

Sorensen reflects on progress, struggles during freshman year

BY KEVIN FELLNER
THE GAMECOCK

Thursday marks the first anniversary of the Board of Trustees' unanimous vote to make Andrew Sorensen USC's 27th president, and since then, USC has undergone many changes.

The university is hoping to break ground on the first phase of a 5-million-square-foot research campus before the end of 2003. Interest in the university from prospective students is at an all-time high, and more bow ties are being sported by members of the Board of Trustees at its quarterly meetings.

Sorensen says his greatest accomplishments so far have been establishing good relationships with students, as well as with state and local government officials.

"Students who see me on campus will invariably say, 'Hello, Dr. Sorensen,' and the fact that they recognize me is very

gratifying," he said, adding that students have introduced themselves in places such as the airport as well.

The challenge this year, Sorensen says, has been dealing with \$41 million in reduced state appropriations since his first official day in office last July.

Since his arrival, Sorensen has officiated at commencement and awards ceremonies, attended dozens of performing-arts events that featured students, and made appearances at community events such as the American Heart Association's Heart Walk. And on top of that, he has held meetings with the governor and Congress members, attended a reception at the White House, and taken the entire Board of Trustees to New Orleans for a weekend.

"The whole sort of fabric of student life in cultural experiences as well as athletic has been very enjoyable," he said.

Sorensen considers his transition to Columbia from Tuscaloosa, Ala., easier than he had expected.

"My wife and I feel that South Carolinians are just wonderfully hospitable people," he said. "There's a sort of stereotype about this type of Southern hospitality, but having not grown up in the South, my wife and I believe it."

During the fall semester, Sorensen said he was determined to get to know people from all corners of South Carolina and from all walks of life. Thus the Bow Tie Bus Tour was born.

A dozen day trips on a 14-seat minibus took him to all of South Carolina's 46 counties, stopping at high schools, corporate headquarters, luncheons and alumni residences to get acquainted.

"I wanted to visit people all

over the state," he said in Rock Hill on the tour's third leg in October. "I want to listen to South Carolinians all over the state. I want to hear what they say. I want to hear what they would like to see from the University of South Carolina."

At high schools, he would try to persuade students to come to USC and answer their questions about the university. He'd then give students T-shirts with bow ties printed below the collar in honor of the tour.

At other events, he'd entertain his audiences with funny stories about his experiences as university president, such as when he asked a group of elementary-school students whether they knew where USC is located and one girl answered, "Yes sir, it's right across the street from Bojangles."

He's now engaged in the Bow Tie Sky Tour, which has him traveling as far as New York and California to talk to potential donors and corporations interested in investing in USC's research ventures.

"People have to believe that I'm sincere," he said about his fundraising approach. "And, generally speaking, people tell me that's an impression that I create. I hope I do because I am sincere in what I tell people."

Sorensen's staff is already scheduling the next bus tour for spring 2004. Sorensen said he would have more time for it then because, during football season, he entertains visitors who come to see the games.

Sorensen said the biggest difference between USC and the University of Alabama has been his jurisdiction over more than

one campus.

"I can't think just about Columbia here," he said. "I have to think about all the seven other institutions and 11 campuses. I visit them on a regular basis and keep them in my sort of thoughts in vision, in aspirations and sensitivity."

Sorensen said he doesn't mind that his peers or subordinates often compare him to a politician or traveling salesman.

"In some respects, what I do is sell the university to people who don't know about it, and it's a requisite for every salesman to believe in the product he's selling. I've got a terrific product. I've got the education that the University of South Carolina provides ... and I'm proud of it," he said.

Sorensen's staff members often talk about how he never appears to tire from his job.

"People will tell you I do have a lot of energy," he said, but he is planning a summer vacation with his family in Alaska in June.

Sorensen has been invited to speak at a handful of international conferences this fall. He says that during the next 12 months, he is most excited about continuing to push his ideas for the university's growth and add initiatives that conform to the university's changing layout.

"The response to my vision for the university has been, quite frankly, more positive and widespread than I ever dreamed it would be," he said. "And I don't mean to imply that everybody that hears it says, 'Oh terrific. That's exactly what I want to do.' But the response is usually so enthusiastic."

Comments on this story? E-mail gamecockudesk@hotmail.com



PHOTOS BY CANDI HAUGLUM/THE GAMECOCK

Top: Thursday marks the one-year anniversary of Andrew Sorensen's election as USC's 27th president. Above left: Sorensen helps Maxcy residents move in. Above right: Sorensen plays a trumpet solo at a football game.

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