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Donna Parrino oral history interview by Yael V. Greenberg, August 8, 2003

Donna Parrino (Interviewee)

Yael V. Greenberg (Interviewer)

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

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Current Position: Executive Director of ENLACE; Director of Latin Community Advancement for the USF Advancement Committee	Location of Interview: Tampa Campus Library
Date of Interview: August 8, 2003	Abstractor: Mary E. Yeary
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TOPICS OF DISCUSSION

Year of arrival

Donna came to USF in 1967 as an assistant reference librarian.

Circumstances that brought Donna to USF, her interview process, and her hiring

She is a native of Tampa and Ybor City. Once Donna finished graduate school in library science at FSU, she began thinking about jobs. She knew USF was new and growing. She asked for an interview and got one in April of 1967. She remembers telling her mom before she left the house for her 8 a.m. interview that she would be home for lunch. She left USF exhausted at 5 p.m. "It was one long grueling day of interviews." Every department head in the library interviewed her. The director at the time, Elliot Hardaway, was the first person to greet her and respond to her job inquiry. Elliot Hardaway was the first person hired by John Allen. She received the job offer in May of 1967. She was offered the position of assistant reference librarian with a starting salary of \$6,600 a year, "which was pretty good in those days." When she started her job in September of 1967, Mr. Hardaway had been promoted to dean of instructional services. Mary Lou Harkness assumed the position of library director.

USF campus in 1967

She remembers driving to campus for the first time. She did not see many buildings. Parking was not a problem at the time. Even in those days she remembers people complaining about the 5 p.m. traffic. The old College of Education building was being built in 1967.

Reference Department

The head of reference at the time was Dennis Robeson. The reference department was in the SVC building, the original library. The department was housed on the second floor. "We were very busy." One of her assignments there was inter-library loan librarian. At the time the library was new so it was a borrowing library. Now the USF library is a big lending library. We were very busy with getting inter-library loans for faculty.

What did she hear about USF in 1967? (Sam Gibbons' philosophy)

“Sam Gibbons was the father of USF. It was his notion that the founding mission of USF [be] to serve the needs of the working class of the community who could not afford to move elsewhere for college.”

Latino community embraces USF

“It [USF] was very accepted and embraced by the Latino community to come to USF from the very beginning. Education has always been a high priority among Latinos. Home ownership is number one, and education is number two.” Latino parents in Tampa encouraged their children to seek a college education at USF. Her family always supported her getting an education. They supported her working at USF because it was prestigious. Many Latinos attended the university. Many of the Latino females were education majors. The Latino men were usually business majors. A lot of her contemporaries are now retiring from the Hillsborough County school district.

Elliot Hardaway (embarrassing moment for Donna when she first met him)

“I was so in awe of coming to USF, and then here's the director of the library interviewing me.” He greeted her at the entrance to reference since his office was right next to the department. As she walked into his office her heel caught on something and fell off her foot. She had to go back and get her shoe. Mr. Hardaway did not see it happen, but his secretary did. Donna remembers thinking, “Oh, I hope this isn't the beginning of a disastrous day.” “He was very friendly and nice. He had a charming southern accent. I was very fond of him. He was a very fine gentleman.”

Why did students come to reference in the early days?

Mostly students wanted help with their term papers and sought assistance about how to get started with their papers. The reference department directed students to sources that would help them with their papers.

Donna leaves the library

In 1969 she left the library because her husband was in Vietnam. He came back from Vietnam and was sent to a naval air station in California. Donna moved with her husband to California.

Donna comes back to Tampa and begins working at the library again

Donna and her husband later returned to Tampa. She stayed home with her two kids until 1979 when she got the itch to come back. The new computers the library had acquired while Donna was away intimidated her. She wondered if she could enter the workforce again. Donna received much help and encouragement from Jeanene McNair, who helped Donna re-enter the technologically changed library. “She was very encouraging.” An OPS position was all that was available, so Donna took it. She was hired as OPS for acquisitions.

How had the university changed during Donna's absence?

Donna says when she returned there were more buildings, students, and new faces. When she returned to USF the current library had just opened.

What did Donna do in acquisitions?

In acquisitions, Donna purchased out of print books. She came back to the library at the tail end of years when the library had money to purchase out of print books. When she came it was a dwindling thing because there was less money.

Donna moves to cataloging

In 1981, there was a cataloging vacancy so she applied for it and got the position.

Technology in cataloging

Donna used computers to catalog the books. The card catalog was still in existence, but plans were underway to convert to the online catalog. She remained in cataloging for about four years. "There was a lot of change going on in the library world at that time."

Library staff embraces technology

Donna says the library staff embraced technology. She says the only person that was a little skeptical was Mary Lou.

Mary Lou Harkness

"She was a tough cookie, but very competent."

The library helps USF celebrate its 25th anniversary

When USF was ready to celebrate its silver anniversary, all the colleges and units planned activities. However, the library did not plan to do anything. Donna told Mary Lou that the library needed to do something. Mary Lou told Donna to think of an idea. Donna decided to write letters to different notables in the community. She wrote to John Grant and others asking them to provide the title of the most influential book in their lives. The library displayed the response letters with the corresponding books.

Staging a protest of budget cuts (student and staff reaction to the protest)

There were budget cuts around 1983. Jeanene and Donna decided to concoct a protest. They borrowed a coffin from a funeral home and placed it in the space between the entrance and exit of the library. Jeanene printed out a list of all the periodicals the library had to cut. The printout was flowing out of the inside of the coffin. Jeanene decorated the coffin with fake spider webs. Donna says it was quite a popular display. People came to see it. There was an article in the *Oracle* about how the budget cuts were affecting the library. Mary Lou went along with the protest because she too was upset about the budget cuts in the library. Students came to see the display. There was a petition by the coffin and many students signed it.

Donna becomes the first director of development for the library

After leaving cataloging, Donna became the first director of development for the library.

Donna's job involves raising money for the library—something Mary Lou did not want to do

Mary Lou was upset that the support from the state was dwindling. She was upset that the library did not have enough adequate budget for its purchases and acquisitions. She also did not like the idea of the library having to fundraise for money. Fundraising was a new concept. Donna says she was between a rock and a hard place because she knew the library had to fundraise and she was assigned the job to do it, yet the director of the library did not want to do it. Donna says Mary Lou kept saying, “We shouldn’t have to be doing this. The state should give us adequate resources to meet the needs [of] and serve the people and faculty. “She finally came around to see that it was a reality of life.”

Donna's responsibilities as director

As director of development, Donna's responsibilities involved raising funds in the community in support of the library. Special Collections is the marketable part. Donna says a notable thing occurred while she fundraised. The Tampa NCNB, later Nation's Bank and then Bank of America, gave the library \$45,000 to purchase a black music collection. The late Israel “Ike” Tribble was very helpful to Donna in acquiring the collection because at the time he served on the NCNB board. The CEO of all of Bank of America is a man named Ken Lewis. At the time he was president of NCNB in Tampa. “He was very nice and supportive.”

Fundraising in the community

As director Donna asked the community for money and collections. Donna says collections from the community are important because a community needs to see itself in the university before they give money in support of it. “If they saw their collection here and saw that we were using it then they would support it. While fundraising Donna always thought, “We are part of the community and we are preserving the archives of this community. She collected the Sam Gibbons papers and the Louis de la Parte papers.

After development, Donna becomes President Brown's assistant

In 1987 President Brown asked her to come and be his assistant. He became aware of her at an event where the library partnered with Ybor City for its centennial celebration. He was involved in one event during the celebration. She wrote his speech. He liked what she wrote.

Donna was President Brown's assistant for a year until he retired in 1988.

First impressions of President Brown

She says President Brown was a neat, down to earth guy. He was interested in a lot of things and very interested in people. “He was the last of our academic presidents. “Every president we have had or I have known has been the right president at the right time in terms of new directions the university [goes] in as it grows. He built the academic component strongly.”

President Brown's monthly luncheons

President Brown hosted a luncheon once a month. She helped organize the lunches.

Donna says at the luncheons rank and file faculty met with the president over lunch and brought to the table any kinds of issues they were concerned about. “This was not for chairs or stellar faculty. It was for rank and file faculty that wouldn’t otherwise have an opportunity to meet with the president.” Donna says the luncheons were very productive, and it was good for the faculty to be able to interact with the president. President Brown instituted the luncheons. “He really wanted to be in contact with the faculty.”

President Borkowski becomes president in 1988

President Borkowski continued President Brown’s initiative of monthly luncheons with rank and file faculty. Once President Borkowski came to USF the university really started reaching out to the community. Donna says President Borkowski’s strength was community relations.

Donna becomes President Borkowski’s assistant.

What does an assistant to the university president do?

As the president’s assistant, Donna wrote speeches and memos. Donna says she “put out fires, little unhappiness here or there with a faculty member or whatever.” She met with that faculty member and tried to put out the fire. She sent out memos, which clarified situations. She wrote letters of response for the president. As an assistant she helped the president with day-to-day things and worked behind the scenes to ensure a smooth operation.

Comparing President Brown and President Borkowski

President Brown loved to sit down and have an intellectual discussion with faculty. Frank Borkowski could do that as well, but his real strength was that he really liked people. He did not mind having people at his home and entertaining guests seven days a week - he liked it.

President Borkowski focuses on Latinos in the community and the Latino Community Advisory Committee begins

The week before he was officially president, Donna picked him up at the airport. He was tired and hungry. She took him to a Latino restaurant. He saw all the Latino food and was very intrigued. He asked Donna to tell him about Tampa. She began telling him about Tampa and Tampa’s beginnings, which occurred with the cigar industry. He was really fascinated with Tampa’s history. President Borkowski asked Donna what kind of relationship the university had with the Latino community. Donna replied, “None, really.” President Borkowski said, “Well, we need to do something about that. We need to bridge that gap.” He asked her to put together an advisory committee, consisting of a group of leaders from the Latino community, for him to start dialoging and meeting with. She did that. The first meeting occurred in the fall of 1988. He became president in February of 1988. The USF Latino Community Advisory Committee began, which she coordinated as his assistant. She still coordinates the committee, which is now in its 15th year. “President Borkowski reached out to the Latino community and that was a wonderful thing that he did.” His strength was that he was a people-person.

Why USF did not have a relationship with the Latino community until President Borkowski; President Borkowski's own experience motivated him to reach out to the Latino community

“I think the answer to that is [as] Gary Mormino says that Tampa began in a very diverse fashion. “[Gary says] ‘Tampa has been an island of diversity, but within a very southern milieu’.” “Florida is really a southern state. I think USF reflected that. They just didn’t see what was out there. But, president Borkowski was raised in a Polish ethnic neighborhood. He appreciated ethnicity and could relate to it. I think that’s the reason why he decided Tampa needed to reach out to the Latino community.” The reaching out of USF to the Latino community began in 1988 when President Borkowski came. “That was a pioneering move on his part.”

How did Donna recruit people for the Latino Community Advisory Committee?

She selected Latino leaders from the community. She told them that USF had a new president who wanted to bridge the gap between the university and the Latino community. He wanted to dialogue with the Latino community. The first couple of meetings, the president met with the leaders. The committee agreed that they would advise the president on issues having to do with Latinos and the representation of Latinos in every aspect of the campus.

USF begins to celebrate Hispanic heritage

They told the president that the community had Hispanic heritage celebrations and wondered why the university did not do anything to celebrate Hispanic heritage. The next year, in 1989, Donna put together the first Hispanic heritage celebration. There was a reception in the green and gold room in the Sun Dome for faculty and staff. She formed a committee that met in the president’s conference room.

Latino Association begins

Around 1993, the committee asked itself why it was just meeting once a year to plan Hispanic heritage celebrations. The committee wondered why it did not meet year round to discuss work force issues pertaining to Latinos at the university. Thus, the Latino Association began to focus on these issues. Through the Latino Advisory Committee, a lot of behind the scenes activities occurred in regards to the representation of Latinos on campus and the shortcomings they faced.

Latino American Student Organization begins

Around the same time the Latino Association began, the first Latino American Student Organization also began.

USF's Latino involvement greatly increases

Referring to the Latino committees and organizations that began within a few years of each other, Donna says, “That snowball was beginning to gain momentum; this was forming and that’s forming. Those were the beginnings of a Latino agenda here at the university.”

Latino enrollment at USF

Currently the enrollment of Hispanic students represents ten (3,200) percent of USF's student population. Donna says that although the numbers have increased, they could grow more. "We don't have the Latino students transferring from HCC and the neighboring community colleges as we should." The Pew Hispanic Center issued a report this year saying that contrary to popular belief, Hispanics are enrolling in college; what they are not doing is transferring from the two-year to the four-year. "We've always been under enrolled in Latino students.

Why did the Latino American Student Association begin?

She thinks the Latino students saw that there were minority programs, but they were not included. She believes the students wondered where did they fit in.

Black and Hispanic populations in Florida

"Florida may be unique in that the black and Latino populations are neck in neck." In other states one is more predominant than the other. "In Florida we really need to serve both."

Donna's role in Latino outreach grows during and after Borkowski's administration

During President Borkowski's administration, her role in Latino outreach grew. When he left in 1993, the interim president, Bob Bryan, and the acting vice president, created an office called Latino Community Advancement. Donna's role was 50 percent community relations and 50 percent fundraising.

She still continued to coordinate the Latino Community Advisory Committee when President Castor came.

President Castor

Donna says she was "a no nonsense, take charge woman." President Castor wanted to bring in her own team, which she did. She was "decisive and politically smart." When she first came to USF there were faculty grumblings because she did not have a Ph.D. "She quieted them down very quickly by getting them pay raises. She was very politically savvy."

President Castor and Latinos

"She came from a background of politics so she knew the importance of the Latino vote. It was not a new concept to her at all." She was very supportive of all the Latino committees.

Latino Advisory Committee establishes a scholarship

The committee established a Latino scholarship in 1992. Currently, it is in its twelfth year. It provides financial and moral support for students. The scholarship is for local students so it is a community effort.

ENLACE grant

As Donna coordinated the scholarship, she came to realize that there were not enough Hispanic students coming to the university. The W.K. Kellogg Foundation did initiatives with historically black colleges and universities, and with Native-American colleges. Donna knew the foundation would do something with Hispanic serving institutions. Donna got the invitation to apply for the ENLACE grant. Donna remembers thinking, “This is what we need.” After receiving the college scholarship, Donna said, “[Now] we need to work with high schools and middle schools so that they [Hispanic students] will stay in school and address the drop out rate at those critical transition points. The ENLACE grant was an opportunity to expand the continuum. In 1999 Donna and others planned to apply for the grant. They received the planning grant in 2000, and then received the actual grant and it became operative in 2001.

What is ENLACE?

ENLACE stands for Engaging Latino Communities for Education. ENLACE is a 28.7 million-dollar Kellogg Foundation initiative. ENLACE funds thirteen universities in southern states, mostly in the southwest. ENLACE funds two universities in Florida, FIU and USF. ENLACE’s mission is to increase the number of Latinos attaining college degrees. Donna says ENLACE is a national imperative because if the Latino population keeps growing, but the drop out rate and their college participation rates stay where they are, the future success for Hispanics will be limited. USF is the only university that was funded by Kellogg and is not an HSI, a Hispanic serving institution. All the other universities that were granted funds are institutions that have a twenty-five percent or more Latino enrollment. “It makes more of a struggle for us because we don’t have that twenty-five percent enrollment, and not as many Latinos in administration, so we aren’t calling the shots.” ENLACE partnered with HCC, the Hillsborough County school district, and “a small community organization that brings a much needed social service component that we as educators can’t provide.” This small organization is called Hispanic Services Council. The council provides stability in the home by dealing with marital issues and other issues that affect a student’s performance. The Hispanic Services Council helps resolve problems so a student can stay in school and be successful. “[We] work on the notion that we don’t have to invent all these new programs. Half the battle is finding out what bureaucracies have available and tapping into those resources as well. [We have] had some wonderful success.” The outreach strategies are focused on three high schools that have high Hispanic enrollment and don’t have a college going tradition among the Latino students.

What challenges do Latino students face today?

“There are many barriers.” One of them has to do with the fact that often parents or students are born in another country. Sometimes the parents did not even finish high school. The parents did not have the educational experience needed to advise their children. Some may have had an educational experience, but not in this country. Therefore, they do not know the educational system or how to maneuver their children through it. “There are not enough education materials going out to the parents in Spanish. The whole communication gap is a challenge.” Donna says Hispanic students need to see more Latino role models. Some students have told Donna that they do not

feel their culture is valued. She says low expectations of Latino students exist among teachers and counselors.

President Genshaft

“She has been most supportive of diversity.” She came from New York. Donna says President Genshaft was a little surprised when she got here and saw few Latinos in administration. She has been very supportive of efforts to increase the Latino representation on campus. “The Latino Advisory Committee has had good dialogue with her. She has pledged her support to make changes.”

Presidents cannot change everything

“The challenge is people think presidents can call the shots all the time. To a certain extent that’s true, but they too face hurdles and challenges in bringing about change.”

How size affects a university

She says size works against a lot of nice things, such as a president’s noticeable presence on campus. In the 1960s the fifth floor of the library was a huge lounge. She says at lunchtime almost everyone went there, including faculty, deans, and sometimes the president. “It was a gathering place. It was a place where communication took place across colleges and across campus”. “But, you lose all that as an institution grows; and as an institution grows the demands of the president increase. “[As an institution grows] it’s inevitable that presidents rely more on provosts to take care of the internal side. It’s very challenging and hard for presidents of large universities.”

What is Donna most proud of in her twenty plus years of affiliation with USF

“I’m proud because I know I’ve been instrumental in the development of a Latino agenda here at the university. It is still a work in progress, but we’ve come a long way. Looking back, I know we’ve come a long way, made some changes, and developed an agenda.”

Where does Donna see the Latino agenda for USF in ten years?

“Maybe we will have a Latino president.”

Last words about USF that Donna would like to leave behind

“To students I would say that the University of South Florida offers a wonderful academic experience. I think we are top notch in academics. I think we need to streamline the bureaucratic side. Academically, we are very sound, and they are going to get a great education here. There are student organizations here for every taste and culture. It is a very exciting place to be. They will be going to school with students from all over the world.” Donna says a lack of money and funding can cause contention at a university. To colleagues, “Keep your eye on the prize and the big picture and move on past the petty squabbles. There is a big picture, a wonderful mission that we have here. We have to keep our eye on the mission.”

End of Interview