



## **Think Differently, Defy Expectations**

American Free Enterprise Day  
*Address by Medalist*

**Y. Michele Kang**  
*Founder and CEO*  
*Cognosante®*

at  
Palm Beach Atlantic University  
November 14, 2019





*President William M. B. Fleming, Jr. introduces Y. Michele Kang, winner of the University's prestigious American Free Enterprise Medal.*

Dear Friends,

I am honored to share with you the inspiring address by Y. Michele Kang, our 2019 American Free Enterprise Day medalist.

On that special day at the University we honor business leaders who have demonstrated the best of our free enterprise system. With that wonderful American entrepreneurial spirit, they have grown businesses, created jobs and shared the fruits of their success through philanthropy and community service.

Ms. Kang has spent her life defying expectations. She emigrated from Korea as a single woman, attended college in the United States, worked her way up to an executive role in a Fortune 500 company and then built from scratch her own health information technology firm during the recession. We honor her not only for her business success, but also for her heart and service to military veterans, to the disabled, to young people and to the underprivileged.

A large crowd of students, faculty, university staff and community leaders came to see her honored and to hear her story. I trust you will be moved and inspired as that crowd was when you read about this creative business leader and role model.

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Bill".

William M. B. Fleming, Jr.  
President

## Think Differently, Defy Expectations

American Free Enterprise Day address by  
Y. Michele Kang

*Founder and CEO, Cognosante®*

Thank you, President Fleming, for your generous introduction. I'd also like to thank Chairman Jenkins; members of the Board of Trustees; distinguished guests, especially many of the previous honorees; members of the university community; and Ambassador Bonnie McElveen-Hunter, who graciously nominated me for this prestigious award.

It is truly an incredible honor to stand in front of you as this year's American Free Enterprise Award medalist. This is an especially powerful moment for me, because the reality is that, based on my background, I was never supposed to be here.

I was born and raised in Korea. When I was growing up, "the Miracle on the Han River" was just getting underway. It didn't take too long for a country devastated by war to evolve into the vibrant economy you see today.

But at that time, Korea was still a deeply traditional and hierarchical society where opportunities were profoundly limited for women. Many young women did go to college but studied home economics, literature, art or music. They graduated and perhaps took jobs as a secretary or receptionist. But once they got married, they would simply stop working, voluntarily or involuntarily. There were really no business or executive career paths for women.

Korean society was also very good at telling you what you "should" or "should not" do. That meant you were expected to conform to social norms, especially on gender roles and responsibilities that

were deeply rooted in the teachings and philosophy of Confucius.

The problem was that I have never been very good at accepting what I “should” or “should not” do, especially when it came to what a woman can or cannot do. With my father’s reinforcement, I believed I could do anything a boy could do. I wanted something different from the future than what was expected of me.

So I earned a scholarship to study economics and business at a college in Seoul, where I enrolled as the only girl. The more I was exposed to the world of business, the more my aspirations grew beyond Korea. I was confident that with hard work and persistence I could one day be CEO of a Fortune 500 company. But to do so meant completing my education and pursuing a business career in the United States, which is the center of the global business world.

But the idea of a young, unmarried woman going to a foreign country on her own? That was simply inconceivable at that time in Korea!

Undeterred, however, I strategized and went to my parents with a proposition. In Korean society, parents are expected to spend a substantial amount of money for their daughter’s wedding and gifts, a tradition known as “Hon-Su.” I offered my parents this deal: let me have a fraction of that money now so that I can pay for the first year of college education in the United States and you won’t have to spend a dime for my wedding. Better yet, when I become successful, I’ll pay back every dime.

As you can imagine, this far-fetched idea stunned my parents. But as they looked around, they saw the growing social unrest around us. Many college

students were demonstrating in the streets for democracy. My parents concluded they would rather see me continue my education than join the protests and end up in jail.

I can admit now that I probably wouldn't have done that. But I was happy to let them believe it was a possibility, if it meant I could go to America to study!

So, my parents agreed. I guess you could say that was my first business deal. And as it happens, it ended up being the most important deal I ever made, because virtually everything else in my life followed from that.

After coming to the U.S., I earned degrees from the University of Chicago and Yale. Upon getting my MBA, I developed a systematic plan, based on a series of three sequential ten-year blocks, that would lead to my becoming CEO of a Fortune 500 company.

First, I was a strategy consultant for the first 10 years or so, advising top domestic and global companies, which helped me to learn every aspect of running a business.

Following that, I joined a Fortune 500 company as a corporate executive, and spent the next eight years or so there. The objective was to learn organizational behavior and leadership. Motivating people to do what you need them to do is equally, if not more important, than obtaining functional expertise like finance or marketing.

I was ready to become CEO of a large company in the third decade, according to my plan.

But then, fortunately or unfortunately, my career diverged in an unexpected direction. I did become a

CEO, but not of a Fortune 500 company. Instead, I started my own company, Cognosante.

I call myself an “accidental entrepreneur,” as starting a company wasn’t part of my original plan. But when I saw the dots could be connected in a new way, when I saw opportunities to help transform this country’s badly broken health care system, I had to jump in.

I started Cognosante literally above my garage. And to be honest, I was a bit anxious. “What if I fail and lose everything?” I knew the statistics for start-ups were grim — something like only one or two out of 10 new start-ups ultimately succeed.

But then, I thought, I’m single and have no children to save college funds for, or wedding for that matter, so how hard would it be to support myself if I lost everything?

I prepared my contingency plans, should the company fail:

- plan number one, get a job in New York waiting tables at a Michelin three-star restaurant. Since I’m a foodie and don’t require much training, I was sure I could go to work immediately;
- plan number two, become a freelance PowerPoint graphic artist. Thanks to my time in strategy consulting, I acquired expert-level skills in creating PowerPoint presentations, so I wouldn’t have trouble getting work;
- plan number three, become an IKEA furniture assembler. I can’t tell you how many IKEA furniture sets I’ve assembled in my life. I can put together a floor-to-ceiling closet with no help from anyone.

Or maybe I could do all three: during the day, I would work as PowerPoint graphics person in pajamas at home or as an IKEA furniture assembler in the field, and then in the evenings, I would work as a waitress. What more would I need? So I took the plunge.

The rest, as they say, is history. By applying fundamentally different thinking, Cognosante provides transformative technology and operations solutions for Medicare, Medicaid, Veterans and military health systems and social services programs. Altogether, we're touching, directly or indirectly, around 170-180 million Americans, which is more than half the population.

It has not been all smooth sailing to get here. I lost a lot of sleep over making payroll and meeting expenses; there were times I questioned the wisdom of starting a company in the middle of a major recession.

But I was fortunate to have so many brilliant minds working with me. It's only thanks to the amazing and diverse group of Cognosante employees — many of whom took risks to join an unproven, fledgling company — that I am here today. Otherwise, I guess I might be assembling your IKEA furniture!

And we're still taking on new challenges. About two years ago, I acquired a company called J.Lodge, which primarily hires disabled Americans, especially disabled veterans. We want disabled Americans to be able to reassert the dignity of work and achieve financial independence.

Many of them rely on government benefit programs because there are so few job opportunities that work for them (many of them can't drive to work,

some need significant health care that many employers cannot afford and some cannot work eight hours straight). Some of them work part-time because if they work too many hours a week, they lose critical disability benefits that most employers do not provide.

We picked a line of business, call center quality monitoring, that would allow employees to work from anywhere. Leveraging technology, we set them up at home so they don't have to travel and they get eight hours of work done each day at their own schedule, not necessarily 9-to-5.

More importantly, we declared that for anyone who was willing and capable of working full time, we would provide the same full benefits other Cognosante employees receive regardless of cost, so they wouldn't have to rely on government safety net programs.

And it's working. For example, Jason in Kentucky joined J.Lodge in 2016 as a part-time analyst still receiving disability benefits from the state. Today, he is a full-time employee, promoted to supervisor, and no longer relies on Kentucky's safety net programs.

J.Lodge is more than an investment to me; it's also a model. I want to prove to large and small employers that we have to do our share. Rather than criticize safety net beneficiaries for being "lazy" or for "not trying hard enough," let's create real jobs for them, so they can contribute and realize financial independence and the dignity of purpose in life.

I want to emphasize that J. Lodge is not a charity or not-for-profit organization. It is very much a for-profit enterprise that is doing really well, thanks entirely to our incredible people.

My story is simple. It is about the dignity of work;

challenging the status quo; taking the risk to create solutions to problems before anyone else even recognizes that they are problems; and producing results.

And along the way, bring as many people with you as possible and do your fair share.

At its root, this is also the story of a high-functioning free enterprise system. It is a mechanism for creating value and being rewarded for it. The American free enterprise system is not perfect by any stretch of the imagination, but it is far better than what anyone else has.

We all know capitalism and free enterprise are under attack these days. And yes, we do need to find ways to make the system work better and more fairly. But we must take care not to do harm to a system that has achieved so much to help people around the world flourish and prosper.

As I stand here today, I am thinking: Where else could I have gone and done all these things? What other country provides an environment in which a young girl from Korea with no money and no connections, but full of dreams and passion and willingness to work hard, could achieve so much? I can't think of a single place other than the United States of America. I say that's a system worth fighting for.

So, my hope today is that by hearing my story, you are inspired to create your own. You don't have to go to a foreign country, although I highly recommend that you explore different cultures. You don't have to start a company, although I highly recommend that, as well.

Please go out and chart a path that is unique and tailored to YOU: your passion, your talents, your

vision. Take the risk, and if you fall short, get yourself back up and start again. Your goal should not be money or fame — but a sense of purpose, service and true achievement.

My greatest hope is that one day, many of you in the audience today will be up here sharing your own stories as the next American Free Enterprise Medalists.

Once again, thank you for this tremendous honor today. I hope my mom and dad are up there smiling and thinking that the return on their investment was not too shabby. Mom and Dad, with this recognition, the debt is paid in full. I love you and miss you dearly.

God bless you all and God bless America!

**Y. Michele Kang** is founder and CEO of the health care technology company Cognosante®.

A visionary in the field of health information technology, she founded the company in 2008 to disrupt and challenge the status quo in the U.S. health care system.

Leveraging a unique set of business, data and technical expertise

in a fundamentally different way, Cognosante provides innovative solutions central to carrying out national health care transformation. Under Kang's leadership, Cognosante has emerged as one of the most trusted partners of key federal and state health agencies.

From a startup operating over her garage at home, the company has grown to employ more than 1,800 workers, with headquarters in Falls Church, Virginia. Kang named the company drawing from a Latin word meaning "to learn" and from sante, French for health.

To further her goal of transforming the health care system in a fundamentally different way, Kang, who resides in Palm Beach and Washington, D.C., established Cognosante Ventures to provide seed money to promising startups in the health IT field. By investing in and mentoring these companies, Cognosante Ventures supports the development of technologies that will fundamentally change the way we experience health care.

Kang also established philanthropic and economic sustainability initiatives to promote entrepreneurship and increase opportunities for veterans, under-resourced young adults and disabled Americans. With a mission to promote the dignity of work, Cognosante Foundation, established in 2012, focuses on supporting members from underserved communities as they pursue financial independence through meaningful careers.



She is also actively engaged in promoting science, technology, engineering and mathematics (STEM) studies and careers for girls and women.

In recognition of her entrepreneurial success and philanthropic efforts, she received numerous accolades, including 2015 EY Entrepreneur of The Year® for the Washington, D.C., region and the U.S. Award for Services. She was elected along with U.S. senators, high-ranking government officials and top executives of Fortune 500 companies as an inaugural member of 100 Women Leaders in STEM in 2012 and one of the “Top 100 CEO Leaders in STEM” in 2016.

Prior to founding Cognosante, Kang served as vice president and general manager of Northrop Grumman’s Health Solutions division and as a management consultant helping global information, technology and telecomm companies formulate and successfully execute profitable growth strategies.

Kang is a member of the board of governors for the American Red Cross, a member of the board of directors for Northern Virginia Technology Council, an American Enterprise Institute National Council committee member and a champion of the Kennedy Center International Committee on the Arts. She earned a bachelor’s degree in economics from the University of Chicago and a master’s degree in public and private management from Yale School of Management.

She is a native of South Korea. She sees her programs serving military veterans as “my small way of paying back and showing my gratitude” for the sacrifice of U.S. soldiers who came to the defense of South Korea during the Korean War.

## **Speeches in the Series**

**Billy Graham**

World Evangelist

Commencement, April 26, 1997

**John Clendenin**

Chairman of BellSouth Corp.

American Free Enterprise Breakfast, Nov. 11, 1997

**David Mahoney**

Chairman and CEO of the Charles A. Dana Foundation

Commencement, May 2, 1998

**Joseph Gregory**

CEO of Monarch Pharmaceuticals

Vice Chairman of the Board, King Pharmaceuticals, Inc.

Commencement, April 29, 2000

**Vonette Bright**

Co-founder of Campus Crusade for Christ

Commencement, May 5, 2001

**Scott Whitaker '91**

Assistant Secretary for Legislation

U.S. Department of Health and Human Services

Commencement, May 4, 2002

**Dallen Peterson**

Retired Chairman and Founder of Merry Maids

Commencement, May 3, 2003

**Perry Gladstone Christie**

Prime Minister of the Bahamas

Commencement, May 3, 2003

**Jerry Regier**

Secretary of the Florida Department

of Children and Families

Commencement, Dec. 13, 2003

**Robert Andringa**

President of the Council

for Christian Colleges and Universities

**Jack Graham**

Pastor of Prestonwood Baptist Church

**David Gyertson**  
President of Taylor University  
Installation Ceremony for President David W. Clark  
Feb. 26, 2004

**Dr. Theodore Baehr**  
Founder and Publisher of Movieguide  
Chairman of The Christian Film & Television Commission  
Commencement, May 1, 2004

**James Ian Walker '81**  
Senior Pastor, Biltmore Baptist Church in Asheville,  
North Carolina  
Commencement, Dec. 11, 2004

**Rich DeVos**  
Orlando Magic Owner, Amway Co-founder  
Commencement, April 30, 2005

**Senator Bill Nelson**  
U.S. Senate  
Commencement, Dec. 17, 2005

**Randy Singer**  
Chief Counsel for the North American Mission Board  
of the Southern Baptist Convention  
and President of Family Net Television  
Commencement, May 6, 2006

**Admiral Vernon Clark**  
Chief of Naval Operations (retired)  
U.S. Navy  
Commencement, May 5, 2007

**Dr. David Burnham**  
Chairman of Burnham Ministries International  
Commencement, Dec. 15, 2007

**Dr. David H. McKinley**  
Prestonwood Baptist Church  
Commencement, May 3, 2008

**Dr. John M. Gregory**  
Managing Partner, SJ Strategic Investments LLC  
American Free Enterprise Day, Nov. 13, 2008

**Robert Simpson**

President and Owner of Palm Beach Motor Cars  
Commencement, May 8, 2010

**Edward M. Kobel**

President and Chief Operating Officer  
DeBartolo Development  
American Free Enterprise Day, Nov. 9, 2010

**Senator George LeMieux**

Former U.S. Senator  
Chairman of the Board, Gunster Law Firm  
Commencement, May 7, 2011

**Brian P. Burns**

Chairman of BF Enterprises Inc. and business attorney,  
entrepreneur and philanthropist  
American Free Enterprise Day, Nov. 8, 2012

**Eric Metaxas**

Best-selling author and radio commentator  
Commencement, May 4, 2013

**Kenneth Langone**

Founder, Invemed Associates LLC,  
Co-founder, The Home Depot  
American Free Enterprise Day, November 10, 2016

**David C. Novak**

Co-founder, Retired Chairman  
and CEO of Yum! Brands Inc.  
American Free Enterprise Day, November 14, 2017

*Please note: Speakers' titles may have changed  
since time of their address.*

## PBA at a Glance

### West Palm Beach Academic Programs

- 55 undergraduate majors
- Evening undergraduate degrees in business administration, Christian studies, ministry, organizational leadership and community psychology
- Graduate programs in accountancy; business administration (concentrations in accounting, enterprise systems, finance, global development, marketing and project management); Christian studies; clinical mental health counseling; marriage, couple and family counseling; school counseling; general counseling studies; divinity, global development and leadership
- Professional degree programs in health systems leadership, nursing practice (concentrations in adult gerontology primary care, executive leadership, family nurse practitioner and psychiatric mental health) and pharmacy
- Degrees offered: B.A., B.G.S., B.S., B.Mus., B.S.N., D.N.P., M.A., M.Acc., M.B.A., M.Div., M.S., M.S.N., Pharm.D.
- 482,000 + library volumes (books and audiovisual material)
- Some of the semester-long study abroad programs offered are in Brazil, Chile, Colombia, Costa Rica, Czech Republic, England, France, Italy, Jordan, Peru, Scotland, South Africa, South Korea, Spain and Uganda.

### Orlando Academic Programs

- Evening undergraduate degrees in Christian studies, ministry, organizational leadership, community psychology, and RN to BSN
- Master's degrees in Christian studies; divinity; clinical mental health counseling; marriage, couple and family counseling; school counseling; general counseling studies and leadership

### Online Programs

- Undergraduate degrees in ministry, organizational leadership, community psychology and RN to BSN
- Master's degree in leadership

### Centers of Excellence

- Center for Biblical Leadership
- Center for Integrative Science Learning
- David and Leigha Rinker Center for Experiential Learning
- Gregory Center for Medical Missions
- The LeMieux Center for Public Policy
- Titus Center for Franchising

## **Faculty**

- Undergraduate student-faculty ratio: 12 to 1
- Average day undergraduate class size: 17
- 89% of undergraduate classes have fewer than 30 students
- 83% of full-time teaching faculty hold the highest degree in their field
- 178 full-time teaching faculty

## **Enrollment - Fall 2019-2020**

- Total 3,699
- 2,153 traditional day (West Palm Beach)
- 232 evening adult (West Palm Beach, Orlando and online)
- 443 master's (West Palm Beach, Orlando and online)
- 112 professional in nursing practice and health systems leadership
- 257 professional in pharmacy
- 502 dual-enrolled students
- 1,172 residential students
- 18,000 + alumni

## **Accreditation**

Palm Beach Atlantic University is accredited by the Southern Association of Colleges and Schools Commission on Colleges (SACSCOC) to award the following degrees: bachelor's, master's, doctor of pharmacy, and doctor of nursing practice. For questions about the accreditation of Palm Beach Atlantic University, contact the Commission on Colleges at:

**1866 Southern Lane  
Decatur, GA 30033-4097  
(404) 679-4500 or [www.sacscoc.org](http://www.sacscoc.org)**

Persons wishing to review documents related to the accreditation of Palm Beach Atlantic University should contact the Assistant Provost for Accreditation and Assessment at (561) 803-2050.

## **Workshop: A Tradition of Service Since 1968**

Workshop is a distinctive community service program that responds to human needs with Christ-like action in the community and the world. Through community service, students can discern their vocation and develop a life-long habit of servant leadership. To date, Palm Beach Atlantic students have volunteered more than 3.5 million hours.

## American Free Enterprise

Palm Beach Atlantic University confidently affirms the values and institutions that historically have informed American society—religious liberty; traditional Judeo-Christian morality; limited, constitutional government; the Rule of Law; personal and political accountability; and capitalism—the system of free enterprise. We believe that America is truly an exceptional nation, which was founded and has flourished under the guiding providential hand of God. We aim to develop in each of our students an appreciation for the unique American achievement in its many dimensions—social, political, economic, moral, legal, and religious.

Our general education curriculum, required of all students, includes a course entitled “Freedom in American Society,” which examines the meaning and significance of freedom in the American experience. Students explore such topics as the historical roots of American liberty, with special emphasis on the close link between liberty and Christianity, and the nature of freedom as understood by the chief architects of the American political order. They examine the interdependence between political and economic freedom, in particular, the significance of free-enterprise capitalism for the preservation of liberty. They learn about the structure of American constitutional democracy and the traditional meaning of justice and the Rule of Law.

These studies help students recognize the various threats to individual freedom, religious liberty, and other traditional American rights and values that have emerged over the past several centuries, as well as contemporary challenges to their preservation.

Cicero remarked of the declining Republic of his era: “Our age . . . inherited the Republic like some beautiful painting of bygone days, its colors already fading through great age; and not only has our time neglected to freshen the colors of the picture, but we have failed to preserve its form and outlines.” Palm Beach Atlantic University strives to ensure that a similar fate does not befall the noble American experiment in ordered liberty. We regard the transmission of the American cultural heritage to the rising generation as not only a profound joy, but also a profound duty.



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