

We were talking about the origin and development of The Fund For The Future.

As president of the College, it was my responsibility of course to seek to maintain a continuing assessment of the needs of the College, and of its resources to accomplish its purposes. We were dealing with greatly rising costs in the '70s; the year 1973 was a time of very rapid inflation of costs, as was the case again about 1980-81.

But in '73 with the oil crisis increasing costs in many ways we began to find belt-tightening becoming more and more important to the College. Colleges and universities across the country began to realize they were functioning in a different time frame as it related to general economic conditions. We were making efforts to enhance our gift income in many ways, with greater emphasis on the annual fund and a more assiduous effort at soliciting capital gifts. Indeed from the year 1973 I began to devote more of my personal time and energies to external relationships of the College simply to help along efforts to increase our financial resources. But in the latter '70s, let's say about 1977-78, we began to undertake to project our needs more exactly as we considered ways in which to enlarge our resources further. We felt that it would not be out of order to consider a structured capital campaign; but we wanted to define our needs pretty thoroughly.

With the Development Committee of the board of trustees we studied those needs for a couple of years. I guess that had to go back to around '76-77. At that time we had a vacancy in the leadership of our external relations program, and I recommended to the board that we bring in as a vice president for resources development a person of senior experience, Gordon Freese. He was retiring from the position of administrative vice president of Stephens College, which I had served before coming here. He had gone into his duties at Stephens during my presidency there. He had been Stephens' general financial and managerial vice president. He did not function in the area of fund raising, but he was a man skilled in fiscal analysis and with a fine sense of organization and management. I recommended his appointment to head up our external relations staff after persuading him that he would be capable to move into that field at age 63. There were two things, I told him, I wished to do; first was to reorganize our operations to meet the needs of the '80s, and then to develop a thoroughgoing analysis of our institutional needs. For a period of a couple of years we addressed those goals. During Mr. Freese's time with us Mr. Nahm was brought in, initially as the alumni director for the College. He ultimately became director of development and then general secretary and, as you know, continues to give fine leadership in the external relations area.

We added a bit to the staff, but most importantly Mr. Freese developed a real projection of our needs that was convincing to the board of trustees. We foresaw that our annual fund needed to be increasing at what appeared to be an appalling rate, because we needed to be increasing the income from annual gifts by about \$100,000 a year. (That is, if one projected trend lines, that seemed to be necessary.) But we also figured that our capital assets needed on the average to increase by about \$2 million a year. Projecting those things led us to believe that there was no possible way of doing that without a very focused effort, and we began to consider the dimensions of a capital campaign.

We retained an external development analyst and asked him to study our potential, as fund-raising specialists like to do; to do a feasibility study. After conducting a survey, he reported to us that our capabilities for raising funds in a three-year campaign should be about \$8.5 million. That was a little short of what we felt our needs were; so the Development Committee of the board and the

officers of the College, and ultimately the full board, agreed that we should set for ourselves a goal of \$10 million in current gifts over a three-year period, recognizing in doing that we would necessarily have to intensify the level of our fund-raising activities. We also anticipated that, even when that campaign was concluded, the level of our fund-raising activity would need to be maintained at above the level that has existed prior to the mid '70s.

We also had developed and were developing during Mr. Freese's time printed materials that enhanced our effectiveness in seeking deferred gifts; that is, gifts in which an individual makes an estate commitment to the College, an irrevocable commitment perhaps, or perhaps a revocable one; but we were seeking binding commitments for gifts that would become effective on the death of the donor, or perhaps on the termination of other life estates, let's say through a trust that would be established.

Having that preparation behind us, we decided that we would undertake to set a campaign goal also for deferred gift commitments. Instead of what was previously conceived to be a quiet, continuing estate plan effort with donors of larger capability, we would set a publicly announced goal for new commitments in the way of deferred gift commitments. After analysis, we set on the figure of \$20 million for deferred gift commitments.

That meant a total seeking over a three-year period of \$30 million--\$10 million in cash to be paid in within the three-year period, and \$20 million in deferred commitments. The board of trustees after careful reflection embraced that campaign goal. We committed ourselves early in 1979 to launch a campaign having those objectives in that year and to conclude it in 1982. The board's action was taken at a meeting in January of 1979, and we put the campaign publicly on the road the first of July in 1979, after some preliminary solicitations.

Even before making that final decision in January, we had made solicitations of the membership of the board themselves. They recognized if they were going to mount a major campaign, they should determine their own collective capabilities to give support to it. It was based on the evidences of the trustees' own real commitment that the decision was made to embrace a \$30 million goal.

I think it's fair to say that, though all of us thought that it was not an unreasonable goal, we would have felt very good if the campaign had over three years achieved, let's say, \$25 million out of the \$30 million goal. We set our target at what we thought was a properly justified level and then worked to bring it about.

As we were moving into our campaign mold,⁷ I asked the board to approve changes in the articles of organization of the faculty--after having earlier asked the faculty to recommend it--that would make the provost of the College the chairman of the Council of the College. This would allow me to withdraw more from the day-to-day internal leadership and management of the College in order to give adequate time to general coordination of our external relationships and to have extensive direct involvement in the work.

So from 1978 Mr. Reckard served as chairman for the Council. I was freed of the need to be on campus at the time of the Council's monthly meeting; I attended if I were here, but not as presiding officer. I was glad that Mr. Reckard was willing to take on this larger role in the internal leadership of the College.

The ultimate outcome of the campaign was that we exceeded both goals, as you know. When the campaign was concluded at the end of July 1982, we had gone approximately \$2 million over our goal in both categories. The \$10 million cash goal had been surpassed by nearly \$2 million, just as the capital funds commitments had gone \$2 million past the \$20 million goal there.

Given the fact that we were sliding more deeply into a recession in the national economy during the period of that time, I think the achievement evidenced both the general favor in which the College stands with its constituency, or its multiple constituencies; and reflected an amazingly strong commitment on the part of the trustees of the College and the alumni, hundreds of whom were involved in that effort.

The time and effort given to the campaign by the chairman of the board, James Evans of New York, and by the general chairman of the campaign, David Grissom of Louisville, was far beyond what one could ever have hoped for. With that kind of committed and active leadership the intensity of the campaign never seriously wavered during the whole course of the three years. We actually achieved the \$30 million goal by November of 1981; the added \$4 million came in the time that yet remained in the campaign period.

You have often described or characterized your administration as the presidency of Tom and Catharine Spragens. Could you elaborate a little bit on that, please?

Well, yes; in multiple ways in the modern college or university the responsibilities of the president can be all-consuming. In that regard alone it puts a heavy demand on the commitment and interest and support of the spouse of the president. Beyond that, the maintenance of effective working relationships with the many constituencies that a college president is involved with--faculty, students, alumni, the general community, both local and at large--is greatly enhanced by the maintenance of good social relationships with those constituencies. In that respect the first lady of the college has a role to play that is of inestimable importance.

My wife, Catharine, has been an exceptional hostess to these many constituencies over the years we've been here. When I think just in terms of our gift program, our development of a strong support constituency, my mind always runs to the important role that she has played in entertaining and making comfortable in the College community countless guests that flowed through the president's home, Craik House, during the period of all the years we were here. She hosted students first and foremost, members of the faculty, staff, trustees of the College, and alumni and friends in the thousands. The number of times she's given country ham dinners to trustee committees or to the full board would be far more than she would want to count now.

There's no doubt in my mind that my wife played just an exceptionally large part in the responsibilities that were technically vested in me as the president. They involved her time and her efforts and energies just as fully as my own were involved.

Could you just in reflection summarize some of the general changes in the campus community and students, the faculty; and to broaden it a little bit, how was the job itself changed over the years as the position of the president?

In one sense I would say the job did not change a lot except as over the course of my presidential years, although the emphasis in terms of the allocation of my time did at different periods have to be modified. During the period from '66 to '71--the Viet Nam years--I made a conscious effort to stay closer to the internal life of the College, to be a visible president just by virtue of being apparent, hopefully to be as open as possible to faculty and student concerns and to remain sensitive to those and as responsive as the duties that were mine would call for. By contrast, as I have earlier mentioned, in the latter part of the '70s and up through 1981 I needed to give more time to external relations and did so.

Many things changed over that twenty-five years, but they reflect the changes in our society altogether. The parietal laws of the College--parietal rules--changed quite a bit, but they only mirrored the changes in attitudes of the general community. No; I would not say that the College has changed greatly. The environment within which we function changed a great deal, and we changed along with it.

How would you contrast the student as you passed by on campus that you see going to class in 1982 and the students going to class when you first took office in 1957 as far as the attitudes and concerns they bring to the College?

These students today are more alike to students in 1957 or 1975 than they differ. Their priorities are changed, as are the priorities of their elders in the society by virtue of changes in our economic stance; the fact that we are not maintaining active warfare certainly creates a tremendous difference in some of the concerns of students. (They are the vulnerable generation, of course, when we move into a military involvement as a nation.)

Students are more concerned for career now than they were in the late '60s. Indeed it was a common thing for students to finish college in the late '60s or early '70s and try to avoid entering into any fixed career goal, simply because they wanted to take more time to assess their long-range goals. Nowadays a student is not so sure that he can find a job around every corner and is more concerned to put himself in a position to become self-supporting at least on graduation.

But those things don't reflect fundamental changes in the nature of persons; they just reflect changed responses to changing circumstances in the whole social-economic-political environment in which they grow up. It was true in the late '60s that students found it difficult to communicate with the older generation; they were not as open. I never considered that an affront; it just took a little bit more time to establish a real base of communication with an individual student at that time. But, even so, throughout the whole of the twenty-five years I would say that though the dress may have changed, the length of hair may have changed, the Centre student of the 1950s and the Centre student of the '60s or the '70s were more alike than different.

I see no real major change in the general nature of students who come to this College. They are persons generally with a higher sense of commitment to do well--and with some sense of social responsibility, characteristically, all have been subject to all the varying emotions of late adolescence and post-adolescent years with the same kinds of commitments to work and effort throughout that period of time. Styles of dress changed, but most of the changes are in the more superficial and visible forms rather than in the substance of people or of their attitudes.

Was there any time during your administration that you seriously considered moving on from Centre?

There were two periods, I think, where that was the case; times when I felt perhaps my leadership was possibly not the best leadership that the College could have. One time was during the middle '60s, about 1964; after I'd been here seven years or so. I was feeling a bit frustrated by our inability to get ahead quickly with the next important steps of development. I asked myself more than once whether I should move on, not that I was eager to go anywhere else, but whether someone else might more effectively achieve some of the proper goals of the College, to bring about their earlier achievement. Yes I considered resigning, but not by virtue of having something else to do at the time, in 1964-65. Then again about 1972, at one point in a particular situation I came to wonder whether my leadership was as effective as it should be. This was at a time when we had become very much conditioned, I think, by student attitudes, always wanting change in something. The faculty became a little bit like that. Some of its members seemed to me to lose an adequate sense of the importance of continuity and stability. On one occasion on a very superficial matter in the Council there was a proposal to change a decision that had been made just the year before, one which had called for a redrafting of the catalog with respect to that particular thing, when I did what was for me an unusual thing. From the chair, I expressed my feeling that it would be better to let that matter lie simply because it seemed to suggest that we were becoming about as unstable in our processes as we often accused students of being. There was further discussion, not too thoughtful. The issue had to do with the description of honors in the College--whether we would use the Latin "cum Laude", "magna", "summa", or whether we would continue terms which had been adopted just the year before, speaking of "distinction", "high distinction", and "highest distinction."

I argued again for letting that lie for another year, and still there were those who wanted to push it. I finally said to them; I said, "I have spent five years defending to students the need for maintaining some sense of continuity in things and not changing with the wind every year, and I think at this time it would be better for us not to do that. I sense you don't seem to feel that is significant; but from where I sit it is." I went on to say that I would hope the faculty would recognize that the issue was not terminology, but stability; and I was prepared to make their acceptance of that concern a vote of confidence. I thought that would settle the matter. Well, a vote was taken, and most of them voted to switch back to the old language. I announced the result and then said to the meeting (that item having been last on the agenda) that I would at the next meeting of the board present my resignation to the board. Much to my surprise, for I thought I had made myself clear, that caused an uproar. It led to the faculty later re-assembling--I had already declared that meeting adjourned--to ask me to reconsider that action. (They did at the time also rescind the earlier action and laid it over and haven't done anything with it since.) It's still in English, though that had not been the real issue. After they took their action, I did take a week to decide whether I should, or whether it was perhaps a good time for a change in leadership. After all, I had been here a long, long time. I guess I was convinced that probably the maintenance of continuity then in the presidency was important. My good friends in the faculty (I considered them all my good friends) assured me that they really didn't understand what I was saying. Whatever their feeling about the action they'd voted on, they hoped I would reconsider; and I did. That never got beyond the campus much, but that was a public decision--later reconsidered--that it would be better for me to withdraw. So there were two times.

Now, I was invited from time to time to consider situations in other institutions, but I never was disposed to do so. At two different times--let's make it clear I was not tendered an offer; those things don't happen that way--I was asked twice to talk with a search committee of the University of Kentucky, which is my alma mater. Both times I told them that I felt that I was rendering a more important service to the region where I was than I would in the UK presidency, and that I would only be prepared to consider it if I were persuaded that they had no other options.

I always felt that what I had set my hand to here was a thing that could command the full extent of my professional career. There was also a time there in the latter part of the '60s or the very early '70s when another large public university pressed me awfully hard. One thing was a little bit tempting about that; it was a chancellorship of a multi-campus university. There was something attractive about a situation that would allow one to be separated a little bit more from day to day responsibility for a campus. I guess I was feeling a little fatigue from the intensity of the presidential job, so I did agree to talk with them and did talk with them. But after considering all of the ramifications, I decided I found far more pleasure in what I was doing. From the time I had been here five years, let us say, and through the next ten years, I had all kinds of inquiries. I was a man who had the experience of two presidencies and was still relatively young. My secretary learned that when a letter like that came in, she could type up the reply before it got on my desk. It was simply the case that I was never really inclined to want to seek something else.

Your name came up, by the way, quite recently, with Kentucky State in Frankfort. There were several articles...

That was after my retirement here. No, it is true that some of the governing board there were eager to see me make myself available to serve as an interim president. I wanted to be as helpful to that institution in its then difficult circumstances as I could, but I did not think that was the best way for me to help. I am serving as a consultant to them over the period of the current academic year, and they worked out a better answer for the interim presidency.

As you know, they have confirmed that interim president, one of our alumni, Raymond Burse, as president of the University. I didn't retire from the presidency of Centre to take on another presidency; that was not my purpose. I had reached that point in life where I was ready to become emeritus.

Tape 4, Side 1 (Part 7) Thomas A. Spragens Interview (continued)
Transcribed May 22, 1985. Edited by Dr. Spragens and retyped October 16, 1985.