

Honorary citizen of Shanghai impressed by the city's pursuit of excellence

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Having lived in Shanghai for 10 years, Jeffrey Sean Lehman, 65, vice chancellor of Shanghai New York University, or NYU Shanghai, has become proud of the city, as many local citizens are.

And he now has become an honorary citizen of Shanghai, the highest honor for expats who have made contributions to the city's development.

"I'm honestly deeply moved by this," he told Shanghai Daily in an exclusive interview. "I know what a special gesture it is for the city to bestow this honor. Shanghai is my home now, so for me to receive this really means more than I can say."

Lehman, a transnational education advocate, started working in China in 2006 as founding dean of the Peking University School of Transnational Law in Shenzhen, southern Guangdong Province.

In 2012, he became a resident of Shanghai when he took a new job - inaugural vice chancellor of NYU Shanghai, the first Sino-US joint venture university established by New York University and East China Normal University with the support of the city of Shanghai.

Since then, he has been dedicated to developing an innovative international research university and promoting educational and cultural exchanges between China and the US.

Thanks to the efforts of Lehman and his colleagues, NYU Shanghai has become a name brand of the city as one of the most international universities in the world, with half of its students from China and the other half from more than 80

countries and regions. This year, the university will celebrate its 10th anniversary.

Cultivating Cosmopolitans

Lehman said the university is dedicated to cultivating students into cosmopolitans.

"A cosmopolitan recognizes that the world and the human species are more creative when it draws from different cultures in pursuit of common values, and the world is more beautiful when you can see it through these different lenses," he said.

"I think today the world is struggling with a set of very big challenges, such as climate change and diseases, and this generation will find the best solutions to these challenges exactly in this way."

Lehman said the university definitely bore some Shanghai genes.

"Shanghai is the most internationally connected city in China," he said. "It has that special quality and understands itself to be one of the world's great cities. I think NYU Shanghai understands itself in that way, too. We're a force to connect with the great cities of the world."

"There is a kind of a sense here that whatever you do, you should do it at the highest level of quality. This is not a city that cuts corners. That is a kind of a message that we want to give to our students."

Four batches of undergraduates have graduated from NYU Shanghai with outstanding achievements. Despite a challenging global economy, its Class of 2021 has achieved a 93 percent overall employment and graduate education rate.

NYU Shanghai has also become an intellectual home to some of the world's best



the university had very quick response to handle the situation and share their resources and experiences with the rest of the world.

Pandemic challenge

He was in the US when the pandemic broke out in China. He then ran to several pharmacies to purchase as many masks as possible and brought them back to Shanghai immediately.

The university developed tool kits and renovated their classrooms to do synchronous and asynchronous teaching when students were trapped at their homes around the world. It was the first university in the world to move online during the pandemic.

They later shared the solutions with many international universities when the pandemic swept the globe.

It also hosted more than 3,000 Chinese students of NYU and NYU Abu Dhabi as students cannot go back to the campuses due to the pandemic. It rented two buildings, converted the space into classrooms, and brought in teachers so that the students could take classes in person and not have

them all be online.

In 2020, he became chair of the Board of Governors of the American Chamber of Commerce in Shanghai and was reelected last year. For this post, he works to sustain the business links between Shanghai and the US.

During the pandemic, Lehman coordinated dozens of the chamber members to raise a large number of epidemic prevention materials and transport them from the Pudong International Airport to New York University Langone Medical Center.

The supply was distributed to other medical institutions in the US, protecting medical workers there, which fully embodies the humanistic care of a community with a shared future for mankind.

In recognition of his great contributions to the development of higher education in China and China-US exchanges and cooperation, Lehman was honored with the Friendship Award in 2011. This is China's highest honor for foreign experts.

He also received in 2014 the Medal of Merit for Education, which is awarded to 10 foreign experts for distinguished service and contribution to education in China during the period from 1954 to 2014.

In 2018, he was named one of the 40 Most Influential Foreign Experts During 40 Years of China's Reform and Opening-Up at the 16th Conference on International Exchange of Professionals.

He was a recipient of Shanghai's Magnolia Silver and Gold awards in 2013 and 2015. And on Monday, he received the Honorary Citizenship of Shanghai, the highest honor in the Magnolia Award system for expats.