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July 17/2000

Interview with Dr. Bob Collins-Founding Board Member

Dr. A: Bob, how did you get involved with the college to start?

First let me tell you John, everything has happened since we began thinking about this thing is a blur to me. The time has just flown by. Lot of details I don't even remember. There was, as I recall, a kind of informal planning group. David McCall was in the middle of it and this was the group that had basically put together the two hundred people out getting petitions signed. There was also, once they got the petition signed, once they got the legislature to approve the go-ahead on the election, then there was a group that was organizing some people to run for board positions. And McCall called me and asked me if I'd consider running for a board position and I sat down with he and 7 or 8 of us, Carey, Jim Dixon was involved and Colin Chopin. We got together informally and talked about it then the 6 or 7 of us decided we'd put our names on the ballot. Dick was on there from Wylie.

Dr. A: I think 7 of you ran as a slate. I think they attribute Judge Roberts attributes the 9 to the Mayor out at Wylie complaining that there was not a representative from Wylie and so they added 2 more cause they didn't want 8. Dick became part of that.

And then Bill Crawford got in there. He was not part of the slate but he ran on his own. Carey was in the middle of that and was very interested. He'd been co-chair in the effort to get the petition signed. After the election we all got together and decided we wanted Carey to be our Chair. It was very informal, very congenial, no political agendas. I think the neat thing about what we did was we all had the same objective in mind. We all wanted to build a top notch community college, we wanted to be first. I think if you look back, particularly at the leadership element in Plano – I'm not talking about today's

generation, I'm talking about a generation past. The vision that they has was just incredible and generally the differentiator in that vision was that probably the superceding requirement and everything that Plano did in the early days over it began to grow, was excellence. And still they want to be first class in whatever they do, so that influence from the southern part of the county. The thing that I liked about our board, was really, you always had your eyes commonly on the same goal which was to have an outstanding institution.

Dr. A: Tino asked me what impressed me as to why I took the job. I said, the Board of Trustees. When I first came to the interview I was really impressed. There was no agenda, everybody was interested in doing the best job for kids and the county and that was very impressive.

The second thing was we were intent on hiring the best people we could get. When we interviewed you, we had 5 of the best candidates you could find in this country. Ed had done a superb job in getting people dug out of the woodwork and filtering that group for¹ us. It was a tough decision to deciding who our final choice would be because the quality was so high. Back to the election...we had the election and no political agendas, that I was aware of. The election was pretty uneventful, several of the candidates fell by the wayside and that initial group set out as the Board of Trustees. I still remember the day we were sworn in at the courthouse in McKinney. In fact we have a photo of that. Then we started all the things we had to do, process of hiring a president, process of to get some sort of a long-range plan in place, all at one time which you well know, since you had to implement it. So anyway things went well for us.

Dr. A: That initial master plan that was before I even came was just a masterpiece, one of the most accurate thing I've ever seen.

I've forgotten who we hired, but we hired a planning company to do that for us and of course we interacted with them a little bit on that. I thought that was good too. Now

Collin County and the North Texas Region is blessed to have a good set of forecasting statistics that the North Texas Council of Governments keeps. So the planners have the data they need to do a pretty good forecast. In the 32 years that we've been in the county the growth trends have never stopped. Even during down times, the growth continued on, it was a slow rate, but nevertheless there was growth that never stopped. And I don't see it stopping from a population standpoint. Until the county geographically fills out or until the local governments decides to cut back on the construction funding. And if the tax base get to the point where they will not support that then you'll see some growth tempering. But the environment here is fantastic economically. When you're dealing with a tax base that is continually growing, when your economy is growing and your tax base grows and so you don't have to worry about tax rate changes all the time. Just set your tax rate and go because you are growing with the economy. There's not a much easier environment to be in.

Dr. A: Bob, when you first came on board you were still in Plano and then you moved to Frisco. Initially there appeared to be a lot of resistance from the smaller communities about the college. I think the most opposition came from Allen and Plano and that area.

Well you know the many conversations we had about McKinney and the fact that McKinney seems to be town about whether they want to come into the 20th century. In a way McKinney serves as a good measure of the transition that a rural community has to make in order to face up to go. I see it in all the small communities and primarily it's a leadership issue and a vision issue. Most of the folks in the small communities if you were to sample them you would find opinions that look something like this: we're not getting much benefit out of this but we're going to have to pay taxes, the sub part of the counties are going to dictate what happens and there's a high level of education where you have people who are aggressive and in this modern day market place and educated them you tend to have a more vision to grow. The rural communities haven't come to grips with that growth is going to get them one way or the other. In our country, fortunately, we have ownership rights and laws to support that and so a community just

can't up and say we're not going to grow. The growth trends will occur whether you like it or not. Then the issue is how do you handle that or manage or cope with it. You can either have a positive visionary approach or you can have a head-in-sand approach. A head-in-sand approach will get ya. That was the McKinney type approach cause you have a leadership there that doesn't want to deal with growth. They're still living 20 years ago and are worried about tax rates. The blessing of leadership, the value of that, you just cannot truly asset it – how important that is. And visionary leadership in Plano in the southern part of the county has been probably the key to Collin County being able to accomplish what it's been able to accomplish in the last 34 years. There's no doubt in my mind that it's not a resource issue as a leadership issue. You look at the Commissioners Court. In fact we were at the GOP Convention last month and we had a chance to get in some informal chats. After one of the county caucuses 4 or 5 of ourselves found ourselves just standing around talking. It was Florence, myself, Jack Hatchell and Jerry Hoagland and our spouses talking and that was the nucleus of the City Council in Plano in the late 70s and early 80s right there. And all of those guys except me had gone to be outstanding leaders in our county. So you see Jack & Jerry have a key spot on the Commissioners Court, Ryan's come along now, he came out of that same Plano Leadership Training School down there and Phyllis who kind of on the periphery did the same thing. That Leadership Aura/Environment that existed in Plano has influenced almost to the Commissioners Court. Joe Jaynes is the only one who has not come out of that environment, so you see, this leadership, this vision is moving up to the county level. You don't transfer knowledge by issuing training courses or manuals, you need to transfer it to people.

Dr. A: As you look back over the history, any challenges you would want to reflect on?

This has been the most pleasant, satisfying public service position I've ever had. I think the biggest challenge we had was the very first challenge we faced was hiring a president. Once we accomplished that satisfactorily, everything else fell into place. The only set

back we had was when we lost the bond election for the Frisco Campus. That was a setback

Dr. A: Course we still live with a little negativism about how did you go ahead and build that when we didn't want it.

In fact I had friends that said we didn't want that campus. I said, no you didn't, what you decided you didn't want to pay any taxes. We still see that, but I'm telling you that visionary leadership in my opinion always faces those issues. You're going to always face crisis decision points where you're not going to be the most popular person in town, but the vision says we must go ahead. The first challenge we had was getting the president, the right president, which we did and we were very fortunate and blessed in being able to do that. The second challenge, what to do about the West Campus. Because that was the final component of the Master Plan. The disappointment there, that whole process: 1st we lost the bond election, 2nd there was a crisis of leadership, what d²o we do now. And we decided we had to have this campus. It was going to be the center for the future, we had this whole area developing up the toll way to Legacy Park and th³e potential for major industrial facilities going on in there and corporate headquarters, so we felt like we had to be close to that or part of that. So we decided, well hell, that was the key decision on that. The only time that we've had political agendas visibly present in board deliberations was in the process of settling on a site for this campus. That was a disappointment to me. We had political elements that played in there. We had personal agendas at play and it was very evident that they were in play. It was evident that there was political pressure involved. That was a disappointment but that we let it come in to the board. We always have political pressure of one sort or another. The key to, I think, visionary leadership is to that apart from the deliberations. Our deliberations have to be open and they have to be honest. And we have to solicit honest opinions on the table and on honest debate. But that was a disappointment. Fortunately we were able to make the

² Bob Collins

³ Bob Collins

right decision. I believe we had selected a site south on 121 and from a long range visionary standpoint a bad choice. We would not have made the progress.

Dr. A: We drive by that property we looked at and it's still not developed. The congestion, this is bad, but...

This is going to come out alright. I think the access to the tollway will be better here. Eventually I think we should have a straight shot over to the tollway shouldn't we? I think that's going to work out well. At the time we could not or we did not forecast it but it turns out that Frisco's going to be the dominant city in the county. In city government, size has a lot to do with your power within your local. The key to this is leadership and progress.

Dr. A: What do you see for the future?

That question is a question that for the first time in my career I've not been able to fairly quickly get to a decision or get to an opinion on how we ought to head out because it's clear that we're going to grow, clear that growth will continue in a number of ways. Growth is going to continue up the tollway corridor or the I-35 / 75 corridor. It will continue all the way to Sherman eventually. So we've got that growth situation. We've got a growth situation that's going to occur on the east side of town, not to the same extent here, but it is going to grow. Now the quality of growth is another issue now in that the visionary leadership is a big thing cause you're seeing all the communities involved and they don't know how to handle it. So what does the college do in the midst of all this? We have a responsibility to provide not only top notch freshmen, sophomore education for students but we have a responsibility to provide an education environment for everybody, whether it be just pure training or whether it be for personal growth or whatever it may be. I think we have the mission to provide that educational environment as accessible by everybody or who ever want it. So what do we do? The confusing part is what is the role of technology in the future learning environment. I can't put my finger on that cause I watched over the years and I've seen technology bits and parts and I've never

seen it really solve the problem of education. Nothing yet has been able to beat a person sitting across the table from a mentor. Try to learn what that mentor is teaching you. As I look back on my education there's nothing like a true mentor for a professor in the classroom, who is gifted, committed, called literally to that position and focuses all their energy on conveying knowledge to their students. There's not an experience quite like that I've enjoyed more and I've been blessed to have had 2 or 3 mentors along the way. So I don't know what role technology's going to play, Internet will play a powerful role. It's going to be able to electronically move a student from a remote position to an eyeball to eyeball confrontation with that mentor without being in the classroom. the big dilemma on my part is what role is that going to play. Do we need to build a lot of bricks and mortar in the future. do we need to acquire land, do we need to be building technology infrastructure? I suspect the answer to that question to some extent is yes to all the above. Now, how big a scope? I personally can't put my finger on it. I think right now we're probably facing, and don't realize it's the biggest long-term crisis we've ever been faced with this college because it's just not clear where we need to go. I don't know how you guys on the inside feel but I just think we have to be looking at the future with the growth, the trends we have here in this county and the way things are going to develop, aggressive leadership, visionary leadership, high quality people, high level of education.

Dr. A: I think you're going to need a facility because of the very thing you talked about. Education is still a social process, it's tough to socialize with something like this. It's a good information disseminator. I really think a lot of this, the dramatic impact, that technology will have is our learning resources center, our libraries, we're not going to need warehouses for books when you can access everything on the computer but beyond that I still think you're going to need forums and classrooms somewhere you can bring in your major professors to interact with students.

I agree with you John, I guess the question I'm having is in the past our standard footprint is we use a hundred acres. Do we need a hundred or do we need fifty. Do we need to build a cluster of buildings like we're building here or can we get by with half this size of cluster and create that center you're talking about. I think the answer's somewhere in

between there – do we need the health facilities, the physical education facilities. I think we do because I think that's a key to a growing community. They go hand in hand. Do you need a place where experts and students can sit down together – yes, we certainly do. Library, probably not. Do you need a central library, probably do because we'd need to get books out to people. Should we be working with the local communities? I think that's a big untapped partnership area there we could work in local community libraries.

Dr. A: We tried here and they pulled it back. Small town politics.

I think the small towns waste a lot of energy and money when they could be working with the college.

Dr. A: Now we do have a good relationship with Plano, Maribell Davis was easy to work with. She was very visionary and when she and DeCody got together they created a system that our people were opposed to because they've taken over the administration side of that city library and doing a very good job. Saved us a lot of money.

So I think we can see some partnerships yet to evolve, but where do we take our future sides. I admit I'm biased here cause I'm a strong believer that we've got to have a site on each side of the county. The population is coming that way. We've got the potential for picking up Rockwall into our educational coverage. There's a whole corridor from Rockwall going north from a physical standpoint's not served right now, we need to do something there. And we're going to need more sites north of 121, there's no question about that – when and where we put them in, I don't know. We desperately need to have a plan in mind, start doing some forecasting. I think Carey's working on that.

Dr. A: Anything else you want to say for the good of the cause. I always ask people when the book turns into a movies is there any particular person you want to play you?

⁴ Bob Collins

No. As far as I'm concerned John, it's just been a great ride. This is a great story to tell, I'm glad you're doing that.

Dr. A: I'm learning a lot, I really am. There's a lot of things I was not, probably should have been, never had a chance to...

I think John, really, from an administrators' standpoint you've got your finger on the real pulse of the college and all of the issues that took place – faculty and all those things. I can't emphasize enough the fact that we've been very fortunate to have for 15 years a Board that refused to let outside agendas come into our board deliberations.

Dr. A: And the other thing is you gave the President the leeway to do things with micromanaging the institution, which was extremely important.

Yea, we've always stayed away from that and just been very fortunate to have people in board positions. I don't know how you get to that point but we're very fortunate.

Dr. A: I've looked at other groups, other boards and they're not that way.

Thanks for your time Bob.⁵

⁵ Bob Collins