

supported for the long term. We could bring those rocks home from Mars and potentially learn if microbial life existed somewhere beyond Earth!

During your presidency, Caltech's physical campus evolved significantly with the construction of new buildings to support expanding research programs in neuroscience, sustainability, quantum science, and more. How does this evolution mirror your broader goals and aspirations for the Institute?

We want to keep the core campus small and preserve our open and interactive culture but, at the same time, have an impact on the world in as many areas as we can. This requires state-of-the-art facilities on campus to pursue cross-disciplinary endeavors where Caltech either has a discriminating advantage, or the problem is so important that we have to play. In addition, we amplify our position and contributions by running large off-campus endeavors, such as JPL, the Keck telescopes, LIGO, and an earthquake early warning system.

During the last 11-plus years, you have focused in part on student life and expanding access to cultural experiences. Why was this initiative important to you?

I believe that college and grad school are about far more than getting a good job. Obtaining the quantitative skills to be able to make contributions to society is a necessary and laudatory goal, but as important is stretching oneself to develop lifelong passions. We can do both at Caltech.

How do you hope the faculty, students, and staff remember your leadership?

That Caltech was the place where they realized their full potential.

What has been your favorite part of being a university president?

The people! Where else do you have an excuse to interact with so many talented, accomplished individuals across the intellectual spectrum? Keeping Caltech going through social unrest, a pandemic, catastrophic wildfires, and executive orders has been trying. Fortunately, I can depend on a dedicated leadership team and a tight-knit community to help see us through.

How has the Caltech community shaped you as a leader? As a person? As a scientist?

We depend on one another, we prize the collaborations, and we savor the serendipitous interactions. It is a modality that cuts across the personal and the professional.

What one aspect of the role most surprised you?

The president is seen as the instantiation of the Institute. That goes with the territory but doesn't really represent what Caltech is about.

What scientific or technological breakthrough most surprised you?

The observation of gravitational waves by LIGO, the most sensitive instrument ever built. And not only the initial discovery but the fact that we are now observing a black hole merger a week, permitting astronomy on Kip Thorne's "warped side of the universe."

What was the quirkiest tradition you discovered here?

Blaring Wagner's "Ride of the Valkyries" at 7 a.m. during finals.

What are your plans after you step down?

I'd like to build up my lab group and learn some new physics. I also serve on two nonprofit boards, so I hope to continue to advance science and society through them.

What's on your reading list right now?

I just finished Dorothy Dunnett's eight-volume novelistic rendition of mercantile and military life in the late 1400s, *The House of Niccolò*. On my nightstand are essays by Zadie Smith and Christian Wiman, a historical novel by Hilary Mantel, and a biography of John Lewis.

Five rapid-fire questions to close:

What is your go-to coffee order?

Small cappuccino with low-fat milk (but fully caffeinated!).

Your favorite spot on campus?

My lab, followed by the Red Door.

Your hidden talent?

Hitting the occasional bucket from half court.

The most-used app on your phone?

New York Times. Maybe that will regularize when I step down.

Next on your bucket list?

Antarctica or Iceland. Not that I miss the cold. 🇨🇪



President Thomas F. Rosenbaum



Caltech's president takes pride in the importance of ideas and objects within his office . . .

By Omar Shamout

When he vacates the president's office next summer, he will move his books and memorabilia to new shelves in a different space. What he will lose is the opportunity to speak with as broad a swath of the Caltech community as he does now. "Caltech is special because of the people who are here," Rosenbaum says. "Although I'll be closer to my scientific colleagues, I won't have the same level of interaction with the rest of the talented people across campus. I'll miss that."

Rosenbaum, an ardent basketball fan, has asked every Caltech Nobel laureate he has interacted with since he arrived to sign this ball. “Tragically, three of the individuals who have signed this are no longer with us: Ahmed Zewail [Linus Pauling Professor of Chemistry], Bob Grubbs [Victor and Elizabeth Atkins Professor of Chemistry], and David Baltimore [President Emeritus and the Judge Shirley Hufsteler Professor of Biology],” he says. “Having their signatures here is very meaningful to me.”

