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Andrew Huse (AH): Okay, today is April 11th, is it?

Roger Frazee (RF): I thought it was the 12th.

AH: The 12th.

RF: I think it's the 12th.

AH: April 12th, 2005. My name is Andrew Huse, program assistant for the Florida Studies Center. Today, we continue a series of interviews in our studio in the Tampa campus library, with USF faculty, students, staff and alumni, in order to commemorate 50 years of university history. Today, we'll be interviewing Roger Frazee, who came to USF in 1969 as a student. Currently, he serves on the alumni board—

RF: National Alumni Board¹ [USF Alumni Association board of directors].

AH:—national alumni board and has been a great help to USF in Sarasota and beyond. So good morning, Roger.

¹The USF Alumni Association is a largely self-funded membership organization for students and alumni of the University of South Florida.

RF: Thank you, Andy. It's a pleasure to be here. Just to reiterate my latest positions with the alumni organization.

AH: Okay.

RF: I was past president of the USF Manatee-Sarasota alumni chapter from 1999 to 2003, four and a half years. And one of my proudest accomplishments was the fact that, each year, the national alumni organization gives an outstanding chapter award; we have 26 chapters. And, during my four and a half year tour, we received the outstanding award three times and runner-up twice. And I don't think any other chapter has received that much recognition in that short period of time.

I'm also involved in a local campus service board in Manatee-Sarasota. We call it Manatee-Sarasota; some people call the campus Sarasota-Manatee. But anyways, it just depends where you reside. We have what we call the USF community leadership council, composed of public officials, CEOs, alumni members. And I serve on that as legislative relations chair. Then also, I've been on the national alumni board for the last couple of years, and it's been a very rewarding experience.

AH: Well, for USF as much as for you, that's for sure. Well, let's start at the beginning, and we'll get into all this exciting stuff.

RF: Okay.

AH: When did you arrive? You said you started at a community college, right?

RF: That's right. Well, and this is at the heart of why I was so interested in becoming involved with USF. I'm a little bit older than I look. And, basically, I came to USF in 1969. I had gone to Palmetto High School in Palmetto, Florida. I graduated, went right to the army. I served in Germany, and I served in Vietnam. After I came out of Vietnam, I [had] saved my combat pay² and everything else. I started at Manatee Community College because it was local, also because of finances. I worked my way through school, so you looked for the best deal you could find. My major was finance at MCC, and when I came to USF, finance was my major.

²Officially referred to as "imminent danger pay," military personnel assigned to combat zones receive additional compensation, which is excluded from taxable income.

But I did a lot of extra courses and ended up getting a double major in finance and accounting. [The years] 1969 to 1979 was [sic] part of the worst times in Vietnam, and it was an interesting time on campus. Being ex-army, I had one side. Many students on the campus had the other side. And it wasn't that we didn't have a lot in common also, we just had different perspectives. But anyways, that's history, and that's been talked about a lot, so I'm not going to dwell on that. You know the story there pretty much. I still believe US involvement was correct, but some people say otherwise, so let's move on. I graduated in 1971, and—

AH: Well, what was your experience like in the classroom?

RF: Well, it was very positive. But, you know, back then, the campus was not nearly as populated as now. I mean, I come up to Tampa quite a bit, but even coming to the library this morning, it looked a little different. I had a map, and I was trying to find the right parking spot. Sometimes you say, you know, "Really, where is it?" So you ask people, "Is this the library?" But it was a smaller area, less students, but we always had a lot of Bull pride. And I think that was the thing that has carried over to where we are currently. It's amazing to me how much the campuses have grown.

But, well, I think the atmosphere on campus was very much influenced by the political and social situation in the United States. You still had tremendous pressures for civil rights, which was a very worthwhile goal. You had the conflict in Vietnam. So you had a lot of things being stirred in the political pot, both statewide and nationally. So, you had all those confluences. You had a lot of students who dressed traditionally, but then you had people who were the lower children and the music of the '60s that carried over into the early '70s. So it was an interesting time.

I know, as a finance and accounting major, I studied a lot. So I didn't get to participate as much in social events as I'd like to. I lived in what was then Beta Hall. I think it's been renamed now. I think the next building over, there was an area where we ate our meals. I believe Morrison's was the caterer. We had a volleyball court outside of our window. And I used to get some exercise playing volleyball while the education majors—it seemed like they always had time on their hands—where we were always studying. But it was fun. I made a lot of nice friends and enjoyed the environment. But, for me, it was serious business because I basically worked my way through school. I got \$100 a month.

Later, I think it was about \$115 from the GI Bill³, which isn't a lot. So I wanted to get out there and graduate and become involved in the world, so that's what I did. But I will say this: we had candlelight services on the campus for the fallen in Vietnam. I participated in

³The GI Bill is a government program that provides educational assistance to US service members, veterans, and their dependents.

those, also reading out things. Not that I didn't support the effort there, but that was the thing that we did because, even today in Iraq, that's a thing that a lot of college students are involved in, even though we are looking for democracy in there. But anyways, it was a very good time. I had what I thought were very excellent professors. I had some I didn't think were that great either. But, you know, when you grow, that's what you get. And one of the reasons for my involvement in USF is that I'd like to see a stronger institution. And so, that's kind of why I got involved.

AH: Before we move on, what were you doing for work as you were working through?

RF: Well, a lot of things. When I was back in Manatee County, going to Manatee Community College, I worked for Tropicana in the bottling line. I worked for a chemical and plastics company that made materials for boats. Wellcraft⁴ was headquartered down there. When I was up here in Tampa, I did odd jobs around the campus. I worked at the airport. My roommate and I, his name was Tom Hicks, we would go to the airport and wash down the airliners with the big brooms and the spray things and stuff like that. And I had also saved some money from the service.

So it was really a combination of savings, working whenever I could, and getting \$100, \$115 a month. I think, when I graduated, I had like \$80 to my name, so it was a pretty tight budget. And, when I got back from Vietnam, I bought a Volkswagen Bug, which was a popular automobile back then. I think it was my junior or senior year up here, I actually had gone down to Bradenton, and I went to a movie. I saw a James Bond movie, came out with a date, and my car was gone. So I came back and reported to Allstate. And so, for, like, four months, I was on campus here until they gave me a new car, which was kind of an experience because I always like to have some flexibility and mobility.

But anyways, it was a unique experience, so it was fun. And then, after school, I worked for a large international accounting firm in Miami, Florida. I ended up a supervisor with them, called Peat, Marwick, Mitchell [& Co.], which nowadays is called KPMG, one of the top four international companies. I was there for about six years. I moved out to Houston, Texas, for eight years. I worked as a chief financial officer for several companies. Remember the old TV series, *Dallas*⁵?

AH: Um-hm.

⁴Wellcraft LLC is a major US boat manufacturer.

⁵A primetime television soap opera about a wealthy, feuding Texas family. The episodes frequently revolved around backstabbing, greed, manipulation and deception among family members.

RF: Okay, I also was CFO for a family very similar to *Dallas*, with the same misfunctions [dysfunctions] and whatever. And I moved back to Florida in the late '80s and moved to the Bradenton, Sarasota area and became involved with what was then the Sarasota campus in 1989.

AH: So, with your training and with your degree, you were able to live, obviously, much more comfortably than you were accustomed to before.

RF: Oh, absolutely. Yeah, I mean, it was pretty stark, and money was in short supply. And I remember, the year I graduated, 1971, it was one of those tough years that comes along every so often. And a number of us, you know, we hustled to find a job for a long time. Three, four, or five months after graduation, then it finally came through. And so, that's what happened. But anyways, I kind of did a little bit of a career change just before I moved back from Texas. My true love was always finance. And so, I wanted to become a stockbroker, which I did, out in Houston. I worked for a firm by the name of Drexel Burnham Lambert there. Then, when I came to Florida, I worked for a firm by the name of Kidder, Peabody [& Co.].

And then, I evolved into—got away from being a stockbroker. There is a fine difference. I'm now an investment advisor and primarily a fee-based investment advisor, where I manage individuals' assets. My clientele are—basically on the lower side, they have assets that are a couple of hundred thousand dollars; on the upper side, they may have a couple million to invest. We also have some individuals that we give counsel to that are worth over a \$100 million apiece. We'd like to get some of those to give some money to USF. Anyways, so I use my accounting and my finance degree to do family financial planning and investments for whatever their goals are. But anyways, getting back to USF and off Roger.

AH: Yeah, you moved back then, from Texas to Sarasota, then?

RF: That's correct.

AH: Okay.

RF: It was a big change.

AH: I bet.

RF: I lived in Houston, which is a big area.

AH: The pace slowed down a little bit.

RF: It did. Houston was a very dynamic city, and I was there when it went through the energy boom in the early '80s. But then, there was an oversupply of oil, which is just the opposite of what the world's going through now, and there was a bust in Houston. And it really slowed down because Houston was primarily energy-based, and people left. So when I came back to this area, there was [sic] about 100,000 vacant homes in Houston. People had just left and went other places. So anyways, I came back here, and I went to work for Kidder, Peabody. And one of the interesting things about Kidder, Peabody is the manager of Kidder, Peabody, whose name was Pat Shay, who was a USF graduate.

And he had ties to the local Sarasota campus. And Pat later went on to become national alumni president of the national board. And he introduced me to some of the people on the local campus. And there was an individual by the name of Jerry Hill, who was a development officer. And he said, "Roger, how would you like to do a few things for USF?" I said, "Well sure" because—well, that was about 15 or 16 years ago. A large portion of the population of the Sarasota-Manatee area was retirees at that time. And, while I love them as clients, I also like to meet younger people also.

Now, it's changed, and it's more dynamic. There's a lot of younger people, but back then, it was more the traditional retirees. So Jerry Hill went out and recruited about 15 USF graduates from Sarasota-Manatee County to become involved and organize a chapter. And so, we did that. And it was very interesting. A woman by the name of Rachel del Prado(??) was elected president. I was elected vice president, I guess because nobody else wanted it or was afraid to get involved. And so, we served an 18-month term. And I guess we did something well because we received the outstanding chapter award from the national organization for that tour.

AH: A recurring theme in your life.

RF: Yeah, well, if you do something, you might as well do it right, and you might as well devote the resources to really accomplish something and not just—

AH: So how do you account for that success? I mean, what were the ingredients that went into it being so successful?

RF: Well, one of the reasons that I put a lot of effort in was that, when I came back from Vietnam, as I mentioned earlier, I went to a community college. And that was great. But there are a lot of individuals in that area who are your nontraditional students. They have gotten married early, may have gotten divorced early, may have had hard times, didn't have the money to go to school. There's a lot of pent-up demand down there of potential students, and their ages vary greatly, 25 to 50. They would like to see something improve their life, and they would like to get an education to better themselves.

And so I know my experience. When I came back from the service, I went to MCC. And it was excellent, but it was just a two-year institution. So, for a lot of people, Tampa is not an option because they have children they have to support; they might have part-time jobs and just can't make the move up here to physically live or to drive up here. So my cause, and that of my compatriots also on the board, was to—well, what can we do to make this a really functional and outstanding campus for USF? When I got involved, there were basically two organizations on the campus. Both were under the USF umbrella. But we had what is called New College, which is a liberal arts school, very high-powered, a lot of very smart, brainy kids, but they specialize in liberal arts.

Well, New College had been a private school that had some financial trouble, and USF rescued them from the scrap heap in 1975 and gave them life. As part of the rescue deal, USF would establish its own program and campus on that area, which is part of the old John Ringling estate that's right on the Sarasota Bay. It's very beautiful. Well, that's great, okay. But as time evolved—and these are my personal opinions, and I think they reflect reality because it's what I saw.

AH: Sure. I understand.

RF: New College kind of got a fat head. I mean, you can't knock their track record. They have a lot of Fulbright Scholars; they have students that have accomplished great things.

But I believe that we're all made of the same cloth. And you may be smarter than some others, or you may be wealthy, or you may be more privileged, whatever, but you are still in a learning environment. You have to respect those who may not be exactly like yourself, or maybe have a little bit different orientation, or are trying to do something with their life. But anyway, my thoughts were and my perceptions were that New College, they kind of did their own evolution, and there were times when they made it known that they did not want to associate with students who transferred from a junior college or might have a grade point average less than their own.

AH: It's a long-term trend. It didn't crop up when you arrived. It started in '75.

RF: Right. That's true. So it evolved. And I could talk for a long time about it and name names, but basically, what happened by the time I got there in '89, there were two camps. The camp with the money and the camp with the political connections in Sarasota because they continually thumped their chest and said, Well, we're by far the best. We're the ones that the local community should support. So we want you to send us your money, so we can do all these great things for our students to where we can have a professor to student ratio of 10 to 1. Now, how many classes do you find like that? Where the classes at USF, we might have 40 or 50 or more to 1. Plus, they had first dibs on the classrooms.

They had use of the classrooms during the day, okay. USF got dibs on those same classrooms in the evenings and on Saturdays, so it was very hard to expand the USF program. So we became involved, not only in carrying on Bulls pride and carrying the ball for USF, but we became involved in saying, Hey, let's do something about this situation. We want this to grow into an entity that will make a name for itself that will be just as good as any other part of USF, maybe better.

Why not go for it? So there's been a number of us who have been involved for a long period of time. We've had some board members come and go, but basically, three individuals stayed there the whole time. One of which was myself. Dr. Anila Jain was one of those; she was involved during this whole period. She serves in the national board, was president—they now call it chairman, but I think president sounds better—but chairman of the national alumni board. She's an MD, very knowledgeable, very influential in the area. There's a lot of social community work, has been a big Bulls supporter.

AH: Yeah, she was in the hot seat two weeks ago.

RF: Yeah, and I believe she received the distinguished alumni award in 1981 or sometime in the '80s. And then the other was Diana Michael, who is our current alumni president for the chapter, and she had also been president one other term, back in the early '90s. But the three of us, some people call us the three amigos. We've been sort of the core, and then we have recruited other individuals who have sort of come and gone to help out. Some people stay longer than others, but we've had a very good board of directors. We've picked them. We've had people who were state legislators, circuit judges, editors of the local newspapers, just a wide variety, to where it allows us to get our message across.

Anyways, so New College and USF, we did our thing of trying to improve the campus. Historically, for the record, to be honest, it was like something from Shakespeare, where the witches are stirring the cauldron, okay? The relationship between New College and USF boiled for a long time, and different deans would come and go, and some would be good administrators, but they might not really see what we were trying to do and what could be. And then we had a—do you want me to actually name some names?

AH: It's completely up to you. One of the things, though, that I heard you kind of say before is, the two camps—there's much different relationships with the community. New College, obviously, most of the kids aren't from Sarasota.

RF: That's true.

AH: They're from all over the place. And, you know, what inspired you and your community college experience and everything was the fact that you had something local, and it was for the people and the community that's there, you know, just in the geographic area. So what your camp was looking for was more stimulus for the local world.

RF: That is correct. So let me go back just a little bit, and we'll cover that.

AH: Sure, sure. Okay.

RF: In the late '90s, we had a new dean that was appointed by President Betty Castor, whose last name was Bassis. And Dr. Bassis was a person who—I'm not sure what he was trying to accomplish, and he's no longer with USF. He was trying to do some things differently. And when he was selected from a large pool of potential deans to be hired, half the board was made up from New College, and half was made up from USF.

And basically, the New College side said, "This is who we want." He wasn't really the first choice of USF, so he was hired. Then, once he was hired and after he'd been there for about a year, to be honest with you, nobody wanted him. I don't know. He had his own agenda, and he did not get along well with the staff nor with the faculty. So it became a problem. But, during his tenure, some very interesting things happened. Some of this can be a little bit critical of the administration in Tampa, but this is how we saw it —

AH: I'm sure that's fair enough.

RF: —and how we believe it really occurred. And I don't necessarily blame what happened, I just know what I'm going to tell you. The state, as you know, funds a good portion of the USF budget. And I think, right now, it's somewhere in the 25% to 30% area. Well, funds would be dispersed to USF for usage on the four campuses. Of course, until lately, it's primarily three because Lakeland is just starting, really, to expand. It's shared things with Polk Community College. But monies would be expended to come down to each of the campuses: Tampa, St. Pete, and Sarasota, and a little bit to the Lakeland campus.

Well, in the early 2000 legislature—and this was under Senator Sullivan, who was a well spoken education advocate from St. Petersburg, and Senator McKay, who later became the president of the senate—they stated that certain campuses, St. Pete and Sarasota, were not getting their fair share of the money. Now, I think what was done with the money, it was used to develop the high-tech corridor and the high technology in Tampa, which—hey—I can't argue with where that money went. It was spent on things that has really helped this university long term. So I think the philosophy then was probably right. On the other hand, if you lived in St. Pete or Sarasota, you thought you were getting short changed.

Anyways, so there was a movement under Dr. Bassis, with a couple of different avenues. During Senate President McKay's term, the Ringling Art Museum in Sarasota, which had had its own board and everything but never could get a enough money to rehab the buildings and put on its art display, said, "We need State help." I was told that the chancellor of the board of regents, which was the controlling entity at that time, went down to Senator McKay and said, "I think USF should take over the Ringling because it's right next to the campus." Well, Senator McKay is a Florida State [University] graduate, and he has done some great things for the Ringling.

But he said, "No, I think it should be Florida State [University]." So I am told he actually told the chancellor to disappear—told this from some very factual people—and [decided] it's going to be Florida State [University]. So that happened. It became Florida State [University], and he also—during his presidency—funded that with about \$50 million to set it up to where the art museums and the buildings [were] being renovated, plus the construction of the new buildings. So anyway, that became Florida State [University]. Well, Dr. Bassis was at USF at that time, and he saw what was going on, and he said, "Well, maybe we should become part of Florida State or an independent entity." So he hired some Washington DC-based consultants to do some exploratory work as to whether we should go Florida State or be independent outside of USF.

So this was going on, and I know he paid for some studies and stuff. So I was actually present. I walked into some meetings of the staff and faculty when this was being discussed, as the alumni representative. And also, our campus was visited by the person who was then the president of Florida State, looking over the situation. So anyway, that evolved, and what happened was that our alumni chapter and community leaders in the Manatee-Sarasota County area—at that time, I think we had about 7,000 alumni members—we organized committees to say, Hey, this campus is USF. It's sacred. And we want to do whatever we can to keep it USF and to get the money that had gone to Tampa to come down to Sarasota.

So a bunch of us became very politically active, in both the Democratic and Republican parties. I myself am on the Republican Executive Committee in Manatee County. I'm the legislative chair. So what we did is we started writing letters to the editor—these are groups, not just myself, but a number of people who had contacts in the area. We said, We want this USF. We want the money to come down to the campus. So anyway, at this time, Senator McKay and Senator Sullivan said, "We want to enforce on the administration of USF legislative directors that will define and guarantee more funding to go to St. Pete and to Sarasota." So that was accomplished. We did that. And then, in the evolution of things, President Judy Genshaft came on board, and I tell you, she has been a very, very powerful presence for USF. I cannot say how much she has done.

She is always out there. And we'll talk more about her later. But she saw what was going on in Sarasota. Dr. Bassis left USF, and [he] went to New College. At the same time, there was the vote in the legislature to separate, and that was a very hard-fought vote because people had different opinions. But the two sides separated. He went to New College. Eventually, there was a revolt of their foundation and their faculty against him, and he left the scene. And New College now operates on its own. President Genshaft totally put a stop to anything about separation and said, "Hey, I want this to be a very important campus in Sarasota." So she sent down Dr. Laurie Striker, who had been a vice president, I think, in charge of finances, data processing, information—

AH: Oh, yeah. Really interesting. She was here before—

RF: Oh, yeah. She was one of the top two or three people in the echelon under the provost, I guess.

AH: And that demonstrates Genshaft's commitment, right?

RF: Commitment. That is correct. So anyway, she sent Laurie down, and any thoughts of separation were totally gone. The consultants from Washington DC said, "Don't come

back here.” And so, she started. So anyway, she came down while Bassis was still here, but he had gone to New College. So Dr. Striker has really thrown her heart and soul into the development of the Sarasota campus. When she came down, we had a student population of about 1,200 or 1,300. So we immediately said, “Well, what can we do to do things while we—.” The chapter already had 15 board members and was doing a lot.

She organized what is called the USF Sarasota-Manatee community leadership council, which is an organization that’s got like the super intendants of education in Manatee and Sarasota County. You’ve got CEOs, about a third are distinguished USF alumni from the area. I also served on that as chapter president, later as legislative chair. So we got those people involved, and we raised the profile of USF. A lot of us wrote numerous stories about a number of things for publications in the newspaper because we needed to overcome the mystique that New College had on our area, but they were the most beneficial for the area. They were most beneficial for liberal education. But primarily, at that time, their students were students nationally or outside the area.

And so, we went to the chambers of commerce. Dr. Striker was out there talking to all the organizations. Dr. Genshaft came down. She was down in Sarasota probably twice a week, sometimes more than that, raising the profile of USF. So what we accomplished was a reorientation of the perception of USF in the community. And so, this happened. And then a number of us, we have this USF Day in Tallahassee. A number of us became very politically active. We go up to Tallahassee, and we talk to the legislature about funding. So what has happened is that we’ve gotten a fair amount of financial support.

So anyway, Dr. Striker was there, [and] Dr. Genshaft was there. They stabilized the situation and said, Hey, we don’t want to have a stable student population anymore. We want to expand and do new things. So we had some difficult and, at times, testy relationships with New College. And we said, We’re going to expand. We’ve got so much land. What do you want? And here’s what we want for our footprints. And that has been delineated over the last couple of years. And the thing that has really helped us recently is the fact that we’ve added some new programs. The faculty has doubled under Dr. Striker and President Genshaft. We just started, two years ago, a hotel and restaurant management program.

AH: That’s exciting.

RF: It is very exciting. And Dr. Anila Jain just attended, Sunday, an honors program on the campus for the honors graduates that are going to be graduating here later in the month, or in May, whenever it is. So the faculty are very excited. So we’ve stabilized the situation. And, over the last three or four years, our student population has gone from the

1,200 to 1,300 area to about 3,200 students, which is a pretty good-sized movement. New College has about 675, so we're expanding.

AH: Well, and the interesting thing here too is, when you're talking about delineating the territory, et cetera, New College isn't really in a position to do a whole lot of expanding. I mean, not on the scale that the Sarasota campus has, right?

RF: Well, that is correct because 99% of our students are local students, and they come from the Sarasota-Manatee area. So what had been mainly nontraditional students because they could only go to school at night or on Saturdays—what we've done is we said, Hey, we want a little bit more of the classrooms. So, at this point, I would say our traditional and nontraditional is about 50/50. But we are just junior and senior years. Our transfers are mainly from Manatee Community College and some other places. So that's where we've gone. Now, three years ago, maybe four years ago, after numerous meetings of our alumni, community leaders, community leadership council, meetings with President Genshaft, Dr. Striker. We decided we were ready to make the first steps.

And so, what is known as the Crosley area, which is an area to the north, is somewhere between 28 and 30 acres of land. It's to the north of us. It's by what is known as the Crosley Estate. Crosley himself was a person who lived there in the '30s. He was an inventor. He was the one who invented the first car radio and many other things. Those are back a ways. But anyway, so there's kind of an old mansion there that came into disrepair. Manatee County came in and upgraded it, and it's kind of used now as a place for meetings and weddings and things like that. At the same time as the county came in and secured that mansion, the university system—and this was under President Castor and some of our local alumni, like Pat Glass, who is a county commissioner—got together with the board of regents and the state legislators and everything.

And I think it was, like, for funding and dollars; they purchased a 30-acre piece of land to be used for USF in the future. So we decided that we would use this land to build the Crosley building on. Well, that's easier said than done because some of the neighboring homes in that area, the subdivisions, inhabited with people who didn't want USF to expand for various reasons. There are also a lot of professors from New College who live in this area also. (AH laughs) And I think, my personal opinion is they antagonized the local residents to say, We don't want USF to be in there. So going back about two and a half years ago, we had to change and develop the master plan for USF Sarasota-Manatee.

And when you do that and you say, "I'm going to build a 100,000 square foot building," you have to go through public hearings. So we ended up having three public hearings in the chambers of the Bradenton City Council. And one of my functions that I did as chapter president was I helped organize the pro-USF side. We'd get prominent,

distinguished alumni in the area, plus students, to go on record. This was all taped. It was all recorded by a court reporter, our testimony, as to why we should go forward with this building. Well, at the same time we were there, the other side organized also, and they would have 70, 80 people yelling and screaming at us, placards, signs and everything.

And so, we went through three public hearings, and believe me, it was very interesting. I don't want to be too negative in this interview. But we had New College students down there; they would go up and testify for us not being there, and then they would come off the stand, and they'd say, We're quality. You're quantity. And that did not do anything to develop friendly relations. But we went to the three public hearings and then the protests continued. So at one of the campus board of trustee meetings, we had to do another public testimony.

So that was held in the music room of College Hall, which is one of the old Ringling buildings there. That's one of the main estates of the campus. So our local campus trustee had a meeting there, all the five trustees. We had our side, and the other side was theirs. So we did that. Okay, so we submitted that to the State. There were several groups of New College professors and local people from the subdivisions who said, We're going to fight you tooth and nail on this. So we're going to sue you. So they filed a lawsuit against the campus and other individuals and things. And we had to have another meeting—this was about 4 or 5 months later—with the [Florida] Department of Community Affairs.

Those individuals came down from Tallahassee and, unfortunately, we had to hire attorneys to represent us. We had our architects, [and] we had our environmental consultants. The other side had their attorneys. And what was supposed to be like a two or three-day public hearing and review for reconsideration in Tallahassee turned out—I think it lasted about 10 days and cost us, like, over \$100,000 in additional costs. These protests probably cost us about \$250,000 or \$300,000 in addition to legal, professional costs beyond what we thought they would be. But anyways, we participated there. Our alumni were involved in those DAC hearings. I mean, we got out there and we gave our reasons why, under sworn testimony. The other side would be screaming at us for talking. It was—

AH: It's like 1969 all over again.

RF: I don't think that's things that happened up here too often, but we went through that. Okay, so we got through that. It went back up to Tallahassee, and the Department of Community Affairs said, "Okay, we think USF has done appropriately the requirements to expand their master plan and create this 100,000-square-foot building called the Crosley Campus Center." We still had lawsuits going. We've made very, very substantial

compromises, environmentally, with these other people. We put up a 50-foot berm⁶. That's what we're going to put, a buffer zone between part of the campus and where these lights are. We are going to leave certain trees where they are because, supposedly, they've been there a long time, even though we have factual aerial maps of the area from the 1930s. They weren't there, but they're claimed to be 200 years old.

We have 25 or 26 tortoises on this property. And these are tortoises we cannot move because they have a form of HIV. There's actually a tortoise HIV that they have, and so, we can't relocate them to some other area. So we have to build our stuff around that. And we're actually building underground pathways, under the roads that we're constructing, for these tortoises, so they can live their lives out. And so, we've done a lot of compromising. You have to have a lake there for drainage, and where are you going to put the lake? How's it going to be set up? How's your building going to be? Whatever. So anyways, we went forward with this thing.

We made compromises, so some of the protesting people dropped out. Last year, we finally got it approved and everything. And then I went to the governor and the cabinet. So we went up there and talked with the governor and the cabinet. It was approved unanimously. We've still got people suing us. And so, basically, we made a few more compromises. And just a couple of weeks ago, they had sued us again, so we had to go before a three-judge—I think it was the circuit court of Tallahassee that has jurisdiction over this. We had our representatives up there, and we won the appeal. So, unless they take us to the Supreme Court of Florida or the United States, we think we're okay. But we're in there now, clearing this area, and we're going to construct our building, okay? But that was just a plan. We also had to get the money because the cost of these buildings is around \$25 or \$26 million. I'm going to kind of rush a little bit because I'm probably slowing you down here.

AH: Oh, no, no. It's okay. We have 15 minutes left.

RF: Oh, okay.

AH: Yeah.

RF: Anyway, so we had to go to the legislature to get the money. So, over the last three or four years, myself and Dr. Anila Jain and other board members, we've gone up to Tallahassee. We've had private meetings with the president of the senate and his chambers. We've had private meetings with the speaker of the house and his, trying to get money through the legislature. And there's times when we almost had it, and we failed,

⁶A berm, in this context, refers to a man-made ridge of raised land or an embankment.

and we had to wait for the next legislature. But we did get substantial additional appropriations to expand our faculty and everything else. Anyways, last year, 2004, we worked very hard. We had meetings with our local senators and senators from other areas, people who were in the legislature who are USF grads.

We worked with them, so we got the money through the senate. And we worked on the house. We had a private meeting with Johnnie Byrd in Sarasota, showing him that we needed this building for the community so we could expand our student population. We're at about 3,200 students. Now, this new facility will let us grow to 5,000, but the important thing is it lets us separate more from New College. There will just be the auditorium and the library shared in common with them. This will pretty much be a big shuffle to our own footprint on campus. So anyways, last year, we got it through the senate separately and through the house separately.

And then we had to go through the joint appropriations committees and everything. We worked on that, and we got through there. And we got it through the governor, and we thought, We are finished. We found out we were on the sure-veto list for the governor. So anyways, we organized a committee effort. A lot of people were involved, many of the people I've named previously are involved. I was the local chair, being the legislative chair for the COC. We pulled out all stops. We had people in our community.

It didn't make a difference if they were from University of Florida, Florida State [University], USF, if they were heavyweights, we had them writing, calling the governor. We had people who'd been out to Crawford to see George W. [Bush] calling the governor saying, We need this building in our area. And we also had a lot of help. There's an individual by the name of Jim McGill. He'd been a former national alumni president who had been a lobbyist up in Tallahassee, who Jeb Bush had asked to be on his staff. The last two years, he was in charge of legislative relations with the senate and the house, so we had Jim McGill up there also, telling the governor, "You know, you really should think about signing this bill and getting this money for USF." President Genshaft went up. The national trustees of USF, several of them including the chairman went up. We had our local board trustees go up. We went up. To make a long story short—we had our state senators go up—anybody of influence, we put up there. And so, three weeks from the deadline, we were sure-veto, and then we got moved to maybe-veto.

AH: Now, explain for me, is it just that there were so many projects on the table that he couldn't fund it?

RF: That's correct. And also, is this really needed? Well, it is really needed. So we made the point about, Well, if you give us this building, we will turn out XYZ more nurses. We will turn out a lot more educators because, with that classroom amendment that passed,

there's a huge demand for classroom teachers. And the baby boomers are starting to retire, so we are going to need a lot more educated teachers in the state of Florida. You may know this, but USF is the biggest provider of educators in the state. We graduate more than University of Florida, Florida State [University], Florida A&M [University], and FIU combined.

So anyways, so we said, Okay, you have these State problems, you give us money, we will help you solve state problems. And that's another thing that our chapter's been involved in. We have also influenced the national board. We now have a legislative representative on the national board. And we've become more politically aware that we need to develop relationships. So, to make a long story short, the governor signed it. We didn't get all the money we needed. We got \$14.7 million, but that gave us the money we needed to clear the land and start the construction. This year—I'll be going back up to Tallahassee next week. I'm trying to get another five or six million dollars for the project. We also have local fundraising going on, and we've raised, in the last six or seven months, about \$2.1 million.

AH: Wow, congratulations.

RF: Yeah, thank you. And we have submitted that to the State because we can get 100% match under a special grant that they have for capital improvement projects. So we're hoping that we'll turn about four million dollars in this legislature. And then, we've also gotten some concessions from some of the contractors. And, with the additional moneys we're going to be asking for, we hope we have enough with this legislature to complete it. So that will allow us to grow to 5,000 students. Five years from now, after we get this built and we're at 5,000, we're going to be looking to do another building that'll let us go to 7,500. And we will become a big force in the Sarasota-Manatee area. I probably have about, what, ten minutes left?

AH: Yes.

RF: Okay, let me dwell on some other things because we've talked so much about Sarasota-Manatee.

AH: Oh, it's been fascinating, though. Thank you.

RF: Oh, it's a real story. I could've talked longer. I abbreviate a lot.

AH: It's a real gauntlet of struggle, I mean, that you had to go through.

RF: It was. It was a big struggle. And so, I've been involved in that quite a bit. Our chapter, as I mentioned, has gone on and done some very good things. In the last five years, we were outstanding chapter three times and runner-up twice, which I don't think any other chapter has ever matched over that short of a period, out of 26 chapters. I've been on the national alumni board for a couple of years, but I've been advising it before then because you can only do so much. You know, if you're going to do something, you need to do it right; just don't spread yourself too thin. But myself and some others, we've influenced the national alumni board to become more politically savvy and aware.

And so, that, I think, has worked out very well. And we're also making connections with other state legislators. Some are Bulls, some are graduates of other universities, and [we] make them aware of what our needs are. And one of the things I have done the last two years up here, I chair what is called the President's Roundtable. That is a roundtable of all 26 USF alumni presidents and all 23 society presidents. And two years ago I first started chairing this. This goes from, like, about eight o'clock to about noon—in the morning. This is the weekend when we have homecoming; we do this thing. And we kind of have a runner-up update thing every six months after that. But one of our board members a couple of years ago was elected as a state representative.

I know you've never heard of him, but you've probably heard of his name. His name is Ronald Reagan. (AH laughs) But there's a difference of the middle initial from the president.

AH: Okay.

RF: But anyways, he is in the house. And so, we had him as the guest speaker to the president's roundtable two years ago. And then, this past year, I've become very good friends with the state senator from Hillsborough County, Victor Crist, who is a Bull. Both professionally and personally, [he is] very good individual. And so we had him, as our guest speaker, talk about the reality of politics in Tallahassee and things of that nature. And that's been very rewarding. And then, the other thing that happened to me this year that I hang on my office wall is that, each year, they give out awards for [things like] distinguished alumni award, the alumni service award, things of that nature.

So I was honored, being given the national alumni service award. So that was presented. There was actually four of us. There are different categories for four individuals. We have a distinguished award that went to a woman, who—I forget her name, but she heads up a Hollywood production company in California. We started, for the first time this year, an

under-35 award. And that went to another woman whose name I forgot. But anyways, she is a TV reporter for CBS in Philadelphia, and she's a traveling reporter. She's been to Iraq. She's been to Afghanistan, all over the world. So she received that. We give a class of '56 award, which goes to a non-alumni. This year, that went to Richard Gonzmart, who owns the Columbia Restaurant chain.

I love his food, and I drink their sangria. It's very good. And I received the [Donald A.] Gifford Alumni Service Award. I was very flattered because—Don Gifford, I never met the person; he died from a blood infection he caught over a weekend and died at, I think, it was at age 53 or 54. This guy was an attorney, a very high-power and accomplished attorney in the Tampa Bay area and had gone to school at USF, had been student government president at USF, had been involved in the national alumni association, had been national alumni president of USF, had gone to law school at Florida State [University], had been president of the alumni association for them, and a wall fly. So anyways, this person had a very distinguished career, so I was honored to be given this award.

AH: Well, it's a fitting award for you.

RF: Well, it was interesting because, when I presented it, I didn't really know what to say, but I had this research on Don Gifford. And so, I told the audience, which included a lot of students because it was held in the new athletic facility when they opened it up. And there were some ramp ways where the students were up there, and I kind of pointed up to them, and I said, "Listen to what I'm going to tell you about this individual because this is what we hope you will do for USF." So I talked about his accomplishments, and it was just phenomenal what he had done. So anyways, that happened this year. And they gave that to us at halftime, when we lost to Army⁷ unfortunately. (AH laughs) But the other thing I want to talk about for just a couple of minutes is President Genshaft.

AH: Yeah, I wanted to get back there.

RF: Well, I was the Sarasota-Manatee representative on the search committee when she came down. There was a couple of us, and we interviewed all the presidents. They came down to the Sarasota campus, and we would have these big, detailed evaluation rosters to fill out and explain what we thought and how to grade her. And I believe we had, like, six nominees. And I believe she was the second from the last, and the quality of all of them were very, very good. But, I tell you, she just really stood out, and she has been phenomenal. The woman never sleeps.

⁷The 2004 Army Black Knights football team represented the United States Military Academy during the 2004 NCAA Division I-A football season.

AH: Yeah, I see her everywhere.

RF: That is true. I mean, I have come up here from Sarasota, I'll spend the night, and I'll go to some event at seven thirty in the morning. She will be there. And then, I have gone to other events where I see her at eleven or twelve o'clock at night, and she never stops. She is such a gift to this university. And she has a lot of vision and foresight. And she has really put us on the map. And I think, you know, she has impressed the legislators and all the area business community because, if you look at all the posts she serves on, I mean, she's on all kinds of posts throughout the Tampa Bay area. She's continually coming down to our area in Sarasota, speaking to groups that carry a lot of influence, telling them what her vision is and things. So I can't say enough good things about her.

AH: Well, to you, what stood out when you were in the evaluation process? What stood out then? And what have you found out since then, about her, that's impressed you?

RF: Well, first of all, she's very down to earth. Sometimes, you get presidents that are kind of standoffish, and they're a power to be—I'm not saying they can be arrogant, but they're kind of in the back, and they control things. She's right out there with the masses. It's like a grassroots effort. She's right out there with you. She continually hugs you and shakes your hand whenever she sees you and thanks you for your contributions to USF. But she has a lot of vision and foresight, as I said, and she's going to be a big driving force. And, I mean, just look at what has happened since she's been here. I mean, our campus has done very, very well. The St. Petersburg campus has its own CEO now. They have more autonomy. They're doing more things over there.

I mean, the football program started under Betty Castor, but it's gone through this big evolution, I think, joining the Big East. I know that's not academics, but the president's vision is this: it gets us into the spotlight in the big money media markets, and we'll bring in additional recognition. We'll bring in high-powered professors. You know, her goal now is in the next couple of years to be one of the top 50 research universities in the country. And so, that's what she's shooting for. And that's where we ought to be. I mean, we're not that old. This year, this coming year is our 50th anniversary. I'm going to be doing a few things on that. Dr. Anila Jain's co-chair of that. She was my secretary treasurer at the chapter. So we've evolved all over the place, the chapter members. Anila is very well organized.

She's an MD, has a lot of relationships, and very well-organized at getting things done. And so, there's going to be a number of events going on. And my personal involvement is I would like to do a program with John Thomas, who's our upcoming chairman of the national association. John was chief-of-staff to Governor Lawton Chiles in Tampa. I hope

to do something with him on Governor Leroy Collins, who was governor when USF was organized. A lot of people don't realize [that] he founded the community college system in Florida, and he was a great civil rights advocate. So I hope to do something there for the public. A lot of people have forgotten him because that was back in the mid '50s to early '60s, but he was a designer of the college system, and also, he was named by the legislature [as] the Citizen of Florida for the 20th century, which is a lot. But anyways, I guess we're getting ready to sign off.

AH: Yeah, we're about out of time, but I want to thank you for taking the time today and really laying out all this great material for us. It's a great contribution to the 50th anniversary book and just to the historic record.

RF: Okay, and I want to do one more thing. As President Genshaft would do, you stick up this finger and then you stick up that one, and you say, "Go Bulls!"

AH: All right.

RF: Thank you.

End of interview