

Excerpts from The Gamecock's interview with John Palms

The Gamecock: You were president of Georgia State before you came here, and you decided to come when the university was going through the Holderman ordeal. What motivated you to come to this university in the face of all that?

John Palms: Well, let me say, I didn't know as much about the previous president's undertakings. I knew there had been controversy about what he paid a visiting dignitary to come and teach—\$300-and-something thousand dollars to Mrs. Sadat. [Jihan Sadat, the widow of Egyptian President Anwar Sadat.] I had no idea about all the other things that ... were revealed to me after I arrived. I came for one reason: that is, that the University of South Carolina is a flagship institution. Georgia State is a great institution, but it's not a flagship institution. ... I was not seeking a job at that time. I got called about this job and turned it, said 'I'm not interested at all.' Got called again and said I wasn't interested and they said, 'Well, come talk to us about, you know, what we should be looking for for a president.' And when I came, one thing led to another. So kind of a rapid process. ... When I came here, we had a major crisis with the credibility of the institution: trust. Bad press, legislative suspicions about the integrity and the character of the institution, which is the most valuable thing one has as an institution. So the first thing was to reestablish that credibility. There are a couple of things I did immediately. One was those scholarships going to people the president had picked. I immediately revealed who the recipients of those scholarships were. I eliminated a lot of money in administrative expenses. One whole area dealing with some vice president of administration, about a million and a half, and I just eliminated the whole thing, because, in my opinion, it just wasn't functioning well. ... I worked across a pretty broad front of issues dealing with that administration, and, at the same time, trying to assess where this university was academically, what it had achieved and what the faculty thought its potential was, realistically. So I wasn't out here saying 'Charge,' and I looked behind me and there's nobody there to follow me. ... We decided that we were much better than the reputation that we had...that we had the capacity to recruit better students than what we were recruiting.... We needed both new build-

ings and renovated buildings. So we needed a master plan for the campus—a long-term master plan....[The university] raised the admissions standards three times, got the SAT's up. People worried that we wouldn't make a class and we did that and we did it anyway. We raised the standards for teaching and research for faculty and what it would take to get tenure. ...Essentially we said, we want to be worthy eventually of being invited into the most elite group of major research universities, the AAU, the Association of American Universities....You know, in all the surrounding states, the states have picked one or two institutions and raised them above everybody else's: Chapel Hill, University of Virginia, University of Georgia, University of Florida.... And we still have to make that decision in this state—that this comprehensive flagship institution needs to be raised above everybody else's. ... We've had 500 new faculty, and the majority of them come from AAU institutions where you have this culture that we're trying to create, so what you're doing here is changing the culture....Our athletic success is helping some here, in the last couple of years, and will continue to do so, especially with the quality of the coaches that we have. Their personal character quality is very important. And that win-loss record doesn't hurt, either, for a change.

Gamecock: One of the things that you mentioned as a goal has been to gain us entrance into the AAU, which, as far as I know, is completely dependent upon graduate and doctoral research. One of the things I know we write about a good deal, about that quest, is how getting into the AAU will benefit the education of an undergraduate student.

Palms: Well, let me tell you, there are a few qualities that all these AAU institutions have in common. First of all, it's just taken for granted, you have the best undergraduate students in the country. They come there because [of] the best faculty. The faculty come because they're teaching the best students as well as doing the research. ... So if everything's going right, teaching should immensely improve here by the fact that we're moving up in overall quality.

Gamecock: You mentioned that when you

first came here, you had some, you wanted to obtain some realistic goals when you got here, improving the reputation of the school. Do you feel, from the time you've come here, that that's already been accomplished?

Palms: There are a couple of things that have happened here. ... The AAU membership is voted on by the presidents of the AAU members. I send out a brag sheet a couple times a year of our major accomplishments. So when I tell them that the faculty six years ago was bringing in \$50 million of research and last year \$121 million, that's a major thing that affects the reputation. When I tell them that last year we had a Rhodes Scholar, that says something about our undergraduate program. ... There are only a couple of Rhodes Scholars in the whole South. It came out of our undergraduate program, from a girl from Lancaster, South Carolina. This was not a New Jersey import. This was a Southern girl. ... When you hire a man like Dan Carter in history, who wrote the biography of [Alabama] Governor [George] Wallace, and wrote the book on the Scottsboro kids in Alabama that got falsely accused of raping a girl and got a Pulitzer Prize ... and he leaves Emory University and comes here—every history department in this country knows this happened.

Gamecock: So would you say that the credibility has been fully restored and that the good public standing of the university has been fully restored?

Palms: Based upon legislative sampling, the alumni coming back and the giving record to the campaign, this would never have been possible without their feeling that the credibility is back. ... The money coming in certainly is an indicator. People are writing checks again for the university. ... The fact that you got a \$20 million gift from one and a \$25 million gift from another and 60 \$1 million gifts from others when there was only one million-dollar gift to the university before we started the campaign. I was writing thank-you notes when somebody gave me a thousand dollars. 'Thank you so much for this thousand dollars.' [laughs]. It's precarious, I mean, that character thing is always delicate. ... And you just have to watch

PALMS

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ing the research," Palms said. "So if everything's going right, teaching should immensely improve here by the fact that we're moving up in overall quality."

Palms said, while some AAU institutions are "great right across the board," USC would have to focus on some "cathedrals of excellence"—such as science and math, the college of liberal arts, engineering and business—instead of trying to bring all of the university's programs to AAU levels.

"Everybody can't be world-class. We've said we're not going to do it across every department," Palms said. "We're going to try to build these cathedrals, the ones that are closest to being at the top. We'll bring everybody up, too, but it would take a lot of resources to do it all across the board with everybody."

it all the time.

Gamecock: Are there any programs you think of that might be AAU quality right now?

Palms: Chemistry. Biology. Information systems. Certainly, our MIBS program is. Our marine science is. I think psychology is. ... I think we're there in public health. ... You know...the top AAUs are great right across the board. There's another level of AAU that, they've got these cathedrals of excellence. The other programs are good also, but not as good as those world-class [programs]. Everybody can't be world-class. ... We've said we're not going to do it across every, every department. We're going to try to build these cathedrals, the ones that are closest to being at the top. We'll bring everybody up, too, but it would take a lot of resources to do it all across the board with everybody.

NEIGHBORHOOD

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Possibly the most frustrating concern for association members, though, is parking problems caused by students. According to Stiver, a USC philosophy professor and associate dean of the honors college, students using neighborhood parking spaces can sometimes disregard resident concerns for a convenient parking spot close to class.

"Students have a tendency to take advantage of the parking system, which is not to give residents certain parking privileges they feel they've earned through their high taxes," Stiver said.

Parking problems aren't just about inconvenience for residents, Stiver added, saying some real safety concerns are at issue. For example, when all of the parking spaces are occupied, especially at intersections such as Greene and Barnwell, a driver's line of sight is often compromised.

"You have to pull out so far to see, you run the risk of getting (into an ac-

cident)," Stiver said.

Among its recommendations to curb parking woes, the association is asking City Council to partially close Gibbs Court at the intersection with Barnwell "in order to reduce the volume of USC traffic looking for parking on Gibbs Court," according to the group's summary of recommendations. It's also requesting some parking spaces on Greene Street be removed completely "in order to increase visibility and safety for both motorists and pedestrians."

While the recommendations have yet to be presented to City Council, and no clear date has been set to do so as of Wednesday night, Stiver is confident the association's recommendations will not be made in vain.

"I'm not so sure the city won't give us a lot of these things," Stiver said. "I think it should go for all of it."

The city/state desk can be reached at gamecockcitydesk@hotmail.com.

Chaplain's Corner



PALM CAMPUS MINISTRY
Partnership Among Lutherans and Methodists

Wednesday Night ~ "Body & Soul" - 5:30 p.m.
(light meal following)

November 15th - "Doers of the Word-Servant Ministry"
with The Rev. Tom Wall & The Rev. Martin Jessiman

Sunday Worship - 5:30 p.m. (meal following)

Shandon United Methodist Church

Sunday Activities

9:00 & 11:15am - Worship Services 10:00am - LifeLine Contemporary Service
10:00am - Sunday School

3407 Devine St. ~ 256-8383 ~ www.Shandon-UMC.org



St. Thomas More Catholic Center

Rev. Tim Ljewecki, Chaplain
St. Julienne Guy OSU, Director of Christian Formation
1610 Greene St. 799-5870 (Across from School of Nursing)

Mass Schedule
Saturday 4:30pm
Sunday 11:00am, 7:30pm

Sacrament of Penance
Saturday 3:00pm-4:00pm
or by appointment
Newman Club Tuesday 7:00pm

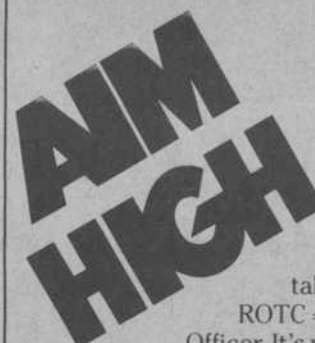
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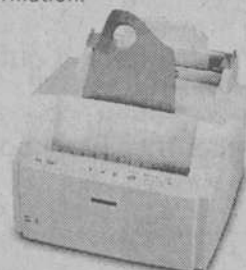
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