



9-1-1996

Breaking New Ground in Tampa

Jacque Bishop

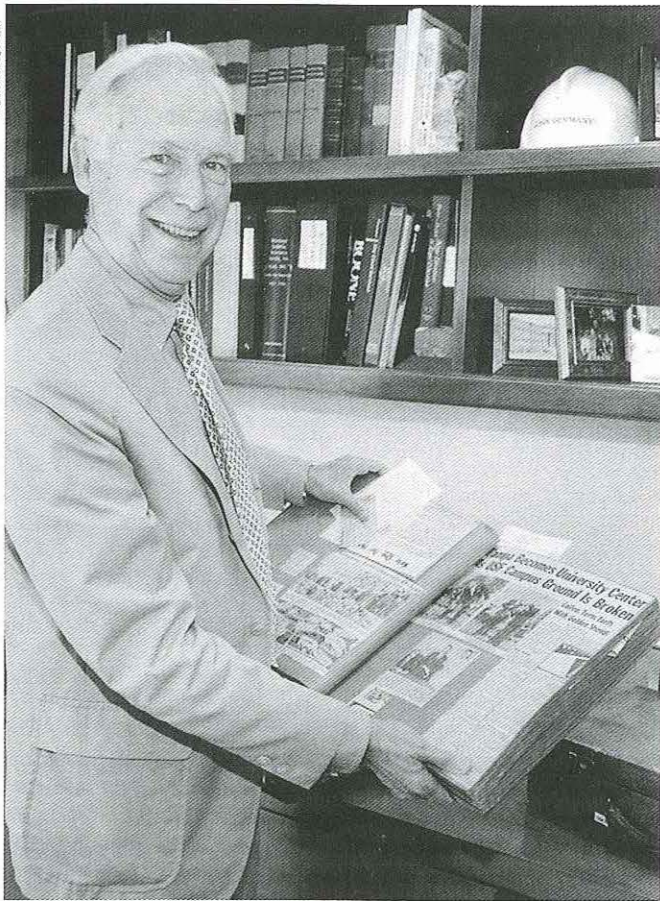
Follow this and additional works at: https://scholarcommons.usf.edu/usf_mag_articles_usfsp

Scholar Commons Citation

Bishop, Jacque, "Breaking New Ground in Tampa" (1996). *USF Magazine Articles about USF St. Petersburg campus*. 52.

https://scholarcommons.usf.edu/usf_mag_articles_usfsp/52

This Other is brought to you for free and open access by the USF St. Petersburg campus University Advancement at Scholar Commons. It has been accepted for inclusion in USF Magazine Articles about USF St. Petersburg campus by an authorized administrator of Scholar Commons. For more information, please contact scholarcommons@usf.edu.



John Germany in his office with scrapbooks of USF's founding.

Breaking new ground in Tampa

JOHN GERMANY HAS TWO bulging scrapbooks that contain the story of his life and times. But they are also a snapshot history of the Tampa Bay Area and its university. Germany, a prominent Tampa attorney and activist for over 46 years, was president of the USF Foundation from 1960-1961. He was also part of a determined group of legislators and educators who turned the idea of an "urban university" into a reality.

"It was Sam Gibbons' idea," says Germany, "to create this 'urban university'." We saw there was a great need in this community for a commuter university, one that was accessible." The "we" Germany refers to included Senator Sam Gibbons, State Representative (and later Circuit Judge) James Moody, former Governor Farris Bryant, and Germany himself, then a legislative assistant to Governor LeRoy Collins. It was this group which did much of the legal and political legwork required to get USF established.

In 1955, Germany says, it was "Moody

and Gibbons who got the funding bill through the House Appropriations Committee. Then, of course, the *opposition* to the project began..." The older universities in Gainesville and Tallahassee, fearful that their own funding would be diminished, began lobbying against the creation of a third institution. But thanks to an energetic defense by the Tampa team—and vigorous editorializing by the *Tampa Tribune*—efforts to squash the project were defeated.

A whole new round of disputes, however, would arise when it came time to select a site for the university. "The Board of County Commissioners," Germany says, "donated 1,000 acres of what had been the Henderson Airfield during the war. Then a developer by the name of Sanson donated an adjoining 700 acres, in return for permission to build a road on some of his other holdings. So, you see, there was a splendid opportunity for growth into a very large university."

Not everyone was as happy with this vast parcel of potential. One group of developers favored a waterfront site further north in Tampa, but the bitterest disappointment was to the St. Petersburg contingent. Led by stalwart education-supporter and St. Pete booster Nelson Poynter, editor of the *St. Petersburg Times*, they desperately wanted the new campus to be located on the water at Bayboro Harbor. The *Times* editorialized vigorously against the Fowler Avenue site — "A Decision... and a Mistake." Germany chuckles as he remembers the tug of war that ensued:

"There was an industrial park on Fowler that housed a Schlitz brewery," he recalls. "So the St. Pete contingent started calling the place 'Bottlecap U.'" (As early growth pains resolved, Nelson Poynter and the *St. Petersburg Times* would become lifelong contributors to USF. Poynter continued to lobby for a St. Petersburg campus, and in 1978, his dream became a reality.)

With the site established and John Allen of the University of Florida selected as the first president, the new school began to accrue substance and an intellectual core. "Allen," says Germany, "was a wonderful

man who had real vision of what the school could be. He wanted an academic university *first*, and was adamant about no football. That was definitely the right decision for that time...Now that we're established, of course, I'm all for it..."

But one more controversy remained to be settled: the choice of a name. Germany and company dug in their heels against "localizing" the name, a move that would have restricted the perceived scope of the university in the future. "They wanted to call it *Temple Terrace University*, if you can imagine," Germany chuckles. "But we

"There was an industrial park on Fowler that housed a Schlitz brewery. So the St. Pete contingent started calling the place 'Bottlecap U'"
—John Germany

wanted it to be clear that this was part of the state university system, and the name had to be big enough to convey that. So it became the University of South Florida. Of course we were aware that this isn't really *south* Florida, but we were the southernmost campus at the time.

In Germany's scrapbook is a program from

the 1956 ground-breaking ceremony, autographed by Governor Collins. It depicts five buildings, including the first dorm—built by the new USF Foundation's "Dollars for Dorms" contribution drive—and the theater that President Allen insisted must be part of any great university. Today, on the Tampa campus alone, there are 225 buildings.

"Now that we're the second largest university in the state," Germany says, "I want to see us go to the next level of quality. I am anxious to see just how great a product we can ultimately produce."

By Jacque Bishop



BANKER HONORED FOR 'SPARKING' USF FUND DRIVE
... Dollars for Dorms chairman V. H. Northcutt, at left, gets chrome-plated spatula from Judge John Germany, chairman of the Greater Tampa Chamber Commerce University committee.