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# Richard Bowers oral history interview by Yael V. Greenberg, May 13, 2003

Richard (Dick) Bowers (Interviewee)

Yael V. Greenberg (Interviewer)

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USF Florida Studies Center  
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TOPICS OF DISCUSSION

*Year of arrival*

Dr. Bowers came to USF in 1963 as an assistant director of physical education and athletics in the College of Education.

*Circumstances that brought Dr. Bowers to USF*

Dr. Bowers arrived at USF in the fall of 1963. He was enamored with the weather. He was in Connecticut teaching and coaching at Central Connecticut in New Britain. He went to Manchester, New Hampshire, to scout a team. When he arrived there was a note on his door that said the game was canceled because the team had the flu. Dr. Bowers says it was so cold on the way back to Connecticut. He remember that it was zero degrees. The car he was traveling in ran out of gas on the turnpike. For half the night, while waiting for help, he thought of the warm South where he had grown up. After arriving back in Connecticut, Dr. Bowers taught his eight p.m. class. After class he went home and there was a letter from USF in the mailbox. "The letter felt warm just opening it," he states. The letter was an invitation to interview for a job at USF. At the time, USF had been open for three years. He went down to visit and decided to sign on to be a part of the young university.

*What did USF and the surrounding area look like?*

Dr. Bowers says the campus was still sparse in relation to the number of buildings. Not counting the dorms, there were about five buildings at the time. He thought it was a pretty campus even though it was sparse. He says the buildings were new. He also says it was the Florida scene. "You could see it was going to be a great university," he says. "You had two places to eat: the University Center or the University Restaurant on Fowler Avenue. You got to know everyone. You would see most of the people from the University at those two places," he says.

*In the early days, USF had two physical education departments*

USF had two physical education departments: basic physical education and professional physical education. Most faculty members taught in both areas. The departments held rank in the College of Education. In the professional department, faculty members taught training courses. The faculty trained teachers to teach physical education to kids.

Students in the professional department would take not only activities courses, but also method courses in administration and research. The students would also take all of the necessary education courses to get certified as full-time teachers in public schools.

*What did Dr. Bowers do as Assistant Director of Physical Education and Athletics?*

The duties of Dr. Bowers and other faculty members were to build facilities and teach classes. His first office was in the University Center. His second office was in Alpha Hall along with the College of Business. Finally, USF built PED, the Physical Education Building. PED is there today and still houses the Physical Education Department. In the early days, the department was busy building tennis courts, the track, and the golf course. The golf course was built in 1967. The department was in charge of building it. They built the golf course for 267,000 dollars. "It would cost that much per hole today," he says. "We have a real nice golf course today."

*Why was there a need for a golf course?*

Dr. Bowers says a golf course was needed for teaching classes, campus recreation, and the present and future, students, and faculty and staff. The faculty taught tennis, golf, swimming, and other physical education activities. USF was not involved in intercollegiate athletics, but in intramurals. Later on, USF introduced soccer as the University's first sport.

*Students were required to take P.E. courses in the early days*

Dr. Bowers says P.E. was required for all students.

*USF required students to pass a swimming test or take a swimming class*

Also, USF required that you pass a swimming test or take the swimming course. "Being in Florida, with all the water and lakes and opportunities, and if it saved one life in the course of its offering then it was worth requiring it as a graduation requirement. Some would take the test, and others would go ahead and take the class. They seemed to enjoy it. Some had never been able to swim all their lives so they felt a real need to learn how to swim," he says.

*What kinds of courses did the physical education department offer students?*

"We had a basic course called P.E. 101, which was the why and the how of physical activity. We would cover various health and fitness issues," states Dr. Bowers. The department had an exercise course where students were timed. They also gave the students a chance to learn a skill. The department would give students an introduction or review to tennis, golf, or such things as fencing or square dancing. If students wanted to increase their skills after taking introduction courses, other courses were offered where students could pursue their interests.

*Notables in the first two graduating classes*

Dr. Bowers says Lee Moffitt and John Grant, both legislators now, were in the first graduating class. Also, in either the first or the second graduating class, was Dr. Richard Ron. He became the chief economist for the U.S. Chamber of Commerce, and the economic advisor to the first Bush administration. "We had some outstanding graduates

in those early classes, and still do. We are proud of them. They are doing well all over the nation and the world,” he states.

*Were students required to wear a uniform in the P.E. classes?*

Dr. Bowers says some of the classes had dress requirements. But, by and large, students could wear their own clothes, provided they were appropriate.

*How diverse were both physical education departments in the early days?*

Dr. Bowers says there were between forty and sixty men and women in the departments. He says the faculty members were both good athletes and good teachers.

*USF and John Allen’s view of physical education and sports*

Dr. Bowers viewed President Allen as a great educator and person. He was impressed with the fact that President Allen wanted to get first things first. “All of us were for athletics, but he had a vision for the University to make sure that we had basic courses established. The library was the first building. That said it all. He wanted to get a great university built before he looked at intercollegiate athletics,” says Dr. Bowers. Later on, USF added spectator sports.

*President Allen agrees to add basketball to USF*

Dr. Allen eventually agreed to let the physical education department add basketball. The physical education department had started other sports, such as golf, tennis, and baseball. Dr. Bowers says the department finally petitioned the Board of Regents to go into basketball.

*Why did President Allen decide to start basketball?*

He asked Dr. Bowers at an informal meeting if it was time USF started basketball. Dr. Bowers told him it was time that USF had a major spectator sport. President Allen said ‘okay.’ USF then interviewed and hired a coach and began recruiting players.

*President Allen and football*

President Allen had previously been at the University of Florida. Dr. Bowers thinks President Allen was leery of football. Football was big at UF—with big budgets. It was very expensive. In the early days, state funds were used for athletics. The Board of Regents put a stop to it. USF had to use student activities money and gate receipts to fund athletics.

*Football begins under President Borkowski*

Football got started under President Borkowski. USF had a local supporter, attorney Ed Rood. He asked for a meeting with the president around 1993. Mr. Rood came out and pledged a million dollars with the hope of getting others to pledge a million dollars to start football. “We were off and running with a million dollar donation from a friend of the University. The regents could see that USF could make it financially. We had other alumni step up to the plate and prove to the regents that yes, we could raise maybe five million dollars,” states Dr. Bowers. “Then USF recruited Jim Leavitt and history has

shown that that was a good move. We have had very successful seasons. Football is good for campus morale,” he states.

*Dr. Bowers comments on the fraternity and sorority housing that is being built*

USF is now building fourteen buildings for fraternity and sorority housing. Dr. Bowers says President Allen did not want this. Dr. Bowers states his opinion about the housing, noting that, “It’s a good thing. It will go right along with football. And it will add to the spirit of the campus.”

*Dr. Bowers describes the first freshmen basketball season*

“We had a great freshman team, a very successful season. We beat FSU, UF, and Georgia Tech freshmen. We never had a home game because we had a small gym that would only seat about 1500. So we would play larger arenas, such as the Lakeland Civic Center, Curtis Hixon Hall, or the St. Petersburg Arena,” says Dr. Bowers.

*Building the Sun Dome*

USF had an election to decide whether or not to build a performing arts center off campus, or a convention type all-purpose center on campus. The fine arts people believed they could build a large fine arts center on the corner of 30<sup>th</sup> Street and Fowler Avenue. USF had no place to have convocations. USF had to go to Curtis Hixon Hall for graduation and the State Fair. Also, it was appealing to have a venue for basketball on campus instead of having to play at different arenas around Tampa. On election day, athletes passed out flyers in parking lots and all over campus. USF students voted overwhelmingly—ninety percent—for the Sun Dome. To get ideas for the basketball building, Dr. Bowers and others went around the country looking at various arenas. Dr. Bowers says many were going to air supported facilities because they were cheaper, translucent, and had less sidewall support. It was during the time of the oil crisis, and Florida, as other states, was looking for ways to save money. “We actually named it ahead of time. Everyone agreed that Sun Dome would be a very good name being in Florida. The department decided that the first person that came in with the name would get a lifetime pass to basketball games. The name came in fifteen to twenty times, but the first one in was the winner.

*Competition with fine arts*

Dr. Bowers says USF received a life size replica of a bull from cattlemen in Florida. USF received the bull after it was determined that the Sun Dome would be built. Students from the fine arts department found the bull and neutered it. Dr. Bowers decided to keep quiet about it. Later on, he received a call from one of the perpetrators who apologized for neutering the bull. The fine arts people were upset at losing the election.

*Dr. Bowers describes the first official basketball season in 1970 in the Sun Dome*

In 1970, varsity basketball began at USF. The opening game was against Duke University. “We had a very good crowd of about 5,000,” he says.

*Was there community support for beginning basketball and football?*

“I think so. Until recently, we have had very good crowds. It has dwindled a little. If you win they will come. Our basketball team has been more than respectable. We are certainly pleased. We’re in a good conference—U.S.A.,” says Dr. Bowers.

*USF forms a basketball conference*

In the early days USF basketball was in the Sunbelt Conference. USF had decided that if the basketball team was going to get a bid to the NCAA tournament it needed to form a conference. Dr. Bowers called Lee Rose, who was the athletic director at the University of North Carolina at Charlotte, to see if he would be interested in joining USF in the conference. Mr. Rose agreed and the Sunbelt Conference began. Later on, USF went into the Metro Conference, and now is in Conference U.S.A.

*Basketball’s effects on USF*

“Basketball has been a good spectator sport for us. We have a good venue. The Sun Dome is a good place to play. It seats about 10,400 people. We fill it up when Florida or Florida State comes down and when we play good conference games. It is a good basketball league. We are proud to be a part of it,” states Dr. Bowers.

*Football evolving*

Dr. Bowers says money is lucrative in football, but teams need to win and compete at the top level. Dr. Bowers says USF is doing both. USF opened up its 2002 season with the University of Alabama. In 2002, USF played Arkansas and Oklahoma. Now, USF has agreed to play the University of Central Florida. Dr. Bowers says that this will be a big rivalry.

*Demonstrations on campus during the 1960’s*

Dr. Bowers says there were demonstrations against the Vietnam War. He says USF had some radical students and radical faculty members who were against the war, the administration, and the government. He says they wanted to tear down the flag on campus. Dr. Bowers and others had to guard the flag to make sure it did not get torn down.

*Dr. Bowers becomes director in 1966*

Dr. Bowers became the director of physical education and athletics in 1966.

*What did Dr. Bowers do as director of physical education and athletics?*

He and the department continued to build facilities. In 1967, they built the golf course. They also continued working on other projects, such as building the tennis courts, handball courts, and the track and baseball fields. In addition to building facilities, they were building programs and serving on committees. Dr. Bowers and others served on committees such as the parking committee and the discipline committee. They were on all of the committees because the University did not have many faculty members that could serve.

*Any parking problems in the early days*

“We have always had parking problems even with 1700 acres and barely any buildings. It has always been a problem because everyone wants to park right at their building. We don’t have a space problem; it’s just that everyone wants to park right where they work. We never charged for parking and now to get a reserve spot I pay over \$500 dollars a year. Now we have campus shuttle buses taking people to their apartments and to the mall. The buses certainly are needed. Parking will always be a problem. We have a walking problem. We have spoiled everybody so that they want to park right at their building,” he states. Dr. Bowers says parking garages will be built in the future by the Sun Dome and by the library.

*Dr. Bowers works for a year in assisting President Brown*

When working with President Brown, Dr. Bowers was trying to keep the athletic program going. Dr. Bowers’ job for a year was to keep the athletic people giving continually. He was on special assignments with Dr. Brown to continue to talk with donors. Dr. Bowers and the president started a foundation in the early days to continue raising money not only for athletics, but also for USF. This foundation was called the President’s Council. Dr. Bowers says the council is a prestigious giving group.

*Dr. Bowers begins working in the College of Business*

When Dr. Bowers began working for the College of Business, they did not have much of a presence downtown. In order to get backing for the College of Business, they needed to get involved with downtown chamber events and all of the businesses. Dr. Bowers took one department at a time, such as accounting, and involved the department with downtown activities and businesses. One woman from a Tampa business gave \$20,000 a year in scholarships, and later gave two million dollars for a new business building that will go up the fall of 2003. Dr. Bowers says when he switched to the College of Business he basically became a fundraiser. The College of Business now has eighteen million dollars in endowments, and gives away \$150,000 a year in scholarships. Those endowments will be there forever. “I feel good that we have been able to raise money from the community to support our different departments in the College of Business,” he states.

*Why did Dr. Bowers decide to move from physical education to the College of Business?*

“I suppose I had fulfilled any destiny I had in athletics. I enjoyed athletics. Athletics is frustrating at times. If you don’t get the proper recruits then you don’t win. If you don’t win, then you are struggling to make your budget every year,” he states. Dean McIntosh, who was the graduate dean of business, asked Dr. Bowers if he would come over and help build the College of Business. Dr. Bowers says he needed a new challenge at that time. He has enjoyed working in the College of Business.

*Dr. Bowers comments on the success of the College of Business*

We are one of the top business schools in the nation. We have 6,000 people in the college. We have passed the accreditation standards at the highest level. We are ready to add a \$10.2 million addition to the Business Building. We raised that money in nine months. We’ve got a lot of good things going,” states Dr. Bowers.

*Dr. Bowers comments on the evolution of USF athletics*

“We have done well. Our program is on the upswing. Our athletics is more than respectable. I hope it stays there,” he says.

*How has the strategy of fundraising changed since Dr. Bowers first came to USF?*

In the old days in athletics, a \$100 contribution was a big amount. The athletics department called the first fundraising organization the Herd. That later changed to the Green Jacket Club. Then the department upped the contribution to \$1,000. Today, it is \$2,000. Dr. Bowers believed the athletics department needed a room to entertain major donors and guests. An entertainment room was built. It is called the Green Gold Room. In the Green Gold Room, a lot of fundraising goes on before and after games. Dr. Bowers says currently thousands of people give major dollars to the University. He says the medical school does quite well in getting donations for cancer, the Moffitt Center, various heart diseases, and Alzheimer’s disease. The number of alumni in the College of Business is over 40,000. Dr. Bowers says that if each of them gave \$100 the College would not have any budget problems like it does today.

*What is the Green Jacket Club*

It is an organization that contributes \$1,000 a year. The club is a major supporter of the basketball and football programs. Dr. Bowers says most schools have those kinds of clubs because they tie in with priority seats for basketball and football. He says it becomes a very good fundraising tool.

*Where does Dr. Bowers see the athletics program going in the next 10 years?*

“It is not going to be easy because people will look at their discretionary income and see whether they can go to the games. If we have to make it strictly on gate receipts it is going to be tough. We do get television money from basketball and football games. We receive money from student activities and from donations. We don’t get much state support. The athletics department will have to make it on their own. Sooner or later, they will have to weigh the priorities around the University,” he states.

*Any financial trouble in the College of Business*

Dr. Bowers says because of recent budget cuts, the College of Business is looking at possibly cutting summer school in 2004, and also cutting business centers that serve the community, such as the Center for International Business and the Center for Entrepreneurship. Dr. Bowers believes in putting higher education in everybody’s back yard.

*The new building addition to the College of Business*

Dr. Bowers says the new addition is needed for graduate courses, which is what most of the building will be, and for an auditorium for major speakers that come to speak at the College. “When we have invited people out, we haven’t had those kinds of facilities to show off the building. It will be a new front door for the College of Business,” he says. The new addition will be built on the east side of the Business Building facing the Sun Dome. The new addition will cost \$9.2 million and will be 40,000 square feet. The

addition will have executive education space, which Dr. Bowers says can bring a lot of money into the College of Business. Dr. Bowers says the building will be paid for the minute it is completed. The College of Business has raised \$10.2 million, even though the building will cost \$9.2 million. Some of the extra money will be used to renovate Chester Ferguson Hall, which is the Business Building.

*Why was the Business Building constructed in the shape that it is in?*

It was built during the oil crisis, and designed to be cool in the summer and warm in the winter. Dr. Bowers says it has not quite worked out that way. Some people call it the bunker. He thinks it is the safest building around. "It has served us well, and we are proud of it," states Dr. Bowers.

*What is the Gold Shield Foundation (Dr. Bowers is president of the foundation)*

Dr. Bowers is president of the Gold Shield Foundation, which began in 1983. In 1983, a fireman and a policeman were killed around the same time. George Steinbrenner called Dr. Bowers and asked him if he brings the Yankees down could the Yankees play USF and raise money for the families of the slain fireman and policeman. Dr. Bowers and Mr. Steinbrenner put the game on and raised \$60,000. Then the Gold Shield Foundation began. In the beginning, the Foundation just included Hillsborough County's law enforcement officers and firefighters. Mr. Steinbrenner called Dr. Bowers two or three years later and asked what it would take to include Pinellas County. Dr. Bowers said \$100,000. Mr. Steinbrenner agreed and gave \$136,000 through his family and the Yankees, gave \$136,000. Later on, Citrus County was added to the foundation. Dr. Bowers says the foundation now has \$1.7 million in the bank. MacDill Air Force base is now covered by the foundation. Today, the foundation covers five counties and the children and spouses of lost officers and firefighters. The foundation has sent twelve children through college, and three spouses. The Gold Shield Foundation has been the recipient of the Hero's Luncheon, put on by John Sykes in 2002 and 2003. Describing the foundation, Dr. Bowers says, "It is a labor of love."

*Did Dr. Bowers expect to stay for forty years?*

Dr. Bowers says he did not expect to stay at USF for forty years. "I have had chances to go back to Tennessee. I've got sand in my shoes. My kids were born here. I have enjoyed being a part of this thriving university. I've seen it grow and I'm pleased at what I see," he states.

*Where does Dr. Bowers see the university heading in the future?*

Dr. Bowers thinks USF is located in an area that will cause the University to continue to grow. He says USF is in a major metropolitan area and business center with a major airport and port. "We are destined to be a great university because of being in the right place at the right time and hiring good quality people. We've got good faculty and staff. We recruit good students," he states.

*Any last words that Dr. Bowers would like to leave for the record about USF*

He feels like he has played a part in building the Physical Education Building and in building the department. He also believes he has played a part in building a base for

athletics and in helping to build the Business College. He will have a scholarship named after him that will be an endowment. He says he will always be a part of USF. "I have enjoyed my years here. It has been a pleasure. It has been fun being part of building something that has been great and will be even greater," says Dr. Bowers.

*End of Interview*