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Our man Dave

By Karen Francisco

MUNCIE – Richard Gere, appearing last month on “The Late Show with David Letterman,” referenced a personal exchange with the Dalai Lama to reflect on the existential meaning of human emotion.

The actor, known for his political activism and outspoken views on human rights, ended the story with a dramatic flourish and turned to Letterman for a response. With perfect timing, the TV host shook his head and declared that he had no idea what Gere was talking about.

“It’s beyond me,” Letterman sputtered, “I went to a state college.”

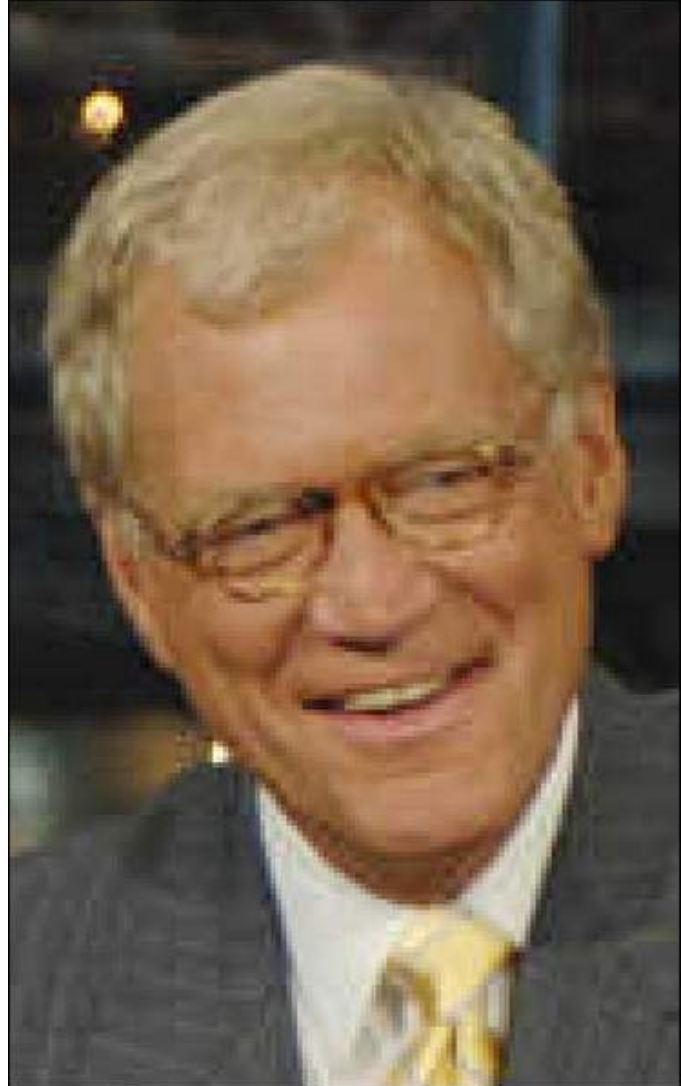
Friday, he returned to that state college – Ball State University – for dedication of the David Letterman Communication and Media Building. It wasn’t embarrassment, but obvious pride and humility he showed in accepting the honor.

Greeted by throngs of cheering students and university guests, Letterman was clearly delighted to be back on campus. Making his way to the stage outside the building, he stopped to salute the Ball State pep band as it heralded his entrance with the “Late Show” theme song.

He smiled at his mother and clasped her hand when BSU President Jo Ann Gora praised his contributions to the university. He proudly pointed out his 4-year-old son, Harry, and wished aloud that his late father was looking down on the proceedings.

Letterman mentioned the project architect – Fort Wayne’s own MSKTD and Associates – noting that the \$21 million building could have been built for half that if they didn’t have to use “mob concrete.”

He also made a gracious point of recognizing Darrell Wible, the faculty member who inspired a student who “barely graduated” with an “ugly 2.0,” grade-point average.



Letterman

The self-deprecating references to his record and state college roots are part of Letterman’s shtick but also a clue to his success. With a single quip, he can burst the well-rehearsed persona of any Hollywood type, reminding everyone that Midwestern sensibilities trump West Coast touchy-feely every time.

For Ball State grads like me, the state college references are particularly sweet. We might not have Ivy League credentials, but hey, the joke’s on everyone else when our fellow alum feigns naiveté. We know Letterman’s intellect is as sharp as his wit, and that’s a positive reflection on his alma mater, his home state, the Midwest and ordinary folks in general.

Karen Francisco is an editorial writer for The Journal Gazette.

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