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Danielle Riley (DR): Today is June 7th, 2004. My name is Danielle Riley, graduate assistant for the Florida Studies Center. We continue a series of interviews in our studio here in the Tampa campus library with USF faculty, students, staff, and alumni in order to commemorate 50 years of university history. Today, we will be interviewing Mr. Stephen Oscher, who came to USF in 1975 and is currently the managing director of Oscher Consulting. Good afternoon, Mr. Oscher.

Steven Oscher (SO): Hi, Danielle.

DR: And let's begin with—I'd like to talk about your military experience, which led into your time here at USF, so let's talk about what—your decision to go into the military.

SO: All right.

DR: And this was 1970—

SO: Actually, the year was 1966.

DR: Okay.

SO: And I grew up in Cincinnati, Ohio, and made a decision—at that time, was 19—to go into the military. I went into the Navy, to the submarine service, and spent six years on active duty. And when it came time to leave the military, I'd come down to Florida on a leave, after one of our patrols in late 1971 and 1972, with a couple of friends, one who lived over in the St. Petersburg area. I came down and fell in love with the area.

DR: And did you go to the campus at that time, or had you heard about it?

SO: At that time, actually, I was thinking not about business. I was thinking about going into engineering. The work I was doing onboard the submarine involved the computer systems and a lot of electronics, and I thought engineering would be where I would want to continue my studies.

DR: So had you always planned to go to college at some point?

SO: When I left the military, yes. That didn't change, and they had a program that terminated a few years later, but they had a program called the GI Bill, which allowed veterans and people who spent time in the armed forces to return to schools, so.

DR: So you were able to utilize the GI Bill?

SO: I used the GI Bill to come back to school.

DR: And so you were considering engineering when you entered USF. Was that the program—

SO: That was the program that I initially applied to get into, and—but I didn't start right away, because at the end of 1972, just as I was getting ready to leave—I was supposed to start in January when I got out 1973, and we were on an extended patrol, which did not allow me to get back in time because of certain circumstances. So when I finally did get back, it was too quick to get back into school and to start school right away. And then over the course of the next few months—anyway, it was just a delay before I was able to get back to school. And then when I finally did, it was a business decision that I had made.

DR: What was your first experience coming to this campus?

SO: Help me—first experience in terms of—

DR: Setting foot on the campus, and what it looked like at the time.

SO: I grew up up north, and college campuses had brick buildings and ivy growing up the wall, and here there was—it looked like a pasture. It was a lot of empty space, and there were buildings that dotted the landscape, and they were all yellow and not very attractive. But Tampa was still a wonderful community, and so in spite of the appearance of the campus, I'd come back for an education.

DR: You said you grew up up north. Where?

SO: Cincinnati.

DR: And did that—was there any other option, when you were thinking about USF, was there any other school that you thought about going, or was that it?

SO: Well, actually there was. I mentioned this friend who I'd come down to the area with. He was from the West Coast, and Tampa I had learned about because I grew up in Cincinnati, and the I-75 corridor continued from Tampa to Cincinnati, and then further up into Ohio. We had actually talked about going out to California, and with us getting out just at the same time he was talking, or we'd been talking about going to California to go to school out in California. And certainly the sunshine and the beaches helped the attraction, I guess, going to California. And so when we came down here for that vacation, or for that visit right after this patrol we had come back from, as I mentioned, before the interview started—January of '72, there wasn't a cloud in the sky. The temperatures were in the mid-70s, the evenings were in the 50s, and it was just a beautiful place to go to.

DR: So it was the weather and the town, and everything like that, that brought you here, more than the academic side?

SO: Well, at the time the academics—you're right. I mean, I wasn't really—I was focused more on the engineering schooling. Actually, what had an attraction—the computer systems that we were using onboard the submarine that I was on had been developed by the Sperry company during—that existed during the '60s—Sperry Rand Corporation. And the company that was competing for that same type of computer system was Honeywell, and they had a plant over in the St. Petersburg area. So when I came down, what I was also giving thought to was not only an engineering program, but

also a place that I might be working that I had some familiarity [with], particularly since they were, I think at that time, trying to get the same contract, or had gotten the same contract. So the possibility was at least they held out that I could find employment while—with something that I knew while I was going back to school.

DR: So the professional experience, and you would work while you were going to school? Was that the plan?

SO: That was initially the plan, yes.

DR: Let's talk about what actually happened.

SO: Oh, okay. Reality, instead of what was planned. Okay. My dad passed away right after those plans, and things just kind of happened immediately afterwards. And so, for me, there was a delay getting back to school, and in fact, I was doing some work in the area, and at that time knowing that I was getting ready to go back to school, but had started to think perhaps engineering really wasn't what I wanted to do, and had always thought business would probably be a better focus for me than the engineering that I had been doing during the military time, or the electronics work that I'd been doing. And so when I came back, I had the opportunity to enroll in the College of Business at that point, so that's where I started taking my classes.

DR: And what was your first semester here? Was that fall of 1975?

SO: I'm not sure. I don't remember. It was sometime in 1975. I think it was the early part of '75.

DR: And where did you live when you came?

SO: When I first moved here, I actually lived in Temple Terrace. By the time I came back to school, I'd moved over into the Carrollwood area and had an apartment over around the Carrollwood area, just off Dale Mabry. So I was able to commute every day to campus, coming down Busch Boulevard, and making a left at Busch Gardens. The lions and giraffes were part of my daily experience coming to USF.

DR: And what did it look like around here at that time, on the way over?

SO: What I said earlier—you know, this was a bunch of dull yellow buildings surrounded by little else, other than just land.

DR: And the drive from Carrollwood?

SO: Carrollwood was a much nicer place to be than campus was during that time.

DR: So you had a non-traditional student experience, where you weren't living in a dorm. What were you looking for, other than the academic side? Did you have any outside interests on campus, or were you involved in anything?

SO: Danielle, initially I didn't. I had an opportunity to—again, I was trying to get out of this place as quickly as possible. I spent six years on active duty and felt that I was behind the curve, if you will, for those students who would have been graduating at a normal pace, than I was. And so I was trying to get the education and graduate quickly. So the load I was taking—actually, we were still on a quarter system back then. We hadn't gone to semesters. But most of the quarters were 15 credit hours, 17 credit hours. In fact, if I recall, I was finishing—my last three quarters, I was finishing

with 18 or 19 credits, just to get out as quickly as I did.

DR: Were you working at that time?

SO: When I came back, I started to work. In fact, there was a veterans group, because on campus during that time period, you had quite a bit of veterans, with the Vietnam War, so there was a pretty large contingency of us on campus. If I recall, the VA—Veterans Administration—had set up a plan for us working on campus for extra part-time work, but my studies became more important, and I took out student loans, perhaps like a lot of other folks did, to make sure that I could pay my bills on top of what I was getting from the GI Bill, which was helping to pay for my classes here. That's what I used to not have to work and to sort of keep my focus on school and the education process.

DR: You mentioned the work the VA would provide for you. What type of work was that?

SO: Oh, I think there was various assignments that we all had, if I recall correctly. I was working doing filing or some menial task in the administration building during part of that time.

DR: On campus?

SO: On campus, yeah. I mean, we were all kept close, but I think different people had different projects that they were doing during that time period.

DR: Let's talk about the department of business. What was the structure like, and what was your relationship like with other people within that department?

SO: It's a college of business—the accounting department is what existed at that time. And by your question, are you asking about faculty, or are you asking about other students?

DR: Just—what were you involved in? Were you close with anyone around you? Did you know your professors well?

SO: Good question. Again, from my standpoint, I didn't—I mean, I was friendly with several of the students, because once you became part of the accounting program, you tended to focus on a similar track, so you'd see many of your classmates. You'd see them from one accounting course to another accounting course, so you certainly identified with those folks on a more consistent basis. But then I was older, and so the interaction—I was not spending that much time on campus.

Now what happened during that time period was I'd become friends with several of the professors, again being older. A fellow, incidentally, that I had in one of my first accounting classes was a gentleman by name of Perry Jacobsen, and Perry and I found ourselves playing tennis together. And while I hadn't focused on accounting being the direction I was taking, it was Perry initially who I spent time with, and he's the one who started probably, more than any other, putting it in my mind that maybe the accounting track was the direction I wanted to follow. And then, as I moved along, there was another professor—his name is LeBrone Harris, and LeBrone was a professor who also started prodding me along and suggesting that accounting might be an area I might want to pursue.

DR: Why do you think people suggested that to you?

SO: That, I don't know. You know, I think there was—for some of these people, both of them obviously CPAs themselves—one a professor. Perry actually was an adjunct professor. He had been in public accounting for a period of time and had decided that he was going to—although he was still in public accounting—he was going to serve as an adjunct during part of the year. But both of

those fellows, as well as others that I talked to, talked about accounting as a more global understanding of business, where the ability to receive an accounting education also introduced you to the other business disciplines, economics and finance and marketing and management. The computer sciences really weren't that important at that time in the '70s. They've now become very important. But so those disciplines—there had to be some basic understanding, and at least it was their perspective that if you could grasp the accounting, the ability to understand some of those others—those other disciplines—you'd be served very well by focusing in on the accounting side of it.

DR: And what was the appeal for you?

SO: From an accounting standpoint?

DR: For particularly just yourself, not what everyone else was suggesting to you?

SO: Well, at the time, I didn't know any different. I did not have—accounting was a difficult program to study. But I didn't have any other frame of reference. I didn't have any family members who had been CPAs. I didn't really know any different, other than I respected these people and others whom I spoke with. And so their advice was advice that made sense to me, and so I followed it. I'd been doing well in the accounting program, and so—but then there was an accounting honorary that I was accepted into.

DR: What was that?

SO: It was Beta Alpha Psi. And that was a group that you became a little bit more familiar with the accounting profession and what accountants did. So I became somewhat active—you were asking earlier were there any campus activities, well, ultimately, that was the activity that I became more closely tied to the accounting folks there. There were some other clubs, but it was the honorary that I spent most of my time in. Then the last quarter—last couple quarters that I was here, I'd been elected president of the honorary, so that gave me even more involvement—more time.

DR: And let's talk about the class size and the atmosphere in the classroom during that time.

SO: Class size—well, you always started out with a lot at the beginning of every accounting course, and you always ended with just a few at the end of every accounting course. There was a pretty high attrition rate, it seemed. The atmosphere—I don't know that I was the oldest. I was usually one of the oldest in the classroom. There were several people who had received degrees in other disciplines—business or non-business—who had come back for an accounting education. And those folks may have been a little bit older as well, so the atmosphere was a very serious atmosphere. I mean, this was not playtime. There were others like myself who were there to get the information, prepare for the examination, and get the heck out of here as quickly as possible. So if that's the atmosphere that you were asking about—

DR: Very professional atmosphere, but what about when you have a smaller class, with a professor, sometimes you're closer and you can have more free discussions and things like that. Do you remember anything like that?

SO: I think in the entire business program, I don't recall—there may have been one or two early classes that I had that were the big three-or-four-hundred-person lecture classes, but most were smaller. Most of them involved more independent work than group work, if that's sort of where you were going with your question, Danielle. There were a few classes that—class projects or group projects were things that gave us a chance to interact, but my recollections were more—you've got

a set of problems, if it was in accounting class, or even in finance or economics or the other disciplines where we took classes, there was not a lot of, quote unquote, group interaction.

DR: Was there any involvement with the community, with the academics, and course ties with it?

SO: No. The only—the only real interaction with the community during that time period was again from the accounting honorary. The department had a chairman by the name of Bob West, Robert West, and Bob was very instrumental in bringing the Beta Alpha Psi of the accounting program to the community, and the community to Beta Alpha Psi. There was a lot of intense pressure during that time period to put our students—the USF accounting students—in front of what was then known as the “Big Eight” accounting firms. There were eight international accounting firms that spent a lot of time and a lot of money recruiting on campus, and not just our campus, but Florida and Florida State, the other schools in the state of Florida, and around the country.

So Bob was very focused, as a number of the other professors were, but primarily led by Bob, that his program, his school of accounting, or what then became known as the School of Accountancy was one that the accounting profession wanted to come to first for their students. And today, we're—25, 30 years later in, and USF has become one of the top schools for their graduates passing the CPA exam. So it's become a very well-recognized program.

DR: And you were president of that organization for a while?

SO: There was a—my final two quarters here on campus, I had the opportunity to serve as president.

DR: What did you do as president?

SO: The group was focused on several things. First, there was the idea that you were introducing the accounting profession to the accounting students. And so it was very much targeted towards an interaction between what the real world and what the academic world was all about in the transition. Secondly, there was certain projects, for example, supplying students to help some of the beginning accounting students. So there were labs where we set up to provide tutoring and private instruction to people who may have been struggling with some of the accounting programs. There was the ability to have fundraisers, hopefully for the purpose of raising scholarship funds for the accounting students. I'm sure there were other things that we did during that time period, but it was both the spirit of the accounting program as well as the College of Business where we were primarily focused towards.

DR: And you talked about these labs and tutoring. Was this university-supported, or was the fundraising your sole source?

SO: No, this was primarily—there had not been any unified fundraising program. Some of what you may now know about, capital campaigns and development of financial resources, really weren't being handled back then the way they are today. And again, Professor West was very instrumental in running out and trying to secure funds for both faculty programs and for scholarships for the students. And so it was something that he himself undertook, and that was really how I started to interact with him during those two quarters that I was president of Beta Alpha Psi.

DR: And did you feel that the university supported the program well, or did you feel there was a certain need—a gap—in certain areas?

SO: In the accounting program, or the business program?

DR: Either one, in maybe your building, your resources, classroom.

SO: If there was, Danielle, I did not know it. As the years went along, and I continued to be involved with the institution, both USF the institution and the College of Business, I became much more aware of the budget constraints and the problems, money-wise, that the university was having. I don't know that during that time period I was really ever cognizant of problems.

DR: So there was no effect on your education because of anything like that?

SO: Not that I was ever aware of.

DR: And do you remember an atmosphere on campus at the time—I know you were a commuter student, so you probably didn't have a lot—but in meeting places, protests, anything like that?

SO: No. The protests that took place in the '90s—or '90s—excuse me, in the late '60s, and maybe going into the early '70s, had all fallen by the wayside by the time I returned to campus. It was a good time there. The UC [University Center] was probably the dominant place for gathering, probably like it is today. The area around campus—again, I was older, and I was not spending a lot of time—they didn't have the Greek houses here, and so I didn't have the—I wasn't relying on the university for my social life, if you will. So, anyway, it was just not a part of my routine to stay on campus any longer than I had to after I'd gone through my classes and come over to the library for whatever research I had to do.

DR: Then back home.

SO: Yeah. Yes.

DR: So let's talk about some other areas. The—well, in the experience of going back and forth to Carrollwood and being a nontraditional student, do you think that was a positive thing, to make you more professional, or did it take away from your college experience?

SO: Well, one could easily say that six years in the military was all the college experience I needed. But again, I guess I've never really thought about it. I don't think that I ever felt that I didn't get everything that I wanted from being on campus. What I came to this institution for was an area that I'd fallen in love with during a two-week visit, again, for reasons that I shared with you before the interview started. And I came for an education. And at the time, I was truly feeling that I was being challenged in the courses, and the professors that I had were pushing, and pushing me in a way that I wanted to be pushed.

And so I was very positive about the experience. I was very positive about the opportunity to participate with that accounting honorary. I was very positive about the things that people like Professor West and the other professors that I came into contact with—the challenges that they were putting on the table. So I never saw anything as deficient. Now, because of the involvement that I had those last two quarters, did I look at that positively, when I got into my professional life, and the need to interact once I came back, or excuse me, and once I got into my professional role, did that help me focus back to involvement on campus? Absolutely. But so, from that standpoint, I did take that experience away, or that commitment, if you will, going forward.

DR: How many years were you here?

SO: I think it was just slightly over two—two full years. Remember I was trying to—that's what I

was saying. While my six years in the military weren't wasted, it was a time period that I felt that I'd gotten behind my peer group, and so I was trying to catch up.

DR: And when you graduated—so you had a vision of this certification to be a CPA. That was the goal in the end?

SO: I had a vision of getting out in the business community. The accounting degree gave me the basic ability to sit for the CPA exam and give me that professional credential. That's true.

DR: Was there—did they prepare you specifically for it, in the classroom, for this exam, or was that something you do on your own?

SO: The accounting program is one that—if your question was do they teach you the exam, the answer is no, they don't teach you the exam. What they do is they teach accounting principles. They teach certain issues in accounting. They teach ways to make you think about business problems and how they have an impact on the accounting—the financial statements that businesses use. The accounting exam—the CPA exam—is one that probably hits you from any number of different directions, so you don't have the ability to study in college for the exam. What you have the ability to do is study so that you're best equipped to answer the questions that eventually may be on the exam. I don't know if I've just answered that well enough for you, but—

DR: So did you take it immediately after you graduated?

SO: Yes.

DR: And you received your BS in accounting in 1977.

SO: Yes.

DR: And let's talk a little bit about how you stayed in the area, and then maybe go on to your continued involvement with USF.

SO: Actually, I didn't stay in the area. What happened was when I graduated, I met a—in fact, it was during that time period that I told you I was involved as the president of the accounting honorary. We held the Southeast regional conference meetings here on our campus for this organization, because it's a national honorary. And during that time period, I met a gentleman who was the regional partner and managing partner for the Minneapolis office of a firm, and after spending the four days of the conference with him, because he sat on the national board of directors, David asked if I'd be interested in visiting his city and coming to work in his office.

And I said no. And after a couple more days of talking with him, I—again, remembering what I shared earlier that I was a little bit older than most of the other students graduating—and he presented an opportunity that if I came to Minneapolis for a two-year tour, he would send me any place in the country that I wanted to go. So I visited Minneapolis. I liked Minneapolis, and after two years, I said I'd like to return to Tampa. So I was transferred down to Tampa. Now I'm in Tampa to stay, yes.

DR: And so you continued with this firm?

SO: I continued with the firm.

DR: And what was the name?

SO: The name was—back then it was known as Alexander Grant. It has changed its name to Grant Thornton and still exists in the Tampa Bay area today. But I returned for two years, and then I went to another CPA firm in the area. At that time it was known as Coopers and Lybrand, and today it's known as PricewaterhouseCoopers. But since that time, I've stayed in the area and stayed in the accounting profession.

SDR: And did you have any involvement with USF during these years?

SO: Yes, I found time for some involvement. When I returned back to the area, I obviously re-contacted the professors, and one of the interesting things about the experience and Minneapolis is—Minneapolis for me was a very interesting community. There was a very strong focus up there on the business community. There's a very strong focus on the cultural part of that community, and there's also a very strong focus on education. There's three prongs of community that I became aware of through what I was doing up in Minneapolis when I first got there. When I returned to Tampa, I sort of set a chart, if you will, for myself that if I was going to get involved, I wanted to get back involved on campus. I wanted to get involved in the cultural part of the community, and I wanted to get involved in the downtown business activities. So, in different ways, I accomplished all three of those. So your question is did I get back involved on campus, and I did. In the early '80s, I was asked to serve on the national alumni board.

DR: Someone approached you about this?

SO: Yes, ma'am.

DR: And who was that? Do you remember?

SO: I'm not remembering now exactly who it was. It could have been a gentleman who I had some contact with when he first arrived on campus, a fellow by the name of Jerry Koehler—Dr. Koehler. And he served as an assistant in the early '80s, if I'm recalling correctly, to Jack Brown, who was then the president of USF. And I had lunch with Jerry, and I think as an outgrowth of that, he asked if there was interest in getting back involved. And next thing I knew, somebody was calling and asking if I'd serve in some capacity on the board. And I did.

DR: And what capacity was that?

SO: I don't remember. It was just as a board member—I think just whether it was an at-large member—they don't have, as they do today—I'm not exactly remembering.

DR: Do you remember your responsibilities for the position or anything?

SO: No. But I do remember I actually did show up at a meeting or two. I showed up at enough meetings that I guess a couple of years later, they asked if I'd serve as—well, actually, during that time period, we were still having elections, so I was asked to serve as president of the National Alumni Association, or at least submit my name to be voted on by the alumni. So I think it was 1984 I was elected president of the National Alumni Association. So again, to your earlier question—

DR: And you must have had responsibilities with this.

SO: Yes, ma'am.

DR: And what were some of those responsibilities?

SO: Well, at that time, we were a developing chapter—or chapter—we were a developing organization. We were still under the leadership, or we'd been under the leadership of a wonderful gentleman by the name of Joe Tomaino. Joe is, even today, I think, still involved on campus in different activities. If I'm not mistaken, but right now he's with the athletic department. But—or he could be at education, or he could be anywhere else. But Joe was, if I recall, the first executive director for the alumni association. So it was Joe who ran the alumni association. The rest of us were there to do whatever bidding Joe wanted or Joe needed, because that's how dynamic a person he was.

And then he stepped down, I think, the year that I came into office, and another gentleman by the name of Lee [Leland] Patouillet—who is, if I'm not mistaken now, at the University of Pittsburgh—he was with us for a number of years, and then he went on to be alumni director of Pitt. But we were building an organization, as more graduates went out from this area to different corners of the country, or different corners of the state. Chapters were being formed, and the spokes of the wheel, if you will, were extending outward to all sorts of places in the United States.

That was part of what we were building. During that time period, the concept of a capital campaign came up, and so the Alumni Association, in conjunction with the administration, were talking and working together to sort of put a face to USF so that they could go forward with the initial capital campaign. And the VP for community affairs, or development, if I recall, during that time period was a gentleman by name of Joe Busta, and Joe and I worked very closely during that time. There were other committee members, but we were searching during that time period for a consultant who was going to work with the university on that very first capital campaign. So those were some of the things, to answer your question, Danielle, that we were doing in that time period.

DR: And this is a difficult task, because we've got a short history here, and you're trying to bring—make these ties that have never been there with all these people.

SO: Well, in fact, you know, today, we have President Genshaft, who is leading the community charge in the university. Prior to Judy, we had Betty Castor, who just served the university extremely well, as far as the outreach into the community. And before her, there was Frank Borkowski, and before Frank, there was Jack Brown, who was there during that time period that I was referring to, when the consultants came forward and said, You know, we really can't start this campaign because our initial indication is that the community doesn't know enough about you that they want to give.

And while the university had received gifts of varying sizes during that time period, there still was not a focus in our community on what USF meant to the community, specifically or generally. So there was an education process that was needed, and each school during that time period got their own development directors, and that was all part of that initial effort to get out and spread the word that whether you were in fine arts, or whether you were in education, or engineering, or business, that that particular college, that particular group of professors, this particular institution, had something to offer the Tampa Bay community, and the west coast of Florida in general.

DR: And the natural progression from here is athletics. Let's talk about how—do you think your program was enhanced by the addition of athletics, especially football?

SO: Well, you've jumped ahead a little bit, because football was a concept that was brought up by many people at different times, and it was always rejected. To put a football program together was going to cost a lot of money, and any money that could be spent on football, people thought could

be much better spent on other education.

DR: Did you think that too?

SO: You know, it's funny. I supported football, but I was always in agreement with the people that wanted to stay away from the football program. And a friend, and somebody who I spent a lot of time with during a certain period of time, Richard Lane, another alumnus, was frankly, from my perspective, one of the key members of the campaign to put football on this campus. And Richard would not say no. Richard would plow forward while I would tell him that I didn't feel comfortable actively out there supporting, I would certainly in the background do whatever I could, because I thought football would be a neat thing. I thought that—I was comfortable where we are. I believed it could be what it has proven to be, and what it still can be in the future. But other people like Lane, and it wasn't him alone, but from my perspective, Richard was out there as a key guiding light to seeing what we now see as our football program develop into what it's now become.

DR: And how were you involved in the university when football was coming about?

SO: Well, again, the—at different times, I've been involved, not only on the National Alumni Association, but I've also been involved in the College of Fine Arts, on an advisory board that existed in the early '80s, and then in the College of Business. When my time as president of the alumni association ended, I felt very strongly, as many of the past presidents have, that to continue to keep the old presidents involved may be a nice thing, but it's really important to get on with new blood, new people, who could bring something to the table from either their unique experiences or perspective. In some of the earlier years, there were a lot of people who kind of hung around and stayed around. And so I felt strongly that it was time to move on.

Well, for me, moving on just meant that it was time to spend more time at the College of Business. And they had a dean, and they had a development officer by the name of Dick Bowers, who was one of the original, or the original athletic director here at USF, who in the early '80s, left as athletic director and moved on to become associate dean for development. And Dick and I had gotten to know each other, and so at that time, I think I was on the advisory board for the management department, or the advisory board for the accounting department.

But I'd been involved, and Dick and I talked about different things that we could do for the College of Business, either fundraising or—and we started a leadership class that involved a number of College of Business graduates who would come back. And each class size was about 25, and we'd meet once a month and introduce them to what was going on on campus and what was going on in the College of Business. And people who had been friends and who the university had a relationship with, or who had a relationship with the university perhaps might be a better way to look at it. Most of them were College of Business students, but every now and then, someone would creep in from engineering or one of the other colleges. So that program lasted for several years.

DR: What years, do you think?

SO: I don't know. I was trying to recall the other day. I think we started it in the late '80s. But certainly by 1990, '91, the program was in full swing, and by the end of the '90s, it had kind of run its course. The people—whether it was the economy had rebounded in such a way that people, even for that half-day program once a month—it was difficult for people to make it on a regular basis. There was some frustration, where we'd have 25 or 30 in a program, if only 15 or 20 showed up, were we really get everything out of the program? And so it sort of died a quiet death, but it's still a group that was very active before, and it's a group that's been active since. And these are people who cared about the College of Business and their respective disciplines, and continue to this day to

do so.

DR: And at some point, you were a Board of Directors president for the Sun Dome.¹ Were you involved in that? Was that during these years?

SO: I think as I sit here, I'm still president of the Sun Dome. Yes, ma'am.

DR: Okay. And do you want to talk about that, and what you do for the Sun Dome?

SO: I don't do anything. There's a wonderful gentleman by the name of Michael LaPan who's the real president. The real president—the real executive—I think my title may be president of the board, but the real president, the real executive director of the group, is Mike LaPan. Mike has been in that position for, I want to say, almost 20 plus years now. The Sun Dome, as you and probably anybody looking at this at whatever point [know], is the multipurpose facility on campus for housing everything from sporting events to concerts to graduations to any number of other activities. And it had been for many years, until certain other venues were built in Tampa and the Tampa area—it was the primary venue for concerts coming through this area, from Sinatra to Billy Joel to Elton John to Pavarotti. And, I mean, this was the place to be. The Sun Dome was the spot, and it received nationwide recognition as one of the top 10 small facilities in the country. LaPan has been held in high esteem by his peers throughout the country. So my involvement—I show up at meetings when I'm told to show up.

DR: When did you become involved on the board?

SO: I've been on the board—I don't know—maybe 14, 15 years now.

DR: And during this time, what about the progress of this campus? Do you have anything specific you'd like to say about it, and where it's been, where it's going?

SO: Well, the campus, again, starting from my real awareness, which is what you were asking me earlier—the 1980s—the early and mid-'80s, when that first capital campaign was being developed, and the awareness that this little institution was making a mark on the west coast of Florida. I think a couple things happened during that time period. One, that how important the community was to USF, and how important USF [was] to the community. I certainly became more aware, and a lot of people who I know became aware as well. But USF sort of always felt like a stepchild to Florida and Florida State. And whether that was because of the legislature, and the number of people in the legislature who had been graduates of those two institutions, as opposed to all the other institutions in Florida, there was always a feeling that the money distributed by the legislature for education seemed to make its way into their coffers before USF ever got—well, at least what they believed they deserve. And that prompted a lot of people on campus to relook at this public-private partnership.

And so we've had, for the better part of 20 years, an awareness and a recognition, even before the dollar crunch became as intense as it has the last few years, that we needed to do more with the community, and the community needed to become more involved here. And so when the likes of Frank Borkowski took over from Jack Brown, and then Betty Castor took over from Frank, and Judy Genshaft took over from Betty, I think that has been a continuing theme that has allowed this campus to grow and sprout, and become the kind of institution that it has. You mentioned before the interview started that the library was now going to become—or was being looked at to become a Research I library. Well, as we talked about, our campus has been designated by the legislature as a

¹ The Sun Dome was renamed the Yuengling Center in 2018.

level I research institution.

And so I think these are strides that have been made for a lot of different reasons, but you've got visionaries like our friend Lee Moffitt, and we've got the cancer facility, and Lee and his vision to put a facility on this campus, and for cancer research. And what that's meant for the medical program that we have, and then all the other—the medical school and everything else that's going on here, in gerontology and the different programs, more than I can even begin to think about and imagine. I mean, those are the strengths of this institution.

DR: It's very unique. And you must be very proud to see where it is now. How does it feel when you come on campus now?

SO: Well, you know, it's funny you even ask that question, because as I was making a left-hand turn to come in, the signage when you first come in makes a very positive statement. The palm trees and the maples, the oaks or whatever it is that come along the passageway—they didn't exist 30 years ago. They didn't exist, I don't even think 20 years ago. And so the willingness to create an identity and create an image for the people coming on campus, and that positive image—from the barren field that it was when I first showed up, for the first few days, and the number of buildings that are there—it's progress, it's very positive, and it's a great feeling to see.

DR: Were there any other experiences that you'd like to talk about?

SO: Not on camera, probably. Not that I can think of sitting here.

DR: Well, we really appreciate you being here, and thank you very much.

SO: Thank you.

DR: You've done a great job for this university.

End of interview.