in their sports. Their individual and team accomplishments make us all proud to wear the Power T. We also cheer their academic achievements.

Over the past academic year the overall student-athlete GPA was 3.06, our highest ever. Their excellence is found within the 100 percent graduation rates of the women’s teams in golf, rowing, tennis, track and field, and volleyball, and the men’s swimming and diving and tennis teams. Additionally, several of our student-athletes have started nonprofits or foundations to help our communities. These young women and men demonstrate every day what it means to be a Vol for Life.

“Chancellor Cheek’s leadership has positively impacted the University of Tennessee and I thank him for all his contributions. Each year, I have the honor of presenting academic scholarships to bright, promising students and the privilege of mentoring young student-athletes. They share with me their excitement about the quality of the student experience on campus and what it means to be a Tennessee Volunteer. I applaud Chancellor Cheek for making the student experience a priority.”

—Peyton Manning (’97)

As UT’s reputation in academics and research grows, so do opportunities to increase our donations and affiliations. Thanks to the generosity of our donors, the university has seen fundraising go from $72 million in FY 2009 to more than $165 million projected for this year, and in the past three years we have welcomed more than 10,000 new donors. Last year was the strongest year of support in our history, with a record $235 million. This year, we celebrated UT’s second named college—the Tickle College of Engineering, joining the Haslam College of Business. These gifts provide students in every field with access to industry-forward resources that will give them an edge in applying for their first jobs. Our donors help turn our students’ dreams into their journeys.

Impactful Giving

“’Our family is most appreciative of Chancellor Cheek’s accomplishments at UT. He has been instrumental in helping us think through impactful giving in higher education that helped in the creation of the Haslam Scholars and the gift to name the Haslam College of Business.’”

—Dee Haslam (’86) Businessperson & Philanthropist

The Natalie L. Haslam Music Center

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It’s an Honor

World-renowned superstar and community hero Dolly Parton. First Amendment champion John Seigenthaler. Former Vice President Al Gore. The world calls them famous. We are privileged to call them friends.

Perhaps there is no more special occasion for our university than recognizing loyal ambassadors with honorary degrees. When Chancellor Cheek first arrived, we had awarded only one—to statesman Howard H. Baker Jr. We’ve now honored 14 esteemed alumni and friends.

“Coming from a family where my parents did not finish school, and only some of my brothers and sisters finished high school, it certainly made me proud to have an honorary college degree. Even more, it made my family proud of me. From the bottom of my heart, I thank you personally and the university for allowing me to have such a privilege.

“I truly appreciate your tenure at UT and all you have accomplished there for the school, the State of Tennessee, and, certainly, for me.” —Dolly Parton

As I reflect on my tenure as chancellor of the University of Tennessee, Knoxville, it’s not easy to say goodbye. Having worked with a team of people who are fully engaged and working hard every day, it continues to amaze me to have had the opportunity to serve as chancellor of Tennessee’s flagship university. I want to express my sincere appreciation to Governor Bill Haslam and former Governor Phil Bredesen for their support. I also want to thank President Joe DiPietro, President Emeritus Jan Simek, and all the members of the Board of Trustees who have served during the past eight years.

Their leadership has made it possible for our campus to set very high goals. They have pushed the university, the state, and me to achieve even greater success. They have pushed us to work harder every day, to give our best, and to never settle for anything less than excellence.

I am grateful for the generosity of Volunteers, our alumni, friends, and donors who have invested in our university. Their support has made all that we have believed in a reality. Their gifts allow us to make a big difference in what we can do for our students and faculty. I also want to thank the Board of Trustees and Governor Haslam for their financial support as we set out to compete at the highest level.

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“Jimmy Cheek is a leader who gets thing done—from strong educational programs to endowments and new buildings. He is very highly regarded by his peers around the country for his substance, dedication, and leadership. Both nationally and here at APLU, we will miss his sound and thoughtful advice.”

— Peter McPherson | President, Association of Public and Land-grant Universities