

# KENTUCKY

Alumni

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Meet Dr. Eli Capilouto,  
UK's 12th President

Digging Ancient Ruins • UK Alumni In Leadership



# President Capilouto finds second home in Kentucky

By Kelli Elam

Dr. Eli Capilouto, University of Kentucky president, admits he doesn't fall in love easily. However, he readily admits to falling in love rather quickly with Kentucky. Since he was named UK's 12th president, Capilouto, a native of Montgomery, Ala., has come to think of Kentucky as his second home.

"My wife (Dr. Mary Lynne Capilouto) and I have had an opportunity to see some of the state and get to know some of its people," Capilouto said. "And it's been wonderful. It really reminds us of our home state of Alabama — the people, their compassion, their willingness to work hard. I fell in love with another state for very familiar reasons."





Photo: Courtesy UKPR

It took a very special place to get the Capiloutos out of Alabama. Kentucky was that place.

Capilouto, 61, officially took office on July 1, succeeding President Lee T. Todd, Jr., who retired after 10 years. He came to Lexington from the University of Alabama-Birmingham (UAB) where he had served as provost since 2005. Previously, he served as dean of the School of Public Health. Capilouto calls himself the “accidental administrator,” having gone from being a faculty member at the UAB College of Dentistry to serving as department chairman for three weeks, to interim dean to dean, and then provost.

The importance of education in Capilouto’s life is certainly no accident. His commitment to education can be traced back to his grandfather, a Turkish immigrant, who settled in Montgomery in the 1900s. His grandfather instilled the value of an education in his children, and they, in turn, instilled it in his grandchildren. Capilouto’s father attended college and became a dentist — a career path his son followed.

“Throughout my childhood my father always told me to get an education,” he said. “My father, and one other sibling, attended college. I never met my grandfather, but I hope that he would be proud. I would love to know what his expectations were for his family. If I could have supper with three people who are no longer living, one would definitely be my grandfather.”

Capilouto married the former Mary Lynne Hartselle in 1978. She is the former dean of the College of Dentistry at UAB.

Dr. Mary Lynne Capilouto shares her husband’s commitment to education. “He (Eli) wants UK to be the best it can be in terms of providing an education to the students because we’ve seen what education has done for our lives and other’s lives and how it improves the quality of life,” she said.

The Capiloutos have instilled that same value for education in their daughter, Emily, who is in graduate school at UAB.

“Education has always been part of our lives,” President Capilouto said. “Our daughter took the money she received for her Bat Mitzvah and created a scholarship in Montgomery for (international) students. I contribute to that scholarship. We were immigrants, so it’s very important to us.”

He added that one of the most meaning-



Photo: Shaun Ring

**UK Alumni Association Executive Director Stan Key '72 ED, left, welcomes Dr. Eli Capilouto to campus during a reception hosted by the association.**

ful things anyone can do is be a parent. “It overshadows everything else,” he said.

Capilouto talks of “dreaming big.” He added that those dreams are best when shared.

“It’s wonderful to share your dreams with someone who understands. My wife and I are both administrators — sometimes at the end of the day, we don’t even have to say anything, we just look at each other and understand. It’s good to be able to share that with someone,” he said.

Capilouto received his bachelor’s degree from the University of Alabama in 1971,

earned a dental degree in 1975 and a master’s degree in epidemiology from UAB in 1985. In 1991, he received his doctorate in health policy and management from the Harvard University School of Public Health. While at Harvard, he was a recipient of a Robert Wood Johnson Dental Scholars Award, a National Center for Health Services Research Fellowship, and the Charles Wilinsky Award for academic achievement. He has served on numerous national advisory boards and committees and has also served as referee and editor for



Photo: Shaun Ring

**Alumni gathered at the King Alumni House to meet the new university president.**



Photo: UK Public Relations

**Dr. Eli Capilouto, pictured above with his daughter, Emily, and wife, Dr. Mary Lynne Capilouto, became UK's 12th president on July 1.**

many professional journals. As provost at UAB, Capilouto served as the chief academic officer for a university with 11 schools and colleges, 17,543 students and \$460 million in annual external research. Capilouto worked closely with administrators, faculty, staff and students to advance new initiatives in innovative teaching and learning, research and service in support of the university's strategic plan. He also held the rank of professor.

Capilouto wasn't looking to leave UAB, but he was intrigued about the possibility of becoming UK's president. However, he wasn't encouraged after the first phone call.

"After the first (phone) interview, I called my wife and told her I was disappointed because I didn't think it went well," he said. "She assured me that it would be okay. And I said, 'But you don't understand, I really like those people.'"

Capilouto added that prior to learning he had, in fact, gotten the job, he found himself cheering for the Wildcats during the NCAA Tournament.

Even though he might not have origi-

nally planned on one day being a university president, now that he is president of the University of Kentucky, Capilouto embraces the opportunity.

"My daughter says, 'You're just you,'" Capilouto said. "I do recognize the seriousness of the position. It's inspiring to think about all the things that are possible. It really is incredible to be afforded this opportunity to serve. It all starts with people — and it's great to see the reach of UK across this state."

Kentucky, like his home state of Alabama, faces many challenges today. The state also knows the hard work and sacrifice needed to move forward in education, research and healthcare. The state's flagship university is an integral part of the progress, something Capilouto knows well.

"The university means so much to the people of Kentucky," he said. "It's an awesome responsibility. The first part of that responsibility is to ensure people have access to degrees, not just college, but to degrees."

Capilouto says it's critical to the success of the state and university to attract the best and brightest students, faculty, and staff.

"It's critically important that we retain these students," he said of the state's top students. "Other states will go after them, hoping they become future citizens. We need them here."

Capilouto also sees facilities, state funding, and maintaining a balance among the university's various departments as vitally important moving forward.

He added that a continued commitment to research is vital, as well.

"If you are born today, your life span is probably 30 years more than it was 50 or 75 years ago," he said. "That is all because of research, a result of discovery. Some of the greatest discoveries have come since 1900 and we have research to thank."

Capilouto is proud to be a part of the rich tradition of the University of Kentucky and looks forward to the challenges and successes to come. When asked what he would like people to say about his tenure as UK's president, Capilouto replied, "We did our best to educate the next generation of citizens." ■