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Tina Johnson oral history interview by Andrew Huse, October 4, 2004

Tina P. Johnson (Interviewee)

Andrew T. Huse (Interviewer)

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USF Florida Studies Center
Oral History Program
USF 50th History Anniversary Project

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TOPICS OF DISCUSSION

Ms. Johnson came to USF as a student in 1977.

Enrollment at USF

After graduating from high school in June 1977 and wanting to stay close to home, Ms. Johnson enrolled in classes at USF. Considering studying either business or engineering, she was confident that South Florida had strong programs in each.

Academics

Her first quarter at USF, Ms. Johnson took some introductory courses and decided that she “connected better with the business folks.” As a result, she declared her major in accounting during her second quarter at USF, later reflecting that, “I was just one of those lucky people that never changed majors after that.” Of additional appeal was the fact that Ms. Johnson was confident she would not have any difficulty finding a job after graduation. “Coming from a family of six kids, I knew that my family wasn’t going to be able to support me.”

Memorable classes and professors

The classes that she remembers enjoying most were those in the accounting program. Dr. Bill Stevens was one professor in particular who was very involved and supportive to students in the college of business, and had the most impact on Ms. Johnson. “He gave so much, that you [felt] you’ve got to give back.”

Connections in the local community

It was also important that students were meeting and establishing connections with business leaders throughout the community in order to ensure success after graduation. “One of the advantages of being in a metropolitan area ... is that we had a lot of interaction with the ... major firms that had offices in Tampa, so they were good potential employers.”

Living arrangements

While a student at USF, Ms. Johnson lived in the Gamma residence hall (now known as Castor Hall). “I lived on the fifth floor all three years because I thought maybe roaches couldn’t get to the fifth floor – I was incorrect, they can get [there]! ... But I did think that would be quieter ... It was incredibly convenient. I could make it to an 8:00 class by getting up at 7:30 and still showering and changing and getting to class.” Very few of the rooms would actually have phones in them. Instead, there were two phones at the end of the hallways, and residents had to take messages for one another when they would ring. “Back then, it was considered expensive to have a phone in your room.”

Studying and snacking

Aside from the Empty Keg, there were very few places to eat on campus while Ms. Johnson was a student. When studying late nights at the library, she would often be forced to drink and eat from the vending machines. “When you needed ... a caffeine kick, you’d go get that disgusting coffee and we’d sit outside and drink it ... There was no food [or] beverage allowed inside ... No matter what the weather was, if you wanted coffee you were outside ... [and] I just remember eating junk out of the machine ... That’s what you survived on.”

Empty Keg

Towards the end of the week, Ms. Johnson would occasionally spend time at the Empty Keg in the University Center. “Living on campus, I really didn’t leave campus that much ... I pretty much hung out on campus.”

Campus events and activities

Ms. Johnson remembers that there were not nearly as many events and activities on campus as there are now. Since the Sun Dome had not yet been completed, the basketball team was still playing at Curtis Hixon Hall. In the meantime, however, films were shown regularly on Crescent Hill and in the campus auditoriums, “So those were more of the things we went to back then.”

Student clothing

Though the heat prompted some students to wear shorts to class occasionally, “It was mostly a jeans place – not skimpy shirts and that kind of thing ... and tennis shoes.”

Off-campus entertainment

When they ventured off-campus, Ms. Johnson and her friends found “a few beer joints on Fowler Avenue ... that’s really where we’d go ... they were kind of dives.” They would also go to Clearwater Beach occasionally, though time was well spent sunning behind Gamma Hall or going to the swimming pool.

Graduation

Ms. Johnson was scheduled to graduate in the newly constructed Sun Dome in June of 1980, but because the arena was not completed in time, the event was moved to Curtis Hixon Hall at the last moment.

After graduation

After her graduation, Ms. Johnson “never really wasn’t involved” with the University of South Florida. Working with an accounting company in downtown Tampa, she had at least one formal function with USF students every year. “Now I was working for a firm that was recruiting students.” After gaining some experience in the business world, Ms. Johnson became involved with the accounting advisory council at USF, which she has been involved with ever since.

Publix; Jenkins’ Scholars

After leaving the Arthur Anderson accounting firm in 1986, she went to work for Publix, where she did not have as much direct involvement with university students. In 1994, the company started a scholarship program called “Jenkins’ Scholars” which put her back in regular contact with students at South Florida.

USF Foundation board

Within the last couple of years, Ms. Johnson has also become involved with the USF Foundation board. “It’s such a pleasure to see people who are so committed to giving back. They’re really special people ... Obviously private philanthropy is huge as the state funding goes down.” She has also recently become involved with an academic enrichment task force through the Foundation.

USF football program

Ms. Johnson insists that the USF football program has been tremendously helpful in connecting the community to the university and helping to attract donors and generate additional funding.

Advice for future students

“Make the most of the experience while you’re here, because you will have fond memories of it. Make sure you get involved ... and really experience the whole college life ... make sure you find a way to get involved on campus.”

End of Interview