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Philip L. Dubois
Chancellor

UNC Charlotte Chancellor: Thank you, Charlotte and Niner Nation

Op-Ed Special for The Charlotte Observer

Philip L. Dubois, Chancellor

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Today is the one-week anniversary of the saddest day in UNC Charlotte's history. As I told a grieving Niner Nation in last Wednesday's vigil, though the tragic events of April 30, 2019, are an indelible part of our story, they will not define us. Instead, Niner Nation is defined by the strength of our collective response. Over the past week, Charlotte has resoundingly claimed UNC Charlotte as its university and, through word and deed, made clear what it means to be a member of Niner Nation.

Niner Nation is defined by compassion. You have pledged to never forget Reed Parlier and Riley Howell. You have generously donated your time, attention, and money in support of the injured and their families. You have written, called and texted with millions of thoughtful messages of comfort to UNC Charlotte students and employees. Social media has been flooded with encouraging posts, including ideas for ways to ensure Riley and Reed are honored appropriately and permanently.

Niner Nation is defined by courage. Riley Howell lost his life defending the lives of his fellow students. First responders from university police, CMPD, CFD, Medic, and other emergency response agencies risked their own safety to ensure that campus was secure. Students provided first aid and comfort to the wounded. Some employees huddled with students in locked down classrooms and offices, offering consolation and calm in the midst of chaos. Others have worked tirelessly around the clock over the past week, focused solely on the well-being of our students and their families. Students and staff have courageously lifted up friends and colleagues even as they confront their own grief and shock.

Niner Nation is defined by community. Many of you have selflessly volunteered resources, providing supplies and services to aid the recovery effort. Elected and appointed officials, including Gov. Roy Cooper, Mayor Vi Lyles, UNC Interim President William Roper, and UNC Board of Governors Chair Harry Smith immediately traveled to the university to offer assistance. At the Wells Fargo Championship, commemorative ribbons adorned the hats of professional golfers, while the golfers and hundreds of fans covered memorial boards with expressions of support. Charlotte-Mecklenburg Schools students are wearing UNC Charlotte colors this week, and even the Charlotte skyline glowed 49ers green.

Thanks to you, Niner Nation is defined by #CharlotteStrong. I have never been more proud to be the chancellor of this great university. Your university.

On a final note, I want Niner Nation to know the university is committed to memorializing the lives and legacies of Reed and Riley and to honoring the four students who suffered injuries — Rami Alramadhan, Sean Dehart, Emily Houpt, and Drew Pescaro. We have established a permanent website, Niner Nation Remembers, where you can contribute a memory or express your condolences. In time, we will memorialize Reed and Riley and remember the tragedy that occurred on April 30 in other ways after we have talked with their families and considered a number of options. I have formed a Niner Nation Remembrance Commission to provide guidance and insight on next steps. You will be able to read more about the Commission and its charge on the Niner Nation Remembers site in the coming days.

Those days will be difficult, but the last week has proven we will emerge from them united and stronger.

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