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Judge Roberts

John Anthony Dr.

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Dr. Anthony and Judge Roberts

June 29, 2000

Judge Roberts: The initial meeting consisted of Judge Roberts, Howard Thornton and Jerry Hoagland.

They approached the community leaders to help sell the idea and achieve the objective of a community college for this area. It was decided to divide the counties into sections – south and north. David McCall was asked to take the south and Carey Cox the north section. They were asked to lead the charge and they did and did it well.

Dr. A: challenges – Dallas or Grayson

Roberts: There were a number of challenges, obviously the tax payers were a challenge. One of the challenges in the beginning --- 5 commissioners and a county judge who controlled the politics of the county. We had two of the commissioners who were not in favor of the college. I think one of them represented a rural sector – he didn't believe that his part of the county would reap any benefit what-so-ever – the other was just an anti-tax individual and so even though we knew from the very beginning that we should over-ride their two negative votes – we were the sponsors of the idea for the rest of the state. The fact that they were publicly fighting us hurt and it was difficult to overcome. It was not the most difficult thing. The election itself – as I told you – once the Coordinating Board almost laughed – seriously, in public meeting. They really did not believe that we had any chance what-so-ever in passing that election.

We deemed that at the time of being the number one hurdle to overcome, and we didn't realize that the worst hurdle was yet to come. So we put all of our efforts into that election. I give credit to Jerry Hoagland on that... we didn't realize that the biggest hurdle was yet to come and after the election --- from the election we had the authority from the commissioners... we did have to go back to the Coordinating Board and show

them that we had won the election and formally, once again seek their permission to create the college. That's where they really lowered the boom on us and said, well we don't have a choice – we have to allow you to do what you want to do but we're not going to support your request for funding from the state. I remember saying, well I'm kinda ???????? here – what are you talking about and they said, well you can't have a college with that money. I thought that was something that just occurred and they said, oh no – there's a fund that it's used for the community college districts and you are going to have to talk to legislature to allow you to be a part of and then number 2, no one is going to get less than they got last year so if they add you into the pile (?) pie ? so that means they'd get less so that means your going to have to talk legislature into adding more money to it.

And I had had a number of years in working with legislature and in the funding areas so I realized that we were going to have super obstacles in getting this accomplished. I took a real optimistic approach in my lobbying efforts with members and I'd had a lot of success in previous years – in my requests with legislature. I think I really felt that it was going to be hard – but it would be something that I could overcome early in the session. We had a legislature session coming up in a couple of months and I started early. I got nothing but discouraging news. I don't remember who the chairman of the committee was that controlled those funds but he basically told me that there is nothing that I could do to be added to the list. At that time I asked the commissioners to hire a professional lobbyist to help us – and the lobbyist was more than one person – it was a firm in Austin, a law firm that had close ties to the key personnel in the legislature and it was a joint effort between the law firm and my personal efforts and when the legislative sessions started committee meetings on funding, I began on the very first day of legislative sessions --- Legislature sessions are in session roughly 5 months and I was in Austin every single week for 5 months – part of the time knocking on doors and part of the time working with the legislature analysts for the state. I worked with them for hours and hours – many times hours at night trying to calculate what we would need as for as state funding and to figure out how to try to work it into the budget. At that time, deathly afraid of not only opposition from our local competitors - being Dallas and Grayson but

we were more afraid of distant competitors cause we were asking for a piece of the whole pie and we did get some opposition – some verbal opposition from people from community colleges that were distant and I’m very happy to say that we got support from our neighbors. They were truly wonderful for us. I don’t know if you know the legislative process or not but the preparation of the state wide budget which we were going to be a teeny tiny part begins really before the legislative session starts in January and it normally does not end until the last 3 days of the legislative session. We got down to the last 3 days of the legislative session and the budget on the floor did not include us – and I’m not sure how it was pulled off but before -- in fact I wasn’t even there when the vote came down although I’d been there for 5 months. Before the legislature was over -- -- I got a call about 11 or 11:30 at night from our lobbyist telling me ---- you were just voted in. So, it was that close. Now had they recessed the next day – and us not being included in the budget – we probably wouldn’t have a college today. So it was that close of a call.

Dr. A: Who was the lobbyist that was used there?

Roberts: It was the law firm ??? Biggerstaff ?? the young lady’s name ?? I’ll look it up for you.

Dr. A: O.K. Was our local delegation supportive?

Roberts: Yeah – very supportive. The 2 hurdles we had were the finance/budget committees in the legislature. Had a mandate from the Governor that there would be no raises in budget or taxes – and then if that was the case, there was one pie that had to be cut up and the other community colleges were saying, “NO” we are not sharing our pie.

Dr. A: I spent 15 years listening to that - - - - as president of association chair when we had only one new college – South Texas

Roberts: Well certainly you know what I’m talking about then.

Dr. A: Was White or Clemmons governor at the time? I can look that up - - -

Roberts: I do not recall. .

Dr. A: This is information I've never heard. I knew you were very active in lobbying and in talking with Carey. You really did the yeoman's job of getting the political process moving down there but I didn't realize they had said – the – was what it was -----

Roberts: Oh – it was a stone wall and it wasn't "maybe" it was "no" – every time we knocked on the door.... It was one of the deals that I was losing hope that it was going to happen – but I didn't want to give up.

Dr. A: How something like that can change the lives of 100/1000 of people is unbelievable.

Roberts: Now you look at the population of the college and all that have gone through it - - - benefited from it. I'll be very candid about it in saying, those of us sitting around the table that evening that the whole ordeal was conceived, I never dreamed of those kind of benefits – that the numbers would be as great as they are. Even today I'm stunned at the numbers.

Dr. A: Do you have any disappointments?

Roberts: I can't think of a single disappointment. To your credit, I don't think we could have chosen a better leader to lead the college in all the years that you did. I think it was another notch in our belt that we made another good decision.

Dr. A: Characters???

Roberts: Oh back in the election process when we were getting ready – we had some characters come up in rural parts of the county that we had to handle with kid gloves. They saw no benefits and didn't want to pay anymore taxes.

Dr. A: Farmersville farmer – opposed to it but now proud of what has been accomplished.

Roberts: Farmersville and Princeton as communities were opposed to the college but the rural people were for it. After voted in – Princeton offered land – wanted college there. Looked at it but it didn't come to pass. I would like for history to show that lots of people pulling their individual jobs were responsible for this coming to pass. My part was a small part.

Dr. A: It was a crucial part.

Roberts: All parts were crucial. I give credit to Jerry Hoagland. If the election hadn't passed – it would never have been raised again – but lots of people didn't think the election would pass. But it was a huge success. Jerry knows how to run elections. That's why that job was delegated to him. Everyone did the job that they did the best. I am proud to have been a part of this process. I guess everyone wants to leave a legacy that is considered worthwhile. I feel that this is one of my major accomplishments that I had anything to do with.

Dr. A: The students owe you a great depth of gratitude