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## Letterman's visit a real crowd-pleaser

### The *Late Show* host entertained thousands during his visit to Ball State University on Friday.

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MUNCIE -- With his family in tow, a Top 10 list in hand and his quick wit on display, David Letterman did not disappoint the thousands of fans who attended Friday's dedication ceremony in his honor at Ball State University.

"His speech ... it was just classic Dave, you know?" said sophomore David Podsiadlik. "Couldn't have been better."

From mocking his grades as a Ball State student to praising President Jo Ann Gora for her "tremendous legs," Letterman kept the audience entertained with his quips.

Jokes aside, Letterman stressed how important the day was to him and his family and the honor he felt in having the new \$21 million communication and media building formally named on his behalf.

"My father dropped dead of a heart attack at 57. He would have loved to have been here for this," Letterman told the crowd of 3,000-plus people, the majority of whom were students. "This would have been the most exciting day of his life."

Turning to his grinning mother, Dorothy, Letterman thanked her, too -- in his own way. "I'm lucky she's here today. Usually she's home watching Oprah," he said.

Along with Letterman's mother, Letterman's son, Harry, 4, was in the crowd.

"I hope one day it means something to my son that his dad's name is on a building," Letterman said. "Maybe it will help impress the girls."

## Letterman gets Sagamore

Storm clouds threatened the afternoon ceremony and brought a few sudden showers during the event.

Rain fell as Letterman took the stage. "Screw the weather," he said to applause before making his remarks.

A crowd-pleaser of Letterman's speech was his "Top 10 List of Good Things About Having Your Name on a Building." The list's No. 1 reason? "Unlike me, this building will still look good when it's 60."

Letterman thanked Ball State faculty emeritus Darrell Wible, his mentor during his years at Ball State in the 1960s. "I hope every student has at least one Darrell in his life. I couldn't have done it without him."

President Gora gave Letterman a surprise when she presented the *Late Show* host with a Sagamore of the Wabash from Gov. Mitch Daniels. The Sagamore is the highest civilian honor an Indiana governor can bestow on a Hoosier citizen.

Letterman accepted the award, joking the moment would have been that much better had Daniels showed up for the event.

As the crowd laughed, Letterman added, "Is it necessary for me to wear this name tag much longer?"

Preceding Letterman's speech was keynote speaker for the event, Jeffrey Smulyan, founder and CEO of Indianapolis-based Emmis Communications Corp.

Smulyan began his remarks by noting that few of the thousands in attendance were likely anxious to hear his 15-minute speech on global media. "I know that the only thing this audience wants to do is see David Letterman," Smulyan said.

Letterman, a longtime friend of Smulyan, later said he could "listen to (Smulyan) talk all day, and for a minute I thought we were going to."

### Visits with students

Letterman's visit to Ball State Friday marked his first return to campus since he opened the school's fall Homecoming show in 1979.

Though he declined interviews with the press on Friday, Letterman spent a few hours before the ceremony talking to communications students about his career. Ball State freshman Zach Perlinski was one of a lucky few who met the famed alumnus, dressed earlier in the day in shorts and a T-shirt, before the ceremony began.

"He was nice, and just seemed really sincere about wanting to be here," Perlinski said. "He seemed blown away by the new building and said he couldn't believe it, that it was more than he imagined it could be."

Letterman also took a private tour of the building, which opened at the start of the semester. The student radio station, WCRD-FM, now broadcasts from inside the new, state-of-the-art facilities. Over the years, Letterman has provided generous financial support to the start-up and operation of the station (its call letters for years stood for Cardinal Radio Dave) and most recently gave funds for a new on-campus antenna that will improve the station's reach.

Speaking about the new building, Letterman told the crowd, "The future of communications is inside this building. No questions asked."

For those who came out to hear Letterman speak, the day was "as good as it could have been," said Ball State student Eric Sporinsky.

"Listening to him speak, I felt incredibly proud to be a student here. More so than ever before," added freshman Michael Konopasek.

Al Rent, Ball State's marketing director, emceed WIPB's live coverage of the day's ceremony and said the university community was thrilled to welcome Letterman back to campus.

Rent was student program director of WBST radio station when Letterman worked there during his years at Ball State. Infamously, he fired Letterman after he cracked one too many jokes on air. Rent also was the Ball State rep who delivered the game ball to Letterman on his CBS program after the university's football team ended its losing streak in 2000.

Rent said he was hopeful that footage from Friday's ceremony would make its way next week on to the *Late Show*.

"I don't know if that's going to happen or not, but wouldn't that sure be a bonus?" he said.

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