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## Joseph Tomaino oral history interview by Yael V. Greenberg, April 22, 2003

Joseph Tomaino (Interviewee)

Yael V. Greenberg (Interviewer)

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TOPICS OF DISCUSSION

*Year of Arrival to USF*  
December 1966

*Year of Arrival to Tampa*

Mr. Tomaino moved from New Jersey to Tampa with his family in December 1961; he finished his remaining year of university in Tampa. Upon arriving to Tampa, Mr. Tomaino contacted the Chamber of Commerce and told them that he had one year left of university. Ironically, despite being open for one year, the Chamber never mentioned the University of South Florida. Instead, Mr. Tomaino was encouraged to apply to the University of Tampa where he was accepted. He later went on to receive a master's degree in education from USF.

*Return to Tampa/Beginning employment at USF*

After graduating from the University of Tampa, Mr. Tomaino and his wife entered into the Peace Corps and later ended up in Virginia. Being a native of West Tampa, Mr. Tomaino's wife was dissatisfied with living up north, and wanted desperately to return to Tampa. Having established ties in Tampa, Mr. Tomaino asked Mrs. Tomaino to contact one of her friends in the area who could assist him in locating a job. Mrs. Tomaino's friend was an employee of USF and immediately got Mr. Tomaino an interview in the placement office. "By the way, the salary was pretty good and I was just so happy because I thought at that time you know in 1966 we only had one child, gee I can be here forever. I think it is going to be forever before it is over."

*Campus in 1966*

"It was pretty stark with lots of sand." At the time, there were only four or five buildings on the campus. Mr. Tomaino recalls fondly his relationship with Dick Bowers, who was then the director of physical education. Mr. Tomaino remembers one night standing next to Dick (near the current site of the Sun Dome) and looking at the dark campus and remarking, "Dick, what's going to become of this campus?" I mean there were hardly any lights on the campus. You could see the glow of Temple Terrace in the distance." Almost immediately, Dick remarked, "Don't worry Tomaino, someday we will be the UCLA of the South. The first thing we gotta do is get some lights on the campus."

### *First people at USF*

According to Mr. Tomaino, the people that came to the university in its early days, were “really interesting, risk-takers, pioneers—they were truly pioneers.” When Mr. Tomaino started at the university he was very young, only twenty-four years old. He recalls many of his fellow colleagues as “scaring him to death” because they were “pushers, entrepreneurs and risk takers and I think we still see it today, and that is why I think our faculty today are so very active.”

### *The politics of career placement at USF vs. other state universities*

According to Mr. Tomaino, in the 1960s there was definitely a political agenda among state universities, particularly in states that had “old-line universities” and new universities that were coming into existence. For example, the University of South Florida was not allowed to have a College of Business or a College of Engineering in the early days. As assistant director of career placement, Mr. Tomaino’s office was responsible for placing USF graduates into jobs. When recruiters would come to visit the campus looking for potential employees, the Career Placement Office would call certain majors that were not permitted at USF because of state politics, by other names in order that a student might receive an interview; examples of such descriptions included Administrative Services degrees being called Business and Mass Communications changed to journalism. Needless to say, Mr. Tomaino spent much of his time explaining to recruiters the kinds of programs and majors offered at USF. The early leaders of the university such as Ed Kopp and Charlie Macintosh initiated many of these non-official name changes. Another example of the degree name changes included the reworking of Structures Materials and Fluids (SMF) to Engineering. USF was permitted to have a College of Basic Studies and a College of Education.

### *George and June Miller—Birth of Mass Communications program at USF*

George and June Miller were one of the early pioneering couples that came to the university. George Miller related the following story to Mr. Tomaino, which pertains to how the Mass Communications program received its name. At that time, George was teaching a journalism course and one day an orator from the Board of Control came to visit his class. After attending one of George’s classes, the orator told him that he could not teach journalism and that he needed to report to Dr. Allen’s office. During the meeting with George, Dr. Allen reiterated to George that although he could not teach journalism officially, he could begin a cooperative education program. In addition, Allen offered George the opportunity to teach journalism courses with a new name, Mass Communications. “There was a lot of that kind of thing going on.”

### *John Allen*

In terms of building an academic institution, Mr. Tomaino believes that President Allen did a great job. “He did not bother us, if you were talking about academics, no problem. If you were talking football...whoa, wait a minute. If we were talking about mobilizing our alumni... we can’t do that yet. If we were talking about any kind of community initiative back in the 1960s, that was something we were not going to do.” In light of this political and academic climate, Mr. Tomaino and his fellow workers in the placement

office, had to work around many of the constraints that were imposed on them by the state and the university.

#### *Placement office suspect*

Even though USF's first students entered into the institution in 1960, the placement office often heard comments regarding graduating students, for example, "What do you mean you have people graduating?" Despite the early attitudes towards the university, it began to grow rapidly as did the placement office.

#### *Placement of USF graduates*

The placement office placed USF graduates into all kinds of positions including big corporations including accounting firms, GTE, General Motors, Ford and government agencies. In fact, USF had such a good reputation for training accountants that the word among many employers was; "You can get a great accountant at South Florida for cheaper prices."

#### *Reasons for USF not being allowed to offer certain programs and colleges*

According to Mr. Tomaino, if you look at other state universities during the 1920s, 1930s, and 1940s like Michigan State, which was already an established university, it was difficult to grow programs at other newly established institutions. In Florida, the University of Florida was the state's flagship university and the main line programs, in particular the graduate programs, were all going to be at UF. USF instead, was initially considered the "glorified community university ... students that could not afford to go to Florida [UF]. In other words, the state of Florida looked at it as we are providing a whole class of folks who would normally not get a higher education." It is important to note that during this period, Florida did not have any community colleges. Additionally, Mr. Tomaino points out that Florida did not receive reapportionment until the 1960s-1970s, as the majority of the legislators in Tallahassee had been representing people that lived north of Gainesville and the Panhandle; this certainly changed the face of Florida.

#### *University of South Florida's name*

With the nature of the political climate of Florida in the 1960s and 1970s, it is no wonder that USF acquired such a name, because, "Anything south of Gainesville was south." This certainly added to the character of the university, as Mr. Tomaino believes that, "We had to work harder, we had to work twice as hard so it made us good, and it made us tough." Even today, USF maintains this attitude; for example the university finished first in acquiring federal research grants in science. "Our faculty are still by and large, very active, very aggressive, and you know maybe a little hostile. It was a pioneer era, we are not too far from it yet."

#### *Mr. Tomaino becomes alumni director and community support for USF*

In 1970, Cecil Mackey appointed Mr. Tomaino as the first alumni director. Immediately the *Oracle* came out with a feature article on Mr. Tomaino's new appointment; the article certainly generated a lot of talk among people who immediately thought, "What in the world is Cecil Mackey doing, has he lost his mind? We don't even have alumni." At the time Mr. Tomaino received the position as alumni director, he recalls that he was the only

community advancement officer on campus. Looking for areas of support around campus, Mr. Tomaino immediately noticed that in the College of Fine Arts through the mid-1960s, that they maintained a good group of supporters. In terms of traditional university support mechanisms, the College of Fine Arts was a “safe area” where annual gifts could be sought. The Graphics Studio was established in this manner, for if a donor gave \$100 for one of the alumni offices’ gift programs, they would receive a piece of art designed through the Graphics Studio. Other than a few people on campus, “We were just not expected to do much in the community.” Moreover, people who had graduated in other universities and were living locally could not understand why USF was not out raising lots of money like other universities. “It was just something that we were not supposed to do in those days.”

#### *John Allen*

John Allen was a quiet, tall and dignified man according to Mr. Tomaino. Every month, Dr. Allen would hold a university-wide meeting, which would include at least three hundred people. Maintaining his composure at all times even during heated discussions, Dr. Allen was a very “deliberate and calm and always kept the university on an academic mission.” His motto, “Accent on Learning” helped lead USF on a successful path and was able to recruit a number of key faculty members.

#### *Early pioneers of USF*

Reflecting back on the early days, Mr. Tomaino pictures Dr. Allen visiting northern universities with pictures of USF as a desert campus with just a small number of buildings. Despite the initial appearance of USF, Allen told prospective faculty that, “They had a chance to be a pioneer and to make a name for themselves.” While many people were not comfortable with the idea of moving to a new university, others were extremely excited at the opportunity. “We had some really outstanding characters, people that were interesting people, because they were different...they were risk takers.” Ed Kopp was definitely one of the characters that Mr. Tomaino remembers, with a cigar in his mouth, Dr. Kopp would often say, “What do you mean we can’t do that – go jump in a lake.” Manny Lukoff, Pete Sasser, Doc Sadderson (Mass Communications), and Lou Jergensen, were just some of the people who Mr. Tomaino worked with in those pioneering days of the university. In the Humanities department, there was Dr. Cooper [Cooper Hall named after him], and Mary Lou Harkness, who was the second director of the library. In the 1960s, Margie Miller told Mr. Tomaino and other university officials that one day the campus would have an art gallery. With her tenacious spirit, today USF has the Museum of Contemporary Art. “In a hundred years, that’s the way we will be, we will finally mellow out and be a traditional university.”

#### *John Allen vs. Cecil Mackey*

In 1970 Cecil Mackey took over for John Allen as president of USF. Enamored with the idea of working with the community and the university, Mr. Tomaino was disappointed in the early 1960s attitude that the university had with respect to community relations. When Dr. Mackey came to USF, he was very young (in his thirties) and completely different from Dr. Allen in that he did not mind “changing the course of the university.” Unlike Allen, Mackey wanted to get out and involve the community in university affairs.

Hearing of Mackey's innovative ideas, Mr. Tomaino immediately went to talk to Jim Vickery who was Mackey's public relations person at the time. Several months after Mr. Tomaino and Jim had met, Mr. Tomaino was in his office, and Mackey comes in and says, "I want to talk to this guy Tomato, Tamata...something like that." The two later met at Mackey's office, where the president asked Mr. Tomaino why he wanted to be alumni director. After providing Mackey with several justifications, the president sent Mr. Tomaino off to meet a few USF alumni at the University Restaurant, located on Fowler Avenue. While there was no organized alumni association per say, a group of former alumni had established a small committee. The next day, Dr. Mackey calls Mr. Tomaino into his office again and offers him the job of alumni director for a trial period of about six months. In addition to his responsibilities as alumni director, Mackey asked Mr. Tomaino to lose some weight. As Mr. Tomaino explains, Mackey's request was not unusual as he was into physical education and expected all of the faculty and staff to be slim and take care of themselves. Wanting to see immediate results, Mackey charged Mr. Tomaino with getting fifty alumni to donate one hundred dollars to the President's Fund by the end of the six-month trial period; "Back then, this was a fortune." After receiving the job, Mr. Tomaino was moved from the placement office to the administration building where he received an office right next to Mackey's. Ultimately, Mr. Tomaino managed to get the number of donations needed into the President's Fund. Today, members of this fund are prominent citizens of the community like Lee Moffitt, and John Bell. Chapter programs of the USF Alumni Association were also begun both in and out of the state of Florida. In those days, there was no fundraising until Mr. Tomaino's office began the Alumni Annul Fund, which entitled all donors to choose where their money would be allocated. Mr. Tomaino remained in the director position for about fifteen years.

#### *Alumni's fondness for Cecil Mackey/Dissidents*

In terms of "likeability," the alumni were fond of Cecil Mackey; however, the students and faculty often got into sparring matches with him. By the time Dr. Mackey left the university in 1975, USF had all of the colleges built including the College of Medicine as well as intercollegiate athletics. "He really broke the ice in a lot of areas, but along the way, he created a few dissidents let's put it this way."

In light of Mackey's leadership style, when Mr. Tomaino was asked by Mackey to establish an alumni chapter in Tallahassee, he initially stalled, for he knew that there were alumni who were involved in the legislature who had attended USF during Mackey's administration, and were clearly unhappy with his management of the university. One day, Mr. Tomaino received a call from Mike Rhodes who was an alumnus of USF and wanted to start a chapter in Tallahassee. In those days, an alumni chapter consisted of a small group of donors who were known as the leaders of the organization. When Mr. Tomaino and Mackey arrived in Tallahassee for the first chapters meeting, the room was filled with nearly 200 people. Thinking that the number of people was rather large, Mr. Tomaino and Dr. Mackey joined the meeting. Having rounded up all of the USF alumni living in the area, Mr. Rhodes locked the door and proceeded to hold a roast for Mackey. After the roast, Dr. Mackey addressed the group and said, "O.K. are we going to start this alumni chapter or aren't we?" After the meeting, Mr. Tomaino told Mackey that he was

sorry about what had taken place at the meeting; Mackey quickly responded that Mr. Tomaino should not be sorry, “This is part of the business, you move around as much as I did you’re going to make a few enemies.” Even in those difficult situations, Mr. Tomaino believes that Mackey knew how to take criticism. While USF faculty and students criticized Mackey heavily, he certainly produced a lot of wonderful results for the university. “Nobody can argue that the university was not better off when he left.”

#### *Mackey’s vision of an Alumni association in the 1970*

Whether it was inherent or not, Mackey understood universities and knew how to relate to donors and prospective donors, “He and Claire [Mackey’s wife] were aristocratic in their mannerisms and in the way they did things.” Mackey also looked at the potential donating abilities of the local community as, “We were always under funded, it seems to me. I think in 1970 we had almost 20,000 students ... but I think our funding level was for around 10,000 students.” In part to the overcrowding of students and a lack of budget, Mr. Tomaino believes that many of the early alumni who graduated from USF did not have a good experience. Also, the majority of students who first came to USF had to commute, had to work and had families, and missed out on the “all-university feeling.” This attitude is changing however, for many alumni have become major donors to athletics because they now realize the importance of being able to get a university education. Lee Moffitt is a perfect example of this phenomenon, for he had to commute from Dade City and work several jobs in order to pay for his education at USF. For many folks, “This was their big shot and most of them were first generation college graduates.” From this vantage point, Dr. Mackey could see the tension between what USF could do and the potential marketplace for donations. “This university is going places, today it is a Research I university, who would have thought.”

#### *Intercollegiate athletics at USF*

Several of the intercollegiate athletics programs were begun under President Allen including swimming and soccer. Bob Grindy was hired as USF’s first swim coach; Dick Bowers recruited him in the late 1960s. At the time, the pool was just a hole-in-the-ground in the Andros Center. Practice for the swim team began at 4:30 every morning. Recently, Bob told Mr. Tomaino that Dr. Allen did not allow the swim team to compete between Monday and Friday; instead they could only compete on the weekends. Furthermore, the swim team was not allowed to leave campus for competitions until 5 p.m. on Friday afternoons.

#### *Resistance for intercollegiate athletics by President Allen*

Mr. Tomaino believes that Dr. Allen felt a lot of pressure from the University of Florida and other state universities in the early days of USF. While there is a lot of evidence that supports the benefits of student athletes, from a business perspective, sports is also viewed as a highly effective marketing strategy. For student recruitment purposes, there is an indirect relationship with sports and fundraising, but overall, for increasing student enrollment figures. “They got football, they got basketball...it’s a fun place to be besides from the academics. Of course, we were not supposed to be this kind of place. Dr. Allen maintained the state policy.” Ultimately, this strategy may have worked to USF’s advantage, as today the university still maintains a strong academic program.

### *Student resistance toward Cecil Mackey*

“Cecil was a very strong leader with a strong vision for the university.” Throughout his tenure at USF, Cecil encountered many issues including taking adult theater ads out of the *Oracle* and what kind of music the school radio station, WBUL, should be playing. “It was sort of like dad and the teenagers going at it.” According to Mr. Tomaino, most of the students did not even know who Mackey was; the complaints stemmed from about one or two percent of students on campus. In terms of getting more students involved in issues on campus, Mr. Tomaino believes that President Castor was extremely successful in meeting this mission. In the end, the increasing student involvement has led to USF becoming a stronger institution. “Looking back on it, it seems that we had the right leadership at the right time. There is always some political conflict going on with the president.” Carl Riggs and Joe Howell were some of the leaders who assisted Mackey throughout his tenure at USF.

### *Beginnings of basketball program at USF*

(Related to Mr. Tomaino by Dick Bowers) In 1970, the university began its basketball program. Elliot Hardaway was Dr. Allen’s VP of Operations. Bowers told Dr. Hardaway that the first game was to be played in the gym. Having no money to advertise the game, Bowers and his students ran all over campus and Temple Terrace putting up signs announcing the first game. The next day, Dr. Hardaway calls Dick and asks him, “What are you doing, you are putting those signs up? People will think that we have basketball at South Florida.” Perplexed, Dick tells Hardaway that the university is trying to establish a basketball program and therefore promotion is necessary. This story is an illustration of the transition period that USF was beginning to experience. As an institution, we were moving from the realm of pure academics to a more comprehensive urban university

### *Director of USF Annual Giving/Telemarketing*

After working as the director of the alumni association, Mr. Tomaino was appointed Director of USF Annual Giving. “The Alumni Association is really about building an affinity with the alumni.” While building affinity was a significant part of the Alumni Association, Mr. Tomaino’s major focus was on annual giving which was bringing in several hundred thousand dollars a year. In addition, during Mackey’s tenure, several major gifts were brought in including the Courtner and Couch gift for heart research; this was a million dollar chair. Endowed scholarships and professorships in Humanities by the Debartlough family were also given to the university during this period. Dr. John Locke Brown had just taken over as president of USF, and felt that the university was certainly “poised for a major gifting program.” Rather than fundraising, the alumni office was now being restructured to only include membership and dues. A development office would be established, which would handle fundraising and major gifts. Furthermore, constituent gifts (where alumni would donate to specific colleges) would now become a focus for the annual giving program. Dr. Busta, then the VP of University Relations, asked Mr. Tomaino if he would leave the alumni office and move to the development office; Mr. Tomaino agreed. Although on an amateur basis, the alumni office began to use telemarketing as a method of solicitation. Students were used as

volunteers for the telemarketing program. With over 200,000 alumni, one of Mr. Tomaino's responsibilities was to set-up a professional call center, train and pay students. Having the money for phones and personnel, Mr. Tomaino is told by Dr. Busta that there is no room on the campus for the telemarketing office. Not satisfied, Mr. Tomaino decided to walk around campus and find a spot for his office. In Cooper Hall, Mr. Tomaino found a large space, which had been locked for quite some time. Wanting to see the space, Mr. Tomaino went to the dean and immediately asked for a key. With some hesitation, Mr. Tomaino was told that the reason why the office had been locked was because a secretary had murdered by an engineering student. "I don't know what happened, but it was one of the few major crimes committed on this campus, it was a murder." After the crime, no one wanted to use the space. Fortunately for the administration, Mr. Tomaino had no qualms and signed a contract to take over the space. During those early days of fundraising, thirty to forty phone banks were set up. Today, telemarketing is standardized and is the bulk of the annual giving program. The money obtained from telemarketing and constituent gifts is extremely important to a college because it is unrestricted and can be used at the colleges' discretion. From 1985-1992, Mr. Tomaino was the director of annual giving program.

#### *First all university gift campaign in the State of Florida*

In 1992, Mr. Tomaino became the director of development for the College of Education. In the mid 1980s, when the development program was just beginning, Dr. Busta was able to allocate resources to hire development directors college by college. USF had the first all university gift income campaign in the State of Florida. "I think it scared the Gators [UF] to death, you see they were old-line, and they never really had a university campaign." However, UF had strong financial support from their athletics and booster programs, which is something that USF certainly did not have. "We had a leg up, we did not have all of this tradition, we had a clean slate." The first all university campaign raised between \$120-125 million. Mr. Tomaino points out that this campaign ran at the same time that fundraising campaigns for the performing arts center downtown, and Ruth Eckerd Hall were running. In 1970, when Mr. Tomaino was first asked by Mackey to solicit \$100 from alumni, this was considered a lot of money. Nearly fifteen years later, the university was asking for million dollar gifts. Jim Seymour trained the development office in proper methods of fundraising. Prior to this, "We were making up the dog gone thing up as we were running down the field." In 1960-1970, the university had major campaigns and programs running in each college.

#### *Athletics as a draw for fundraising*

According to Mr. Tomaino, major gifts are about people wanting to "find meaning in life by supporting" certain areas. Some people for example, do not feel comfortable in donating to a university per say, but would like to donate to medical research or to their religious organizations. "Athletics provides you with visibility, it gives you a marketing edge." When Mr. Tomaino was director of development for the College of Education, half of his entertaining of potential donors took place at USF athletic events. Often donors look at athletics in terms of entertaining and support academics and athletics simultaneously. Today, the university has created a philanthropic side of athletics and has created student athletic endowed scholarships, \$100,000 and more. As USF's athletic

programs are becoming more visible, additional fundraising opportunities are popping up, especially with student recruitment.

#### *Director of development for the College of Education*

As director of development, Mr. Tomaino's current responsibilities include major gift development and annual giving; constituent based activity and general public relations for the college. Special event activity is also a major part of Mr. Tomaino's duties. In the last campaign, \$11 million was raised for the College of Education.

#### *Mr. Tomaino's current connection with athletics*

Vicki Mitchell was the associate vice president for development and responsible for the handling of the two major campaigns that the university has experienced. Seeing firsthand the kind of work that Vicki did, Mr. Tomaino contacted Vicki and applied for the major gifts director in athletics position. Shortly after receiving the position, Vicki called Mr. Tomaino and told him that she was going to take over the associate athletic director position. Three profession positions, an annual fund director (Mike Lewis), a major gifts director (Mr. Tomaino) and associate director (Vicki Mitchell) were created to establish an effective program for raising funding for athletics at the university. Mr. Tomaino is in charge of handling all gifts ranging from \$25,000-\$250,000. Currently, the department is involved in a campaign to build an athletics-training center, which will cost about \$15 million. Since last March, six million dollars has been raised for the project. The support for athletics, has become increasingly significant, "Someday we are going to fill Raymond James Stadium, this is football heaven right here. All the studies show that some of the best football recruits in the country are right here. It is really going to take off and I think in the long run, it will be very beneficial for the university; it already is, there is no question about it."

#### *Connection with athletics at USF*

Athletics has always provided Mr. Tomaino with a "place to cultivate your prospects." In general, Mr. Tomaino finds that most potential donors do have an interest in sports. Fine arts is another area on campus where the potential for donors is increasingly in demand. Every year in Conference USA, USF has consistently received top awards for its student athletes.

#### *Thirty-seven years later and counting*

From the beginning, Mr. Tomaino felt that he could really make a difference at USF; certainly he did not think he would remain at the university for thirty-seven years. "I always had a lot of gratitude for being at the university at growing with it." People often ask Mr. Tomaino, 'How are things at USF?' "It is like asking how are things in Manhattan? There is so much here." Recently, a student athletics association was started. USF has almost 4,000 students who are athletes. In the last several years, Mr. Tomaino points out that the average GPA of USF's athletes have been around 3.0-3.1. One day Mr. Tomaino was asked to attend a meeting with Lee Roy Selmon and a few coaches. As soon as he sits down, Dr. Phyllis Labow who is academic coordinator of the athletics program joins the meeting. Immediately the entire staff stands up to welcome Phyllis. Not knowing who she was, Mr. Tomaino is informed that Phyllis is the person

who decides whether or not a player plays based on their academic standing. In addition to her responsibilities as academic coordinator, Phyllis is also in charge of educating the public about student athletes at USF.

*Final thought*

Mr. Tomaino has lots of gratitude for the University of South Florida. Before Mr. Tomaino came to Tampa, he remembers cutting hair with his father who was a barber, and realizing early on, that this lifestyle was not for him. “Never in my wildest dreams did I think I would be at a university and connected with athletics.” For students, Mr. Tomaino would advise them not to give up. In times of great stress, “this is a place of great leadership, we have leaders that kept us on course.”

*End of Interview*