THE SPECTRUM COMPILATION

January 2007 to December 2008

Courtesy Michael Benson, editorial columnist

January 2007

A President of a one of America's great universities once said, "The Academy should make for less misery among the poor, less ignorance in the schools, less suffering in the hospital, less fraud in business, [and] less folly in politics." That statement was made in 1876 by Daniel Coit Gilman, then president of Johns Hopkins University. In the ensuing 131 years, the Academy certainly has made some strides forward but has much still to do to fulfill the vision of President Gilman. Still and all, those fortunate to live in southern Utah should be profoundly grateful for fact that two institutions of higher education – a mere 45 miles apart – were established for the benefit of both our communities.

Neither time nor space will permit a recounting of the myriad sacrifices made by many to establish these institutions of higher education. The founding of SUU is unique in all the annals of American education in terms of an entire community rallying to support a fledgling institution which would go on to bless countless lives and subsequent generations.

The builders of these colleges understood that education opened the portal to a better life. Study after study reveal that the one great leveling influence to determine the ability to succeed is the level of education to which one attains. The formula is simple – invest more in acquiring as much knowledge and skill as possible and success will invariably follow. Recent data reveals that quality of life is directly proportional to the amount of education one receives and further translates into better health, increased earning potential, and more desire to participate civically and to give back to one's community.

I am honored to join those who have given so much to Southern Utah University and pledge to never forget its legacy while ensuring its future. I also thank my predecessors for their many efforts in making SUU what it is today and promise to a be a good steward of the resources – both public and prviate – committed to this University. My leadership style is simple: I have an open door, open phone, and open e-mail policy. Please contact me anytime at benson@suu.edu and I promise to give you and your comment, question, or concern both an expeditious and courteous hearing.

As I told our faculty, staff , and students last week, our University community will ask more of ourselves. We will work harder, we will expect more, and we will not accept mediocrity. Kingman Brewster, one of America's great education leaders and president of Yale University for 14 years, once said: "There is no greater challenge than to have someone relying upon you; no greater satisfaction than to vindicate his expectation."

Much will be expected of my tenure at SUU and I promise to not disappoint. Some might question or disagree with decisions I make or directions I take, but I will guarantee results as we work together to move SUU forward. Thank you for the trust you have placed in me as my wife and I embark on our tenure in Cedar City.

February 2007

As the annual legislative session nears its conclusion, many within the higher education community are buoyed by the prospects for increased support for institutions throughout our state. For SUU, record enrollments – together with strategic budget and planning by the institution and a commitment by students for a limited second-tier tuition increase – portend a much-needed salary increase for faculty and staff.

There is no better way to spend resources than to invest in our people – human capital is the key to our success now and inthe future. Some have already left campus for double-digit base salary increases at other institutions and we still have ground to make up to get more in-line with market averages in many areas on campus. The University has already undertaken a comprehensive salary analysis to address this issue and this year's increase is the first step to rectify a serious problem.

In addition to these salary increases, Southern Utah University is on the cusp of an infusion of $1 million of additional base budget dollars thanks to the efforts of Senator Bill Hickman and S.B. 90. This far-sighted legislation is an enormous boon to all schools with the Utah System of Higher Education and will allow us to expand and improve our offerings and services. A graduate of Southern Utah, we thank Senator Hickman for his efforts in his multi-year quest to engender support for this effort. He has done yeoman work for all of us that will pay enormous dividends for years to come.

We are also grateful to Senator Dennis Stowell for his championing an effort to secure over $2 million for the Utah Shakespeare Festival in order to buy properties continguous to the proposed Festival village. And, as always, we're grateful to Representative Bud Bowman for his advocacy of SUU on the Capital Facilities Committee and his continued support of various higher education initiatives in this part of the State. Representatives Brad Last and Mike Noel have likewise been very open to our lobbying efforts and extremely helpful.

I certainly don't envy these elected representatives as they attempt to do the "will of the people" during these weeks of intense hearings, negotiations, debates, and vote casting. We may not always agree with positions they may take on specific issues but they deserve our thanks for being willing to "step into the arena," as Teddy Roosevelt put it, and for participating in the greatest represenative democracyin the world. This year in particular, all of us involved in higher education are grateful for their increased support and investment in what promises to pay the best dividends for our State.

March 2007

While I certainly don't profess to be a linguist, it's interesting to note that among European languages, just one word – university – has the same prefix and stem. Only the grammatical ending differs among these languages. The prefix, uni, implies "unity" or "to be one." The stem of the word, vers, comes from the Latin "to turn."

During the academic year, students, faculty, and staff all focus on their individual studies, their own issues, trying to resolve their own challenges and finish their own assignments. But on the first Saturday in May, we come together as a campus community to celebrate "being one" in our collective efforts to promote the development, dissemination, and application of knowledge regardless of our fields of endeavor.

Commencement at Southern Utah University marks both the end of our students' "formal" educational training on our campus but also denotes the beginning of what we all hope is a lifetime of continued learning. As writer George Iles noted, "Whoever ceases to be a student has never been a student."

I invite all to participate in this year's Commencement as we recognize three individuals with the highest honor the University can bestow: honorary doctorates in the fields of public service, public administration, and humane letters, respectively. Governor Jon M. Huntsman, Jr., Mayor Gerald Sherratt, and community activist Ree Zaphiropoulos will all be cited for their individual contributions to our state. It promises to be a memorable day for our students, for the University, and for our entire community.

May 2007

The Notre Dame Phenomenon

I had a very interesting experience this past weekend in South Bend, Indiana. The last of my 3 brothers in law graduated with his MBA from Notre Dame. That's right - all 3 have earned undergraduate degrees from Brigham Young University and then matriculated at the world's best-known and most distinguished Catholic university. The family teases this Golden Domer troika that they are very confused Mormons. But each has walked away from Notre Dame with an increased appreciation for the world's oldest and largest Christian denomination while relishing the opportunity to share insights with their Catholic classmates into their own backgrounds and beliefs. Even I, an unabashed USC fan since my youth, am becoming more and more intrigued by the Notre Dame mystique.

The name itself, Notre Dame (our mother), evokes certain images and feelings that attract the attention of the world's leaders. When the first of the Woods' brothers, Bob, became an alumnus in 2001, the Commencement speaker was President George W. Bush. For good measure, then national security advisor and Notre Dame alumna, Condolezza Rice, was featured as well. This year's list of honorary degree recipients included Chairman and CEO of General Electric, Jeffrey Immelt, University of Michigan, President Mary Sue Coleman, and President of the Republic of Lithuania, Valldas Adamkus. In his Commencement address, Immelt noted a life-long admiration for the University and its focus on "scholarship, values, and excellence."

The Notre Dame campus is as beautiful a layout as any I've seen with its meticulously-kept quads, its famed "Golden Dome", its stunning Basilica, and its imposing stone buildings each with a slate roof. The University's annual budget of $650 million for less than 8,400 students, coupled with an endowment that tops $3 billion, allows it to strive to be the best at everything it does: from the uniformity of its buildings (all constructed with the same "Notre Dame Brick" which can even be ordered by anyone wishing to build anything), to its exclusive contract with NBC to broadcast every single home football game, to its long list of distinguished graduates who are part of the most loyal family of alumni as there exists in higher education. The University just dedicated the most amazing science center I have ever seen - The Jordan Hall of Science -at a cost of over $70 million.

Notre Dame's storied gridiron tradition, replete with traditions every institution should emulate, influences everything the University does. The Knute Rockne phrase "Play Like a Champion Today," is ubiquitous from shirts to signs to bumper stickers and speaks to the institution's unwavering commitment to doing everything first-class. During the first few days of orientation, all graduate students are taken inside the football locker room, led down the stairs toward the field, and encouraged to hit the "Play Like a Champion Today" sign hanging above the door. "Cheer, Cheer for Old Notre Dame" is, arguably, the most recognizable fight song in all collegiate athletics and was even played during the recessional at Sunday's graduation.

But why this fascination with all things Notre Dame? Because even a state school like Southern Utah University can aspire to do everything first-rate, to continue to maintain our beautiful campus, and to educate and train students who will go out and have an impact for good. We can strive to rise above the mediocrity that is all-too prevalent in the world today. We can expect more of ourselves, exceed our reach, distance ourselves from other places who are content to be average, and commit to leave our mark. And as Notre Dame President Father John Jenkins has said so well, "If you are afraid to be different in the world, how can you make a difference in the world?"

June 2007

The Sweet Southern Utah Summer

I've had the good fortune of spending the summer season in some of the world's great cities: London, Jerusalem, Washington, D.C., and Rome. But I'd take a Utah summer over any of those places any day. Of course it gets hot in Washington County this time of year, but who can argue with the stunning sunsets over southern Utah? Or how does one beat waking up early to sneak in a quick nine holes before work and taking in the majestic red rocks, the freshly-cut grass, and the unbeatable sound of the ball dropping in the cup for a birdie?

I'm waxing nostalgic, to be sure, but there is so much to like about summers in southern Utah that I would not want to be anywhere else. Last week was my first experience with the opening ceremonies of the Utah Summer Games and, admittedly, I was completely floored. I have to disagree with the Spectrum's assertion that the balloon hat idea was silly and foolish – to me it was thousands of young people having a great time and celebrating an incredibly beautiful summer evening with one of the most amazing fireworks displays I've ever seen. And as all those young participants circled the track, I couldn't help but envisioning every one of them enrolling as freshmen at SUU in a few years!

As the night progressed, I wasn't the only one bowled over by it all. About mid-ceremony, one of this year's inductees into the Utah Summer Games Hall of Honor – Larry Miller – turned to me and said, "I had NO idea this event was so huge with so many people!" He and his family were duly impressed with the incredible organization, the down-home feel and hospitality, and the sheer number of participants. At the end of last Thursday evening, my eight-year old son Samuel – still flying high over meeting the Jazz Bear and Mark Eaton – exclaimed, "This has been the best day of my life!" During the first 10 days of the Games, I've never seen so many soccer balls being kicked all over so many soccer pitches in my life. My heartiest congratulations to Kyle Case and his entire staff for their superb job with the Games. We wish Kyle the very best in his new endeavor in St. George and trust he won't forgot his good friends – or the great memories -- in Cedar City.

Summer is also a perfect time for all of us on campus to catch up on work, re-charge our batteries, and welcome countless youth to campus who participate in everything from sport camps to girl's state to the governor's honors academy. It's also a time for our physical plant to dive into numerous projects as they continue to maintain SUU as one of the most beautiful campuses anywhere. And since "the play's the thing" who else cant' wait to begin the annual phenomenon that is the Shakespeare Festival ? It doesn't get much better than summer in Southern Utah.

July 2007

The Unifying Power of Language

The establishment of the State of Israel in 1948 represented a unique first in the world's history: never before had a "dead" language been resurrected to become the national language for a new state. While Yiddish, a Germanic language written in Hebrew, was spoken in Jewish homes throughout Europe and taught to countless children during the Diaspora, the founding fathers of the Jewish State recognized the irreplaceable unifying power of a national language. Hence, the use of Hebrew was codified and mandated to be used in everyday transactions, in government documents, and in daily interactions between Israelis – regardless of skin color, national origin, or socioeconomic background.

Two quick examples help illustrate the emphasis of teaching Hebrew to new citizens of Israel. Shortly after the State of Israel was created, Operation Magic Carpet brought nearly 50,000 Yemenite Jews into the country and insisted they immediately learn Hebrew in order to more fully assimilate into everyday life. I was in Israel in the early 1990s when another bold undertaking, this one entitled Operation Solomon, airlifted Ethiopian Jews to safety. The operation set a world record for single-flight passenger load on May 24, 1991, when an El Al 747 carried 1,122 passengers to Israel; 1,087 passengers were registered, but dozens of children hid in their mothers' robes. Again, these immigrants – together with the thousands that flowed into Israel from the former Soviet bloc after the fall of the Berlin Wall – learned Hebrew as a requisite for day-to-day survival in their new home.

The influx of talent and brain power and intellectual capacity into Israel from these various countries is nearly impossible to fathom. With a population of just over 7 million, Israel is second only to the United States in the number of companies registered on the NASDAQ – a feat that speaks to the technological boom fueled by the infusion of these incredibly capable citizens. And the success of these new immigrants is inextricably linked to their ability to communicate in Hebrew with one another on a daily basis.

We have much to do in this country in terms of language capability and the percentage of our population who are conversant in a second tongue. During our most recent trip to Israel last year, our Palestinian bus driver was superbly fluent in 5 different languages. In visiting Europe, one encounters citizens much more fluent in multiple languages. Americans are woefully inadequate – and this inadequacy reveals, perhaps, a certain arrogance and narrowness in terms of world view – when it comes to our ability to communicate in foreign tongues.

All this said, the national experience of Israel is informative as it relates to the current immigration debate in the United States and the perennial bills that emerge both in the Congress and in state legislatures proposing English as the official language. Let there be no misunderstanding – second and third languages taught and spoken in homes by parents and children do nothing but enhance and enrich our national fabric. And, after all, apart from the Native Americans each and every one of us is or has ancestors who are immigrants to this land. But recognizing that success in everyday American life is inexorably tied to one's ability to communicate in English is vitally important. To suggest anything less or to accept anything short is a terrible disservice to those entering this country and wanting to improve themselves and their lives.

August 2007

What's the Big Deal with College Football?

What exactly is the allure of a fall afternoon, a rivalry game, a packed stadium and grown men running headlong into each other at full speed?

I'm always struck - especially at this time of year - by the enormous attention paid to college football. This fascination is mirrored by another unique phenomenon: Nearly all of America's great universities are, or once were, prominent in football. A quick glance the Top 25 rankings of any given season will undoubtedly include some of our country's finest public institutions: Michigan, Cal-Berkeley, Wisconsin, Texas, Virginia, and Florida.

Douglas Toma of the University of Pennsylvania, in his thought-provoking book, Football U, attempts to define the powerful galvanizing force that is college football. While baseball may be considered America's pastime, football - both collegiate and professional - has captured our nation's attention and devotion in a manner unrivaled by any other team sport. The National Football League's television contracts for coverage of its games exceed those of baseball, basketball and hockey combined.

A listing of America's football powerhouses in the 1900s included Harvard, Yale, Penn, and Princeton. Franklin Field at Penn and the Yale Bowl date to the early part of the last century and remain today a testament to the importance of college football on Ivy League campuses during that era.

Another football powerhouse in the 1920s, the University of Chicago, was a founding member of the Big Ten in 1895 but chose to abandon football in 1939. Chicago's president, Robert Maynard Hutchins, once stated: "Football, fraternities and fun have no place in the university. They were introduced only to entertain those who shouldn't be in the university." President Hutchins would get a stern argument to the contrary from the 110,000 blue and maize-clad fans at the Big House on a Saturday afternoon in Ann Arbor, Michigan.

According to Toma, while various external constituencies - alumni, trustees, regents, legislators, donors - may appreciate academic pursuits such as undergraduate teaching and applied research, they are often more interested in things collegiate. These same entities are brought together in hopes of increased support around a common interest: spectator sports on a football Saturday from South Bend to Salt Lake, Lincoln to Los Angeles, Baton Rouge to Boston.

By sheer force of numbers of participants and spectators, college football far exceeds any other team sport. Yet beyond the numbers, there is a unifying influence football Saturdays bring that is unmatched by any other community activity.

As it relates to rivalries within our state and throughout our country, there is no other activity that brings together such diverse groups of people - on both sides of the aisle and from every imaginable camp, persuasion, belief, conviction and allegiance - as a football Saturday. Each side identifies with "their" team, regardless of what differences might possibly separate them on the other 364 days a year. It is truly a phenomenon unlike any other.
Let the 2007 season begin!

October 2007

The British Empire and The Power of Sport

London is a city of monuments. Equestrian statues, buildings, arches, parks, bronzes, boulevards – all these speak to the glorious history of the British Empire. And they were built for a purpose. The predominant figure in Trafalgar Square is a soaring 185 feet-tall column with a lone figure atop: Admiral Lord Nelson, the British naval hero. Just to the side, however, is a smaller statue of Sir Henry Havelock with this statement made to his men while serving in India, "Soldiers, your labours, your privations, your sufferings and your valour will not be forgotten by a grateful country." No other nation has a longer memory than that of Great Britain. And no other nation, with as few natural resources or smaller population, ruled the world in such a way as the British. As the saying goes, the sun never set on their empire.

I was struck by the enormity of the British influence during a recent visit that included walking through the West End of this great city and marveling at the sheer size and number of so many monuments. As our travels would have it, my wife, Debi, and I had the opportunity to be in London last summer during the global event that is the World Cup on the very day England played Portugal in the quarterfinals. When the former lost on penalty kicks we saw the collective pain of a nation on the faces of small children crying as their parents held them in their red soccer outfits. Even more dramatic were the adults streaming out of pubs yelling and screaming their disbelief that a nation boosting a roster of instantly-recognizable names like Beckham and Rooney had to endure such an early exit. The papers the next day roundly criticized the coach, not a British national, by conjuring up images of an erstwhile empire and questioning how and why England had lost her way.

Two weeks ago I witnessed the collective hope of England – again – but this time the sport was rugby. Despite all the odds, the British made it through to the finals against the heavily-favored squad from South Africa, a team that beat them earlier in the tournament 36 nil. That a nation was pinning its hopes, and trying to address some of its political, social, and economic questions through this rugby final, was manifest in two-story billboard affixed to the side of a store in Piccadilly Circus. There stood the British team, team and fists clenched, firmly set on the white cliffs of Dover, staring across the English Channel and challenging all comers. The message was clear: while this "precious stone set in the silver sea", as Shakespeare called England in Richard II, no longer sits astride the globe, it still has tremendous national pride. And this pride is manifested now in sundry and tangible ways, most powerfully in its backing of British athletic teams who compete on the global stage.

Each nation has its own set of challenges. America is certainly still trying to find its place in the world in the post-9/11 world. England is charting a new course as well. But at least on one afternoon, an entire nation came together -- through the unbelievably powerful medium of sport -- behind a side of men who represent the best a nation has to offer.

November 2007

Why the Carter Carillon?

Some have asked why the University is building a carillon tower - 76 feet tall and complete with 26 bells - right in the middle of campus. A few more days and crews will begin the stone, brick, and finish work on the Carter Carillon. Now visible from I-15, the Carillon soars above the City's rooflines and promises to be a significant landmark for years to come as well as an extremely handsome addition to upper campus.

The tradition of towers or carillons associated with universities dates back to campuses as old as Oxford and Cambridge. The most famous towers - Magdalene and Tom Tower at Oxford - have been the center of age-old practices and traditions such as the famed May Day celebration in Oxford when the Magdalene College Choir ascends the tower each May 1st and ushers in daybreak as University students and townspeople celebrate below. This centuries-old tradition was chronicled in Shadowlands, the film about the life and writings of the famed Oxford professor and Christian apologist, C.S. Lewis. The tower itself is the first thing one sees as one enters the city center and is the most famous icon of one of Oxford's most renowned colleges.

Ringing bells to signify events such as graduation of even the passage of time is another tradition we intend to establish at SUU. The bells have been programmed to play 100 songs - a sampling of songs complied by University and community members - and will play on special occasions. We also plan to include walking beneath the Carter Carillon as part of the Commencement procession as faculty, staff, and graduates make their way through campus en route to the Centrum. Also, the Carillon itself can be played through keyboard mechanism in the new Teacher Education Building.

While Southern Utah University isn't quite as mature as England's finest universities, it nonetheless has a history just as proud and unique. The east-west spine running through campus with the statue of Old Sorrel on the western edge takes one up the recently-completed stairs, walking eastward, and terminates at the Carter Carillon. Just east of the new tower will be another campus addition: a triangle-shaped planter box filled with seasonal flowers and plants complete with a stone edge people can sit on and gather that will attract folks into the new plaza area. Given the green shows staged by the Shakespearean Festival each summer, this part of campus is a natural gathering point and this new structure will provide even more opportunities for the community and visitors to relax and to enjoy what is arguably the most beautiful and mature part of SUU.

The Carter Carillon will also feature four clock faces, back lit and 6 feet in diameter. The tower and bells will also be uplit at night and its copper roof is designed to match the cupolas now atop Braithwaite and Old Main. All three structures - renovated Old Main, the new Teacher Education facility, and the Carter Carillon - will be dedicated on Founders' Day in March. It promises to be a celebration not to be missed and will usher in a new and exciting chapter in the upper campus history and reshaping.

Finally, there is a symbolic element to the Carter Carillon that, I hope, will be long-remembered by all who see it. Just as one cranes the neck to look upward and the soaring structure and to hear the magnificent bells, in so doing one is forced to look skyward symbolizing a rising future for SUU and our graduates. I wish to thank all those who have contributed to design and construction of the Carter Carillon, particularly the Cline Dahle family and Cal and Gay Carter and their children, as well as the various subcontractors and our own campus personnel who have worked hard to make this project such a success. It promises to be a remarkable addition to an already beautiful campus.

December 2007

Go Get 'Em Jill!

Next month one of Southern Utah's own, Ms. Jill Stevens, will be competing for the title of Miss America. Just to be counted among the contestants in this annual event is accomplishment enough, but Jill's background – and her relatively new arrival on the pageant scene – has captured the nation's attention. We are all extremely proud of Jill and the superb manner in which she continues to represent her alma mater.

I first met Jill when she served on the SUU presidential search committee as the student representative on that panel in November 2006. Her voice and opinions were informed and passionate and her service was immediately recognized by Trustees and Regents for its influence and effectiveness. I also remember Jill dressed in her camouflaged fatigues, walking from class to class, with her ready smile and cheerful greeting, never too busy to say "hi" to anyone or too haughty to spend time with her fellow students.

The country's media have rightly focused on Jill's remarkable life and her unorthodox climb for someone who, admittedly, had never worn high heels until her first pageant experience. As the first contestant since the pageant's founding in 1921 to be a combat veteran (Jill is a medic in the Utah National Guard's 1st Battalion, 211th Aviation Regiment), Jill has earned every accolade she's received.

Not an interview – whether on Good Morning America or for a piece in Newsweek – passes that she doesn't mention Southern Utah University and the transforming experiences she had on campus. As a University, we couldn't afford to buy such media mentions or attention. But that's not the point – we don't pay Jill a dime to mention SUU and her educational and personal experiences in Cedar. For Jill it's genuine and heartfelt. She readily recognizes that her success academically and personally, and now within the world of pageants, are thanks in large part to the mentoring and support and encouragement Jill received from staff and faculty and friends at SUU. And those who know Jill also recognize the impact of her amazing family on her and her meteoric rise.

Even though my attempts to line up Jill with my nephew, Michael (a third-year cadet at the Air Force Academy – what a perfect match between Army and Air Force!), have proven unsuccessful, I'm still one of her biggest fans and look forward to being in Las Vegas cheering her on in January. All of us at Southern Utah University could not be more proud of Jill. Lock and Load, Sgt. Stevens!

January 2008

It's That Time Again!

The Utah State Legislature convenes in Salt Lake City this week for yet another annual session. Faced with record surpluses, this session promises to provide plenty of fireworks as our elected representatives grapple with the seemingly endless list of needs and requests facing our state and respective communities. I again state my appreciation for and gratitude to our part-time lawmakers who really do try their best to make informed and judicious decisions. We may not always agree with what these legislators do but that is the beauty of our democratic republic – we select those we hope will best represent us and charge them with the task of being informed on issues that impact us all.

Last year proved to be one of the most beneficial years to Southern Utah University as our base budget was increased by nearly 12 percent, salaries for faculty and staff saw the biggest jump in years, and bond authority was approved to construct replacement student housing. The Utah Shakespeare Festival, recognized throughout the state as a cultural gem right here in our backyard, also received one-time funds to purchase additional property within its proposed Festival Village complex.

SUU, and the larger Cedar City community, have much at stake this session. Our own Senator Dennis Stowell is sponsoring legislation, similar to last year's Senate Bill 90 (The Higher Education Enhancements Act) that would pump an additional $2 million in base funding into SUU's on-going operations . In addition to helping with faculty and staff salaries, this funding will enable us to address other acute needs on campus while allowing us to continue with our unique niche of being Utah's public/private higher education option: a private school experience (manageable campus with smaller classes) at a public school price (1/8 the cost of what a student might pay at a liberal arts college).

We are also in the queue for capital funding with our proposed Science building expansion being ranked #4 on the State Board of Regents' list of priorities. This new facility is desperately-needed as SUU ranks dead last in terms of state funding for buildings in the past six years despite leading the Utah System of Higher Education in percentage enrollment increases for the past 3 years in a row. The Utah Shakespearean Festival is also appealing for funds through the Economic Development Committee to assist with the construction of a new Globe-like Theatre to replace the aging Adams facility.

As guaranteed in the First Amendment of our Constitution, you and I as citizens have the right to "petition the government for a redress of grievances." All of us charged with lobbying on behalf of SUU will do just that in the coming weeks at the State Capitol and I would urge you to contact our legislative delegation – as well as key members of the Higher Education Subcommittee and the Executive Appropriations Committee – by phone or e-mail. All this contact information is available at Utah. Gov. Thank you for supporting Southern Utah University and Go Thunderbirds!

February 2008

Pulling for the Underdog

The saying that "athletics doesn't build character, it reveals it" has been reinforced by two recent stories within the sports world: one global and one much more local. First, the amazing Super Bowl victory by the New York Giants over the heavily-favored and much-ballyhooed New England Patriots was the ultimate story of an underdog rising to the challenge and slaying Goliath. On top of being a fantastic game, I was even more pleased for the Giants in light of the Patriots' having cheated by illegally videotaping other teams' signals, admitting as much, and being punished by the NFL.

Now the genius of Coach Bill Belichick is being questioned by allegations that the Patriots have been employing these strategies since he came to the Patriots in 2000 – a charge that greatly diminishes his stature as genius if illicit means were used to advantage his team and its schemes. There was something terribly gratifying in seeing the baby-faced Eli Manning sticking it to the NFL's only undefeated team and not being changed one bit by his success and the attention his performance garnered. The perpetually dour Belichick even left the field before the game had officially ended, adding fuel to the fire of his critics who maintain what a lousy sport he really is. In typical Eli Manning fashion, David Letterman asked him why the Patriots' Coach left early and skipped the typical post-game handshakes and greetings. Manning responded, "Maybe he wanted to beat the traffic." Way to keep it classy, Eli!

As heart-warming as the Manning and Giants' story is, a local one is even better. I first got to know Dax Crum last summer when our administrative offices were temporarily moved over to the Sherratt Library. One of Dax's 3 jobs was to help clean the facility and he was always there, always smiling, and always diligent in his assignment. This job was on top of his other obligations as a student-athlete, a husband, and graduate student at SUU. And while such a situation is not THAT unusual for student-athletes these days, Dax's story is remarkable in that he earned a spot on the Thunderbird roster to play basketball with only one hand. When awarded a scholarship last December, Dax claimed that the extra money would now allow him to drop from 3 part-time jobs down to 2.

Dax's grit and determination – on top of his skills as a terrific basketball player – are now attracting national media attention including the AP, ESPN, and CBS Sports. He was just featured on Channel 2's "Talking Sports" last Sunday night. Dax's wife is every bit his equal, having played soccer for SUU and being named last year's valedictorian. Coach Roger Reid continues to receive notes and messages from young people around the country who cite Dax as their inspiration. To these young people, Dax's dream of playing Division 1 basketball has spurred them to keep trying and succeeding and refusing to allow any sort of disability from deterring them and the pursuit of their dreams. What a great example of the very best SUU has to offer. For all those examples of athletes and coaches willing to cut corners and to cheat to get an edge over their opponents, Dax Crum continues to overcome all sorts of odds just to compete and to inspire all those fortunate enough to see him play.

November 2008

A Time to Bond

With every day revealing yet more dire news for our state, national, and international economies, one would think government should not adopt the policy of increasing expenditures while revenues decline. And yet billions in "bailouts" have been and are being requested for insurance and financial institutions as well as the automobile industry. Federal assistance is even going to homeowners to stem the tide of foreclosures across America.

I certainly don't profess to be an economist but I recall that experts from Keynes to Galbraith have recognized that government spending to spur the larger economy in times of recession is necessary. Historians have argued for decades as to what exactly kicked America of the depression of the 1920s and 30s - some maintain it was World War II - but none can doubt that Franklin Roosevelt and the New Deal, with its alphabet soup of new government agencies, put thousands back to work while ushering in a whole new era of Big Government.

Our current economic climate may call for a similar approach to spur recovery. I am one of a growing chorus in Utah urging our state to consider bonding for much-needed building infrastructure. The moment is right where need can be met with circumstance and done in such a way that current and future generations will benefit from this investment in our institutions. Three factors are converging to support such a position: first, the market for government bonds is good and getting better for preferred rates and terms; second, construction costs - while varying from one industry and market to another - are generally favorable and contractors and subcontractors are motivated to be competitive to get work; and third, and perhaps most important, bonding for facilities now will be a significant boon to our economy and ensure that thousands of Utahns are kept in employed in our of state's most important industries: construction. Economic data suggests that for every $100 million in building projects pursued, over 4,000 new jobs are created.

To be sure, I have a vested interest in encouraging our State Legislature and Governor in supporting these bonds as Southern Utah University is on the list for the expansion of our science building (4th on the State Board of Regents' list and 12th on the State Building Board ranking). This project is absolutely vital to our future success in preparing students in the sciences and ensuring our role as offering the best undergraduate education anywhere. The University has been very aggressive in moving this building priority up the list by securing $5 million in non-state money: $3.6 million from private donors and $1.4 million from the Federal Government, thanks to Senators Reid and Bennett and Congressman Matheson.

Without question, a significant bond issuance - backed by the State of Utah's AAA bond rating and benefitting citizens everywhere with projects from Logan to St. George - will be a bold move and will require broad support and political courage. But pressing infrastructure needs will only grow more acute if we do not act now. I urge all those inclined to contact local and state officials to express support for these bonds as a means whereby Utah, its economy, and its citizens will benefit for years to come.

December 2008

A New Year and a New Attitude

With the dawn of a new year, comes the requisite new year's resolutions to lose weight, be a better person and, in my case, shave a few strokes off the golf handicap. But I've also decided to focus on the principle that suggests that life is really about the 90 percent of how we react to the 10 percent of what happens to us. And 2009 promises to give us ample opportunity to practice this philosophy if the latter part of 2008 is any indication of what is ahead.

The stark reality of the present is that every day seems to reveal another piece of harrowing news about wars and ethnic strife, global financial crises, and yet more layoffs and plant closings. But for all these dire conditions, can anyone argue that life has never been better in terms technological advances, ease of getting from one end of the earth to the other, medical care, and access to news, information, and education? Never in the world's history has the standard of living been higher for those of us fortunate to live in a community such as Iron County where life is amazingly convenient and tranquil.

To adopt a positive attitude in the face of all the negativity that surrounds us is not to play Pollyanna or to ignore reality. Rather, it is adopt the attitude espoused by Winston Churchill during the dark days of World War II who encouraged his fellow Brits to never abandon the "stiff upper lip" approach to challenges their ancestors had practiced for generations.

For those of us committed to the future of Southern Utah University, we readily recognize the inevitable challenges ahead and the "tough sledding" we will be called upon to undertake. But we are steeled for these hard times by the examples of those who have gone before. How can we do anything less when we read of those intrepid pioneers who mortgaged ALL they had to hire faculty, to make payroll, to establish the BNS, and to build Old Main? Not a day passes that I don't reflect on the heritage left to us by these hearty souls who were indefatigable in their efforts to have an institution of higher education in the face of unfathomably long odds.

My resolution, then, is to look to these pioneers for my own attitude adjustment as difficult times continue. I will refuse to be dour and long-faced. Rather, I will be relentlessly optimistic and positive and will encourage my SUU colleagues to be the same. And I will look to the example of Holocaust survivor, Viktor Frankl, who lost his entire family in the extermination camps save one sister and whose life's work focused on the power of attitude as the ultimate determinant of success or failure. Dr. Frankl once wrote: "Everything can be taken from a man but one thing; the last of the human freedoms—to choose one's attitude in any given set of circumstances, to choose one's own way." Best wishes for a most prosperous and productive 2009!

November 2009

A Path Toward Differentiation

Michael T. Benson

I recently had the opportunity to attend a conference in New York City during which Michael Crow, President of Arizona State University, spoke about how institutions can thrive in these challenging economic times. He stated that every single college or university must forge its own path toward excellence and differentiation. Only by providing some "value added" in a specialty niche or with unique programs and offerings can institutions survive and thrive. President Crow's final observation was this: "Institutions that do not have a value proposition that is sufficiently robust will never be able to attract investors."

During the past several weeks and months, Southern Utah University has undertaken a comprehensive and exhaustive process during which a SWOT analysis (strengths, weaknesses, opportunities, and threats) has been performed, information gathered, input solicited, and conclusions drawn. Led by our recently-hired provost, Dr. Brad Cook, this effort has entailed nearly 40 meetings with faculty members, staff, trustees, community members, and other constituents to determine exactly where SUU is and where our focus should be directed now and into the future. I wish to thank all those who have participated for their candid and helpful insights as we have accumulated this data.

While we are acutely aware of the unprecedented economic times in which we find ourselves, we also gather great strength and inspiration from the myriad sacrifices made by those who preceded us. These founders have entrusted us with the future success of this remarkably resilient institution and we take this charge very seriously.

To paraphrase Michael Crow, what then is the value proposition that SUU offers and is it sufficiently robust to attract investors whether it be private support or state appropriations? We have emerged from this SWOT analysis even more convinced that Southern Utah University offers something wholly unique within our state and region: a private school experience within a beautiful and manageable campus, small classes taught by full-time faculty, and caring and conscientious staff committed to the success of each and every student. And this experience comes at a public school price. In point of fact, within our peer institution set, our tuition is considerably less than with those campuses comparable in size and offerings. Just as the SUU billboard that greets southbound travelers on I-15 states, "Private attention – public value."

This experience has also revealed that we have work to do in specific areas and places to shore up in order to further differentiate us from our competitors. During the coming weeks and into the future, we will continue to focus on quality as the defining denominator in all we do. As I stated in my inaugural address in September 2007, "We cannot afford to be average, nor can we be all things to all people. But those things that are asked of us and that we choose to do, we will do exceptionally well." This is SUU's value proposition and we will continue to focus, laser-like, on this path as it leads inexorably toward excellence and differentiation.