

David and Ann Hicks

- C: Today is Monday, November 13. This is Jim Crooks from the UNF Oral History Project interviewing David and Ann Hicks. David, let me ask you to go first if you will and talk about what you have done here in Jacksonville very briefly and what brought you to UNF and getting involved with the institution.
- DH: What I have done in Jacksonville, really the main thing is Computer Power. I did a lot of nonprofit things. I guess the most significant was Habitat. What I can't remember, I was on the Foundation a long time ago and I don't remember what got me involved. Obviously it was somebody that was on the Foundation who thought I would make some sort of contribution so I'm sure that is how I got on it.
- C: You don't remember which president was in charge at the time, whether it was Carpenter?
- DH: It was a long time ago. I looked at the presidents recently and I couldn't pick out which one.
- C: Ann, when did you get involved?
- AH: I got involved in 1989. I found a little window of opportunity to do what I wanted to do for a long time and that was to go back to school. I signed up for one course in the field of religion and went with fear and trepidation like a real school girl and walked into the classroom of Neil Gray and it truly was life transforming, as we speak at UNF today, a transformational experience. I then decided to turn it into a second BA so it took six years. I got it in 1995. During that time, David retired from the Foundation, and I remember Dan. Who was Dan? Who was head of? He was a banker.
- DH: Dan Collins?
- AH: Dan Collins, of course. I knew him well. [He] was head of the Foundation and urged me to take David's place, I guess. But I was so committed to just really the academics that I waited until I was through. When I was through I was so enthusiastic about what the school had to offer that I threw myself into the Foundation and was chairman of it when the Board of Regents was abolished and I subsequently became a trustee.
- C: You got a BA earlier from...
- AH: Mount Holyoke College in South Hadley, Massachusetts.
- C: And what was your impression coming to this relatively new state university as a

student compared to your prior experience at Mount Holyoke?

AH: Well, it was a very different experience because this time I studied. I was so fortunate because this liberal studies degree that I pursued, you used your maths and sciences, thank goodness, from your first degree and only were taking upper level courses. So I was so impressed with the dedication of the students and I was so impressed with the faculty also. Of course, Father Gray, particularly, and I can literally remember the night when David and I were talking about the fact that these students who were really accomplishing so much had to hold down telemarketing jobs or Burger King jobs or whatever. We thought we would really like to establish scholarships, and name some of them, half of them, for Neil Gray because of his contribution to the institution, not only intellectually, but he never even accepted his salary. He turned it back in. That impressed us a lot.

C: So, I guess it is unfair to compare UNF in the [19]90s with Mount Holyoke in the early. . . .

AH: There was no comparison. And my age made such a difference and, as I say, I was really a student this time. I hadn't been in my first degree.

C: One of the questions I ask everybody is how do we know UNF is doing a good job with regard to teaching? We call ourselves a teaching institution and everybody in-house praises it, but I am always a skeptic in trying to find out what do outsiders, what do students think, what do people from the community think. On what basis did you think it was extraordinary? I think you used that term a moment ago.

AH: Well, in the advanced classes the class size was so small and there was just a great deal of interaction between the professor and the student. It is not measurable really when you are studying philosophy and religion and so forth but they left energized and they were full of curiosity. Now David is teaching there, so he probably has a different insight and the business college is more measurable maybe. What do you think?

C: How long have you been teaching in the business college?

DH: About a year and a half. I've enjoyed it a lot. This time I'm involved with the masters program which is perhaps more interesting because of the level of student and how badly they want the education. The students are good, the teachers and professors I've worked with have been good. And I think everything. . . .

C: Good compared to what? Good compared to the University of Florida?

DH: They are interesting. The only way I would call the way a good teacher or professor is that they are interesting. As a matter of fact, if you are taking courses, you ought to find out what the professor is like before you sign up.

C: Yes. And so you got your degree from UNF roughly in the mid [19]90s?

AH: [19]95.

C: And what did your volunteer work become?

AH: Well, at that point, I immediately went on the Foundation Board, and I can't remember what year I became president of the Foundation. And then I became pretty busy. I was involved because of David, really, too, with Habijax and it was a big deal at that time. I was on the board of the Cummer [Art Gallery] from which I just retired. And then, just lately, I have become involved with the [public] library and I am chairman of the board now. But, really, the primary thrust has been UNF; my real focus and my major interest.

C: Is the Foundation primarily for the purpose of fund-raising?

AH: Yes. As it should be. I had a very fine relationship with the board and they had obviously done an amazing job. Pierre Allaire and his staff have just done a beautiful, a wonderful job of cultivating the people in the community who can afford to support it.

C: Did you work with his predecessor at all?

AH: Who was who?

C: I'm drawing a blank on that now myself. Oh, Ed Johnson.

DH: Not me.

AH: No. I do remember him.

C: He had been the dean of the College of Business and then was interim.

AH: I do remember him now that you mention it, but, no, when we became interested in becoming contributors, Pierre was really brand new to the job, from Gainesville. So he's been . . . and Elizabeth Head . . . well, Julia Taylor, however, I must say, got me awfully interested in the university before, before Pierre. I had forgotten about what a great asset she was at the time.

C: How did the Hicks Scholarships come about?

AH: It just really was a mutual agreement that we wanted to focus on anything we were going to do in this community and Habijax and UNF were going to be the most important things to us even though we certainly tried to do our share.

DH: And public housing.

AH: Yes. I meant affordable housing, rather. And we'd certainly try to do our part for cultural things, too, but those were our main focus. David was chairman of the housing authority and prior to being the chairman of Habijax and so we thought that was a great opportunity to encourage young people in those two facilities to have the opportunity to go to college and then, as I say, we, both of us, came out of small liberal arts colleges and feel that if you want to be a computer programmer you still need a strong liberal arts background. So we divided them in half and decided to name the other in honor of Father Gray and attract strong students into the liberal arts.

C: Yes. So half the scholarships went for the liberal arts and half went for computer science?

AH: Not computer science. The affordable housing students can choose.

DH: Academically, they are just like any other student; they do not have to be in the business school. Luther Coggin, his kids have to be the low-income students. We are in the position to support forty students at the university at any one time, so that's worked out pretty well. The students get a complete program including books. They have to live out there. They shouldn't have to do anything in the way of borrowing from the government programs.

AH: They really shouldn't even have to hold down another job.

DH: They all do because they have cars.

AH: Which we wish we could have put in the contract that they not have.

C: Who's idea was it?

DH: The low income housing one was because I had a hook to it.

AH: But, David, I'll tell you something. This is fun to talk about, because I hadn't thought of this, when David retired from Computer Power, they honored you by establishing maybe one or two scholarships at UNF, which sort of put the spark in our minds, don't you think? I'm not sure we thought of it before that.

C: But not many people wake up in the morning and say, "Well, I think these

youngsters from public housing or Habijax should have a free ride to the university.”

DH: No. But, without the scholarship, they don't go to school. They work at Wendy's.

C: Have you been involved in the administration of the scholarships in the sense of identifying young people.

AH: David has more than I.

DH: Yes, I've visited a lot of the houses of the students with their parents. I've gotten pretty involved with the students.

C: Has it been a challenge to identify them, the kids, the students?

DH: Yes, they have to get certain scores on the SATs or the ACTs and then they have got to meet UNF's normal requirements for getting in. So, it's pretty well spelled out what they have to do.

C: My experience working with lower-income kids is that they haven't been counseled, they haven't taken the right courses.

DH: Yes. We do all that. We teach them how to take the SATs. We have an after school program for them and we teach them how to write. We are very much involved in their lives.

C: From a very early age.

DH: Sixth grade.

AH: Was it the housing authority that established the Hicks Prep Club?

DH: They started it. Equally, Habijax.

AH: It involves Habijax kids, too, and they meet monthly at least. Don't they?

DH: They meet every week but they are different groups. There are five meetings a week.

C: So you are literally tracking kids from age ten or eleven up until they potential enter the university.

DH: And we need to track them afterwards. We haven't done that.

C: Do you know about the retention rate?

DH: Our retention rate? Yes. Last year we lost one out of nine. One kid went to Harvard and we lost that one.

C: You can excuse yourself for that one.

DH: Correct. We did worse than this a while ago. Now, with our programs of teaching and so on, helping them, we've got mentors for each one of them, we are just doing a better job of retaining students.

C: So how many young people are entering UNF, roughly, this year?

DH: There will be ten or eleven this year.

AH: You are not including the Gray scholars. Which is another ten or eleven.

DH: Right. The two programs are separate.

C: Have you overseen how the Gray scholarships are going?

AH: Not as intensely as David has because they are the star students, so they don't need coddling, but we gather together once a year to applaud them. This year, or a year or so ago, we changed the contract I guess you'd call it, the gift grant, to some extent, to allow foreign study compliant programs. Somebody is certainly doing a good job with them because we get the most glowing letters from all their various adventures and it really does seem to just make an enormous difference if you are studying art with Debra Murphy and end up with her in Rome and Florence. It's pretty special and they do seem to really appreciate it. I don't think they're just off on a summer trip.

C: Are first year students eligible for the Gray scholarships?

AH: No, actually Juniors.

C: Junior year. Junior and senior year.

AH: Yes.

C: So it is a two-year program for the student which would make a community college transfer student eligible too. What are the criteria for the Gray scholarships?

AH: Well, just excellence.

DH: Isn't there a need base for them?

AH: No, not really. It is really an award. It is like a Morehead [Scholarship], that is of course, a gross exaggeration. We were just trying to attract the best in the liberal arts that we could attract. Certainly scholarships are based on need but that is where it is different from those.

C: Who decides upon who gets the Gray scholarships?

AH: The Dean of Arts and Sciences and faculty.

C: To come back to your undergraduate education at UNF, besides Neil Gray, who were some of the other outstanding professors?

AH: And Art Buchwalter was certainly good. He would not let you fall asleep in class. I majored in the history of art at Mount Holyoke and I do belittle my education there and it certainly was a good one, I just didn't give it enough of my effort. But I never had a professor better than Debra Murphy in the art department. She was marvelous. I think those were the stars because I took every course that Neil Gray taught, twice if I could.

DH: And you're continuing.

AH: We do. It's wonderful. We have a little study group that meets once a month with Neil Gray.

C: Out at the beach?

AH: Yes. And that has just been an added bonus.

C: Had there been, besides student and foundation and board, other ways that you have been involved with the university? Informally or formally?

AH: Well, you know, you make so many friends of faculty and administration and so forth.

DH: You were co-chairman of the fund-raiser.

AH: Well, that is because you got out there and raised all that money, certainly, we were. I was a token. But I feel as much a part of it as if we were on the paid staff, because, as I say, together we decided that was the most important thing to contribute to in the community.

C: As you both approached the institution in the late [19]80s, what did it look like to

you? Was it the small, the smallest of the state regional universities? Did you have any particular impression of UNF?

AH: Did you?

DH: My reaction was it wasn't very impressive. It was small. The way the buildings were arranged, I didn't think, was particularly wonderful.

AH: Hard to find.

DH: Doesn't feel like it feels today, by any means. Of course, you probably only had about 6 or 5,000 students. That is a lot different from 17,000.

AH: I don't think I really got it. I mean it might have been self serving, I just really wanted to stay. I didn't quite get the picture in staying of the state and finding how important it is to have someone like John Delaney with political connections that can bring money to the campus that other academics couldn't. I was not looking at the big picture when I first got out there. But it was just a bunch of concrete buildings on a piece of land.

DH: Concrete and brick.

AH: But it was wonderful. The people who were there were so dedicated. My interest wouldn't have been kindled the way it was if they hadn't been.

C: So, clearly, it was the people that you came in contact with. Both classmates and faculty.

AH: Yes.

C: But for you, David, as a business person concerned about whatever, was it worth investing at that point? Or did you see a potential in UNF? You wouldn't invest that money, say, in Edward Waters, maybe, or JU, or might you have?

DH: No. And I wouldn't have invested in UNF either. I think Adam Herbert had a lot to do with it. I think it was the first million dollars that we gave. I can remember Adam had these little tables set up someplace. I think it was like the J. J. Daniel Building and he had people showing their wares off. I can remember taking a look at them and these were various departments that were hoping to get the money. So, I went through it and I was walking away with Adam and I said, "Adam, none of those ring a bell with me."

AH: Oh, I remember what you are talking about.

DH: And then, because I was involved in both of those other institutions, it suddenly came that this might be a better way. So I just simply investigated. But at the beginning, I was opposed to public education.

C: What was your background in education?

DH: Amherst College and Harvard Business.

C: Okay.

DH: And so there are two quite private, especially. Amherst is really private. So I really objected to the University of Florida and those red-shirt football players.

AH: Bet you wouldn't mind if they red-shirted [Tim] Tebow.

C: But, in a sense, you saw potential for the Habijax housing authority kids at UNF which motivated you more than the reality or the potential of the university itself.

DH: Yes. I just didn't get turned on by a department or anyhow, so it just came and it was relatively simple, but, by this time, I had clearly, we had come around, and backing public education made some sense.

AH: You mean that there are people who don't feel like they should raise money for public education.

DH: Right, or get [money for public education].

C: It is a relatively new phenomenon. When I started at UNF in [19]72, we assumed all the funding would be public funding, but the state backed off and the cost went up and the presidents were required or had to go into the private funding, which all the state universities have done across the country.

AH: David, I was thinking while you were talking. When you are being cultivated I don't think you are as aware, except I'm getting a little old and cynical now, but Adam Herbert did an awfully good job of making us aware of how important the university was to. . . .

DH: Yes. I don't know who got us to give that first million dollars.

AH: Adam Herbert.

DH: Was it he? Then you've got Dolores Kesler and some of the others.

AH: And as I say, Julia Taylor was very good at what she did.

C: So your connection really began with the Herbert era. Curt McCray didn't play

any part?

AH: We just knew who he was.

DH: Curt McCray was not involved with us, with me.

C: As a funder and as a student and alumna, what was your reaction to Adam Herbert? How would you appraise him?

DH: I liked him a lot.

AH: I did too. I thought he had it all.

DH: What was yours?

C: Very positive. As I interview people, and I've interviewed about thirty to thirty-five people, we have two eras in the university's history. The first is the Carpenter era, when it began. The second is the 1990s with Adam Herbert at the helm as a super sales person with the legislature, with the community, with the students and the faculty. The faculty weren't totally enamored of him all the time, but one never can be when you are in that situation. But, generally speaking, there was a soft period during the [19]80s which is not so well remembered. We made the transition to four years but didn't pick up the momentum. That awaited Adam Herbert coming on the scene.

AH: Who was the famous chancellor? Charlie [Reed]?

C: Charlie . . . he would have been Bob Graham's administrative aide.

AH: I can remember we had an event at our house, and he came with the Petways and there were rumors of that. Don't dare take Adam Herbert from us. He did. We felt awfully strong about Adam Herbert and hated to see him leave the university.

DH: He promised me he wasn't going to do that.

AH: I know.

C: Did you work with Ann Hopkins at all?

AH: We did.

C: Then you've been working with John Delaney over the last couple of years.

AH: And I was on the search team for John Delaney.

DH: I was very involved with John's election.

AH: This election. The mayor.

C: As mayor.

DH: Right.

C: But his selection as president of the university.

AH: I just felt strongly that if he would just promise to find a strong provost, which he has now, didn't the first go round, that that was going to be the best combination in the world. And it sure is working.

C: Seems to be.

AH: He is a quick study. He may never have been an academic before, but he...

C: Did you have reservations in picking a non-academic?

AH: No. For our experience, we needed more than an academic. We needed somebody who could put the school on the map and raise funds.

DH: Get it organized.

AH: And just let the provost be the academic face of the university. So I think he's got it in place now.

C: Are you Chair of the Board of Trustees now?

AH: No, I am Chairman of the Educational Policy Committee.

C: How does that affect the institution?

AH: Dissolving the Board of Regents?

C: No. Being chair of the academic component of the Board of Trustees.

AH: Now, I don't quite understand what you're asking.

C: I'm asking what your committee does.

AH: Oh, you know, for instance, this last go round we just approved the two new doctorates in physical therapy and nursing. All the new hires we approved. Anything that pertains to academics and educational policy. Nothing to do with the finances. That governmental affairs side of it doesn't fall under our purview.

C: Or in-house operations, they do fall in your purview?

AH: Not particularly, unless it has to do with academic policy. Not the specific; I thought you were asking about the dissolving of the Board of Regents. I think that was the best thing that ever could have happened to us, in particular. Apparently we were really more fortunate than any of the universities in the state to have landed on our feet with such a strong first board and such a strong president, Carol Thompson. Everybody on the board is just passionate about the university, and you have to be a little dispassionate as a Board of Regents to try to take care of everybody.

C: The initial concern was that with nine or ten separate boards that Florida and Florida State would get most of the money, because they had more people in the legislature. They had more alumni. . . .

AH: That is why we needed John Delaney.

C: He offsets that?

AH: He does. Look at the money we've raised.

DH: I think, in part, he probably offsets it so that UNF gets its fair share.

AH: That is right. That is what I meant.

DH: Florida has got, what, 40,000 students?

C: Fifty thousand

DH: Fifty thousand. So you've got to have some proportionate giving of capital funding.

C: I guess the point is that before, in the earlier years, UNF did not even get its proportional share of funding under the Board of Regents.

AH: Right.

DH: Right.

C: I want to come back to this enthusiasm of the Board for UNF, because I doubt if

any of the board members are alumni, except perhaps yourself.

AH: No, I'll tell you, Wyatt Hendrick, who is with the JEA, and Carol Thompson.

C: She has a

AH: Yes. But that just seems to be incidental. I tend to forget that's really part of my background, too. Everybody is intensely interested. Steve Halverson.

C: Is it because of people like Adam Herbert and John Delaney, or is it because of something else?

AH: Well, that certainly makes a great deal of difference.

DH: You can't have a really good institution without a good leader.

C: True.

C: Yes. But the president alone can't do it alone either.

AH: No.

DH: Well, you know, at the beginning, John picked a person, a provost, which was not a good selection. He was smart enough to see it and straighten it out. So it is a matter of being a good leader and being a good administrator. I don't think you can do without either one.

C: Okay. A combination of leadership, funding and students who come.

AH: I think, by now everybody is realizing what an impact it has on the community. Just pick up the wedding page on Sunday, and you'll get numbers of UNF graduates. People are driving around with license tags. Then the people who are running companies, you know that they are employing them. So I just think anybody who cares about Jacksonville, and certainly nobody would have been put on the Board who wasn't very much involved in Jacksonville, knows that it is really so important to the community.

C: Yes.

AH: The attendance is amazing, participation from every standpoint, financial and physical, it's really the strongest board [that] I have ever served on.

C: Looking again at the institution as a whole, what stands out to you as a trustee, or donor, or citizen? What is it about it that you see that's significant for the

community or in comparison with other regional institutions?

AH: Well, now, I can't compare any other regional institutions.

DH: I'll give you my shot at that. When you look around at other good or great cities, you think Nashville with Vanderbilt, you think Boston with Harvard, BC, and so on. Most big cities, good cities, have got good or great institutions. Chicago has got two of them; but they're not good examples. I think that Jacksonville's best shot at having a cultural organization which will influence the community is UNF.

C: Yes.

DH: Certainly JU is not going to make it. FAMU, are they? They are in Tallahassee.

C: Edward Waters.

DH: Edward Waters. They don't have a shot. So, the best we've got is us. I think, if we continue to manage it well, we'll be the institution of choice in Jacksonville.

AH: Stop talking about your friends. Listen, I was thinking, the university is so responsive to the community. Back in Computer Power days, you had a high number. . . .

DH: We had about 400 programmers, and there were a lot of kids who were taking computer science, and when they graduated, we were hiring a lot of them. The way we worked it is we'd take a number of them in the summer, and it would give us an opportunity to see them, and they could see us. Then we would work with them during the year, and we would see how we matched up at graduation. We probably had of our 400 at least 150 people from UNF, and I don't know what it is like now.

AH: Bruce Taylor of Taylor Engineering has just put a million dollars into the engineering program. We all know about the hospital and the nurse shortage, and we are living too long so we need more physical therapists. It has been incredible the demand for physical therapists, but we just put in these two new doctorates that we'll try – we can't do it totally – we'll try to meet those demands. We are always in a state of flux, but whatever comes to the forefront. John, too, has led the way in these transformational learning experiences he's talking about.

C: You've mentioned a lot about achievements and good things the university has done. In your experience, in the fifteen to eighteen years that you have been involved, are there missed opportunities that you have seen, or mistakes, or

things that the university could have done but didn't?

DH: I talked to John about this—it will probably not go anywhere—but the size situation bothers me a little bit. Of course, I'm coming and to a certain extent Ann is too, but coming from a school with 1400 students but very talented students. My thought was that if you could figure out a way to take 1,000 to 2,000 students and put them in a separate sort of a college...

AH: An honors college.

DH: Right, something like that. If a student was in that college and didn't do very well, they get dropped, or the bottom 5 percent automatically get dropped and kids from the other school get moved up. Anyhow, I'd love to see some sort of greater excellence out there if we could get it. These kids who have SATs of 1400 or 1500.

AH: But you know the argument is that first of all you diminish the learning experience of the other students by isolating the smart ones. Then accessibility is such as issue with state universities that you have to. . . . But I agree with you, I have always wanted an honors college but not everybody will agree with us.

C: There are honors programs within each of the disciplines here. There is the honors program that is generic to the university that's been there for a while and that has been part of the attempt, I think, to do what you would like to see happen, but not as far as an entirely separate honors college. Sort of the Stanton Prep concept.

DH: Right, that is a good example. Good example.

C: What do you see for the near future as a trustee?

AH: Well, I think I just mentioned them really. I think, it is funding these programs that are essential to the community is most directed or most responsive or most needed, and becoming excellent in them, not just having them, but having them become really a program that will attract the best from anywhere.

C: JCCI did a study a couple years ago about how we have a lower proportion of college graduates in Jacksonville than the national average? Something like 25 percent of the adults have a BA degree or higher. Does UNF have a role in changing that ratio, or is it more of a K-12 issue?

DH: Here, you're just trying to make the college get bigger, not trying to get it to get smaller.

C: I think that is one of the questions. Obviously, the metropolitan area is growing in size.

DH: Sure.

C: Does the university. . . .

DH: Why don't we grow FCCJ?

AH: They are doing their part.

DH: I just hate to see a dilution of the talent level by not controlling the growth so you are sure you don't do that.

AH: But we're up against it. We don't have a choice if we want the state money.

C: Corporate America can grow and maintain quality, can it not? Why can't educational America?

DH: That is a good point.

AH: Teacher-student ratio for one thing.

DH: Yeah, that is one of the key things.

C: That would have to be maintained.

DH: Yeah, that would be part of maintaining the quality. We could, based on that, work that model, sure.

C: And the fact that the university is now five colleges, when it started out as three, gives some smallness, say, to the nursing program in the College of Health or physics in the College of Arts and Sciences. It maintains a certain dimension that is workable in human terms. I think, the challenge is not to wind up with television courses that the University of Florida has in Gainesville.

DH: I'll tell you one thing that rankles me is the number of tests and exams which are multiple choice. I continue to believe, I know, that one of the difficult things for an employer to get is a student who can write well. Yet we foster that by multiple choice. Multiple choice is easier to correct but doesn't make the student learn anything and that is part of their world.

C: How many multiple choice exams did you have?

AH: Not a one.

DH: Father Gray wouldn't have done that. He doesn't mind sitting down and correcting them. But he is very cerebral.

AH: David has shown me some from the business school that I could pass by guessing. So that is terrible. However, that is just a small thing, because I really do think the business school is doing a grand job.

DH: Oh, yes, I am not arguing with that. I do think writing skills could be enhanced.

C: Does your course do that? What do you teach?

DH: It is an entrepreneurial course. I've got control of a course in the spring where we're going to get fourteen head people of their companies like Luther Coggin, me, Preston Haskell. The quality is very, very good of the head people. Then we're going to. . . . It is one of those late courses where it starts at six and then we've got about three hours in it.

AH: What? You just told me something I didn't know. You're going to be teaching at night?

DH: One night a week. And then we have these cases from Stanford and Harvard, which we will use, and I'm hoping they haven't seen them, I don't think they have. They are going to get cases for their files, and they're going to be ready if I have anything to do with it. On this course I will have something to do with it.

C: Yes. Anything else you'd like to add in terms of. . . .

AH: No, this has been fun. I love talking about UNF, and I haven't stopped to think about it and reflect in a long time. It certainly has meant a lot to us.

DH: Oh, yes, no question.

AH: I don't say that just to be flowery. It really has just given us lots. . . .

DH: Life more meaning.

AH: It has. Its marvelous.

C: Well, thank you very much for sharing.

DH: You are entirely welcome. I enjoyed it.

[End of Interview.]