

## **Countdown to the Centennial**

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The court in front of the University of Puerto Rico at Mayagüez's (UPRM) Main Library was flooded with University students. Not the smoldering heat, or the bright mid-day sun managed to dampen students' enthusiasm. Festiveness was in the air, inspired by percussion and wind instruments, playing dynamic and up-beat rhythms. Everyone was waiting expectantly with cameras in their hands. It wasn't just for anything; it's not every year one turns 97.

The scene took place September 25, 2008, when UPRM gathered its community members to celebrate its ninety-seventh anniversary, and counting. The UPRM Band provided musical entertainment, an item necessary at every anniversary celebration, while *Millennium UPRM Dancers* and *Las Abanderadas* displayed their special talents and UPRM spirit; which spread to everyone.

“This year is very important for us and this uproar and jubilation illustrates that. The University is optimistic, enthusiastic and hopeful for the Centennial because it's a great opportunity to represent Puerto Rico,” stated UPRM Chancellor, Dr. Jorge Iván Vélez Arocho.

The activity managed to unite students, employees, professors, and faculty to participate in cutting the cake, which has become a tradition at the University.

### **Two Centennials tied Together**

This celebration distinguished itself by the presentation, “*Dos centenarios entrelazados: Antes, ahora, y siempre... Jaime Benítez y el Colegio de Mayagüez* (Two Centennials tied together: Past, present, and future... Jaime Benítez and UPRM),

prepared by Dr. Margarita Benítez, daughter of the educator, lawyer, speaker, essayist, and politician.

The Chancellor's Office, the UPRM Centennial Celebration Committee, and the UPRM Commission coordinated the presentation to be part of the activities organized to commemorate the Don Jaime Benítez Centennial, the University of Puerto Rico's first President whom was also Chancellor of the Agricultural and Mechanical Arts College.

Dr. Margarita Benítez, who has dedicated her life to the field of Education and was the first woman Chancellor of the UPR Cayey branch, recalled her memories at the University as a little girl, some of which she considers "the best memories" of her life.

"I'm not exaggerating nor do I pretend flatter myself, I only wish to honor the values that my father taught me early in life, to appreciate the vigor, authenticity and loyalty of this community, like appreciating and admiring the tremendous people whose lives are tied to the glorious history at UPRM, which is fast approaching its first centennial," said Benítez.

She mentioned various people, who helped to establish the UPR Mayagüez Campus, many of whom she met through her father. "To me, this University was a marvelous country, filled with people who were spontaneous, generous, strong, and happy. Among all those people, there was a magnanimous and serene presence, that of Don Luis Stefani," said Benítez in remembrance of the Vice President of UPRM, during the time Jaime Benítez was the Chancellor.

She spoke of a parallelism in the centennials of UPRM and her father, and offered relevant historical similarities, such as fundamental attitudes that were shared. She

mentioned as examples of these, loyalty to the same principles, such as the University mission and University autonomy.

“The principal achievement, of the privileged relationship between Jaime Benítez and this community, was to reach, what my father called, the common denominator of understanding and solidarity concerning, reason and the University’s purpose,” Benítez reiterated, at the same time, she mentioned the search for freedom and respect of different opinions as concepts essential to this understanding.

Benítez finished her presentation with a quote from a speech that her father gave to UPRM Students in 1942. “The University of Puerto Rico justifies itself by amount of instruction given to the youth of Puerto Rico, in the areas of social responsibility, the concept of obligation to one’s country, in the spirit of generosity, and the typical detachment of the deeply Christian man,” stated her father, Jaime Benítez in 1942.

“These are the values that guided the life of Jaime Benítez, that guided his relationship with this Institution; these values, as important today as at that point in time, are what we pay tribute to today,” said Dr. Margarita Benítez.

At the conference’s conclusion, a student of Industrial Engineering, Christopher Soto Cruz, was announced winner of the art contest to design the Centennial Commemorative Poster. His work forms part of the Centennial Collection that includes posters and memorabilia that reflect back on 100 years of history at UPRM.