

## **New Year's Reception | Honoring of outstanding employees of the administration and the central institutions**

*University's Chancellor Karsten Gerlof*

*(Check against delivery)*

Ladies and gentlemen,

The honors awarded at the New Year's Reception are always a highlight for me, as they put a spotlight on the actual people behind the positive developments that the President just described. This is true for all areas of the university, the academic and scientific areas, science management, and administrative and technical services.

The honors I am now happy to award are in the non-scientific area.

First, I have the pleasure of honoring a staff member from our central administration and an employee working in faculty administration, both of whom have been continuously working to benefit the university over a long period of time.

But, ladies and gentlemen, everything is different in COVID times, and that is why, in the second part, I would also like to express my gratitude to some departments that have provided exceptional crisis management throughout the past year.

Our **first honoree** is Ms. Marita Dörrwand, who holds several positions in the Faculty of Science: She is in charge of clearing and services for all third-party funded projects of the faculty, and there are many! She is the Deputy Faculty Director and thirdly, as Administrative Director for Physics, she takes care of the affairs of the Institute of Physics and Astronomy as well.

The fact that six institutes of the Faculty of Science jointly nominated her to receive this honor today shows how highly she is regarded at the faculty. Ms. Dörrwand is a mainstay in the dean's office, characterized by solution-oriented thinking, an eye for the bigger picture, an efficient way of working, service orientation, and, despite her very heavy workload, interpersonal skills and a sense of humor. Her solution-oriented attitude is best described in her own words: "There are no problems, only challenges!" Ms. Dörrwand has also made significant contributions to the training of other administrators at the University of Potsdam over the years. Even in a pandemic, she has made extraordinary contributions to ensure that faculty administration and university administration as a whole can continue to operate.

### **Congratulations!**

In true COVID-19 fashion, we are presenting the bouquet of flowers and the bonus check to our honorees digitally this year.

Our **second honoree**, Ms. Elke Schröder, celebrated her 40<sup>th</sup> service anniversary last year. She has been working in the central post office since the early days of the University of Potsdam, and for many years, she also served as its deputy director. Her decades of service and vast memory for names and organizations have made her one of the fastest colleagues in mail sorting to this day.

After the sudden departure of the former head of the post office, Ms. Schröder provided essential support in familiarizing the new head with their future responsibilities.

Over the past few months, she once again proved what a valuable employee she is. Despite many years of service at the Am Neuen Palais post office, she chose to support the Golm post office from now on, shortly before her retirement. This is a big contribution and reinforcement for our growing campus in Golm.

Ms. Schröder is seen as a highly valued employee by the post office team and by her many points of contact at the university. Even in the most difficult and stressful situations, she always stays on top of things and thus creates a pleasant atmosphere of cooperation.

## Congratulations!

Ladies and gentlemen,

Last year, the coronavirus came upon us. I still remember how, at the beginning of the year, we heard about the new flu-like disease from Asia. Then, starting at the end of January, the very first cases were reported in Bavaria. Until the end of February, however, life in Germany was not yet affected by the pandemic, and the university also continued to operate quite normally. From the beginning of March, there was one crisis meeting after another at the UP, and the instructional period of the summer semester was just around the corner. At an unprecedented pace, crisis plans had to be drawn up, decisions made, things organized that had to be reorganized again shortly thereafter. From March 24, all institutions of higher education in Brandenburg entered so-called emergency on-site operations. We all turned into "amateur virologists", and the global market for face coverings and Plexiglas screens, as well as computer equipment, collapsed.

At the university, almost all teaching operations were moved online, and in administration, the rather rare phenomenon of working from home became a widespread experience.

Personally, I still admire how quickly the university's teaching staff converted their courses to digital formats last spring, and how quickly the on-site lab courses and exams were adapted to fit the new framework conditions. My highest appreciation for this!

The deans, the senate, the staff and student representatives – everyone treated this as an exceptional situation and focused on the most important issues. That was also a very important contribution to quickly getting the university into pandemic mode, so thank you very much.

In such an exceptional situation, it is important, of course, that the university's infrastructures run smoothly. Without much preparation, the administration and central institutions mastered this very successfully thanks to the high level of commitment of the employees and the fact that everyone identifies strongly with their university, which is what the UP is known for anyway. As examples of this, I would like to draw attention to three departments in particular today:

1. **The Occupational Safety Unit:** It was at the center of all pandemic-related measures. The university management and all members of the university depended and continue to depend on the expert advice of the colleagues in the occupational safety unit and the in-house physician regarding safe work conditions during the pandemic. When it came to putting the pandemic plan into effect, at the meetings of the crisis team, when organizing teaching and examination operations with reduced group sizes, the technical expertise of the occupational safety unit was in high demand, and we certainly got the expertise we needed – almost around the clock and even on weekends, always at the highest technical level and, even under the adverse circumstances of the pandemic, always with an eye for what was feasible. In a very short period of time, the occupational safety unit developed, for example, guidelines for the implementation of laboratory courses in a COVID-compliant manner or seating charts for the COVID-compliant use of all, yes all, lecture halls, seminar and meeting rooms of the university! The unit constantly monitors the requirements of the Federal Ministries of Labor and Health, the Robert Koch Institute and other relevant institutions.
2. **Building Management at the University of Potsdam (HGP):** Within a very short period of time, many information desks in the library or in the office of student affairs had to be reconfigured to comply with COVID-19 regulations – I already mentioned the Plexiglas screens. Cleaning cycles had to be reorganized and disinfection equipment built. Skilled manual work and janitor services, which are only possible on site and cannot be provided from home, had to be ensured in a COVID-compliant manner. The entire technical operations had to be maintained and partly adapted to the coronavirus conditions.

3. **The Data Center**, we call it “Center for Information Technology and Media Management”. As early as the beginning of March, the video conferencing systems offered by the nationwide university network collapsed due to excess traffic, and the universities had to establish their own systems from one day to the next, including us. The UP's server capacities and network connections had to be adjusted at an incredible speed to accommodate the higher storage and data volumes resulting from digital teaching. A large number of new home office workstations were in need of technical support, in a situation where hardly any sea containers with IT equipment from Asia were arriving in Europe. In this situation, it was necessary to stay on top of things and use improvisational talent, which the colleagues at ZIM demonstrated in an outstanding manner.

**For their active support ever since the beginning of the pandemic, I would like to commend these three departments to the highest degree and express the heartfelt gratitude of all university members!**

Ladies and gentlemen,

I am sure that with this high level of commitment, we will not only be able to deal with the pandemic, but also continue to advance the further development of the university this year.

Thank you for your kind attention.