

Athens Rotary Club Address

Holiday Inn · January 17, 2007

Thank you for this annual opportunity to speak with you about the relationship between the University of Georgia and our host community. It is my sense that town-gown relations were quite good in 2006. Let me share with you some of the ways that the university and the city worked together.

We cooperated on a number of significant projects, none more important than Partners For a Prosperous Athens. UGA was one of the co-conveners of this group, which is so ably led by Rotarians Steve Jones and Red Petrovs. Art Dunning, UGA's vice president for public service and outreach, has played a leadership role in connecting our resources with the program. In coming together to address a problem that impacts everyone in this community, we are living the Rotary motto of "Service Above Self."

It has been heartening to see the turnout for the various Partners hearings and meetings. Athens is rich in resources – the campus and the community, the people, the intellectual capital – and complex issues require comprehensive solutions. I am confident that we are on the path toward significant improvement in the quality of life for all Athenians.

We agreed to work together on the construction of a new wastewater treatment plant on the Middle Oconee River, near East Campus. UGA will help with the cost of a bridge to the site of the new plant, which will also provide access to the Harden property we recently purchased.

This is one of those win-win situations: The new plant will be more efficient and, frankly, less smelly. The university gains access to property which can currently be accessed only through a neighborhood. Access to that property allows us to plan for future space and facility needs.

The final stage – thankfully! – of the Lumpkin Street project began last week. This, too, has been a cooperative project. While the city bore most of the financial responsibility, the university has provided some property, some technical assistance and the construction and maintenance of the rain gardens, which direct rainwater away from the storm water system. It's a relatively simple, environmentally-friendly way to manage excess water in the streets.

The Lumpkin Street project tops off a trio of streetscape projects we have completed with Athens-Clarke County, with the Baldwin and Baxter Street projects improving pedestrian safety and traffic flow.

Our joint effort to increase the use of the two bus systems continues to work well, reducing the number of cars on the streets and offering convenient alternatives to people both on and off campus. As you may recall, UGA students, faculty and staff can ride the city buses for free, and the university's a lump-sum payment to Athens Transit. One reason that requests for parking permits on campus have actually decreased over recent years is that our students, faculty and staff have discovered this convenient and economical alternative to driving to campus.

There will be great opportunities for further cooperation in the coming months and years, particularly in the area of economic development. This region has all the necessary resources to be attractive to the kind of high-tech, biotechnology industries that we want here. We need a strategy that involves all the players – the local government, the University of Georgia, Athens Tech, the state government – in order to capitalize on the opportunities that will come our way.

We came close last year, and there is another opportunity in play today, and there will be more in the future. As the cliché goes, it's a marathon, not a sprint, but what is at the finish line is worth the struggle.

The University can use your help on one particularly significant opportunity – our application to host the National Bio and Agro-Defense Facility, or NBAF. As you probably know, the federal government has solicited bids for a facility dedicated to the nation's defense against threats from biological terrorism or attacks on our food supply.

UGA has made the first cut, and we're excited about that. It is not an overstatement to say that NBAF could transform this community in terms of economic development. Construction of the 500,000-square-foot facility would create some 1,000 jobs. Initially, the facility will employ 500 people in very high-paying positions, with an estimated 1,200 additional jobs created in the community as a result of NBAF's being here. The Vinson Institute has estimated that the 20-year

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economic impact to be as much as \$2.5 billion in salaries and \$3.5-\$6 billion in total economic impact.

Mull over those numbers. Six billion dollars. 1,700 jobs.

Here's what you can do: Become a supporter of our NBAF proposal. One of the factors on which the decision will be made is community support. The other factors are research capabilities, where UGA is very strong and has alliances with Tech, Emory, the CDC, MCG and other agencies which strengthen the capability to do this research; workforce, which is an area where Georgia has improved substantially in recent years; and acquisition, construction and operations, or essentially the ability to build and manage the facility – again, an area where Georgia has great strength.

What we need is strong, vocal support for the proposal. Pat Allen and David Lee, our vice president for research, will be happy to provide you with any information you need in order to become an informed advocate. As the process moves forward this year, there will likely be public hearings, conducted by the Department of Homeland Security, and we would appreciate your presence at those.

You have read about our proposal for a Health Sciences Campus on the Navy School property. We are grateful that the Governor included \$3.8 million in his budget for the expansion of the Medical College of Georgia's programs in Athens.

I want to be sure you understand that this is not just a significant opportunity for the University of Georgia. It is also a chance for Athens to be at the center of Georgia's battle with some serious public health challenges.

Teaming up with the clinical staff at the Medical College of Georgia, the academic programs of Athens Technical College and the two local hospitals will provide here in Athens a public health campus that promises to have a significant positive impact on the quality of life in our state. I believe that 50 years hence, the creation of the UGA Health Sciences Center will be seen as one of this state's most important public policy moves of the 21st century.

These opportunities – NBAF, the Navy School property, biotech development along 316 and the Orkin tract – are as exciting as any in my 10 years at UGA.

I want to brag about our students and the positive impact they have as volunteers in this community. Some of you may have read the story in the Banner-Herald a few weeks ago about the difficulty some local social service organizations have serving their clients when the University is on holiday, because so many UGA students serve as volunteers in those organizations.

Trudy Bradley, coordinator of the Clarke County Mentor Program, says there are 448 UGA students registered as mentors. If they meet only the minimum requirement of one hour per week with their young students, that's 2,740 hours per month - and I am confident that many of them spend much more than just an hour a week with their students.

This is what she had to say about the UGA students who serve as mentors: "Their enthusiasm is boundless, their dedication to their mentees is unbelievable, their sense of responsibility shows maturity beyond their years, and their desire to help others is an example we should all follow.

"The mentor program is blessed to have UGA students working with us. And I am blessed, personally. They are MY mentors as well as the young people with which they work.....they make ME a better person just by the examples they set."

More than 1,200 UGA students subscribe to a weekly e-mail service which lists volunteer opportunities coordinated through Volunteer UGA, a department of our student affairs office. More than 800 students have volunteered with community service agencies, and 150 UGA students applied to the Big Brother/Big Sister program this year.

The Alternative Spring Break program, in which UGA students use the break to volunteer in service to others, has 12 sites set up this year, from Washington, DC to Chattanooga to Mobile to Port Saint Joe. There were 360 applications for the 150 spots available. And UGA students organized the first campus-based Relay for Life, which this year involves some 500 students.

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These are good kids doing good work on their own time for this community, and I am proud of them.

In closing, an update on our plans for enrollment and facilities. There are no plans at present for any significant increase in enrollment here in Athens. There may be, in the coming years, some adjustment in the enrollment mix between undergraduate and graduate students as we evaluate those programs. (As a point of reference, most major public research universities have an undergraduate to graduate ratio of 2:1; at UGA, we are closer to 3:1.)

By agreement with the Regents, our enrollment target for the main campus is 32,500, with a two percent variance. With about 32,800 students on the Athens campus and about 1,100 others at Gwinnett, Griffin and Tifton, we are within that range and plan to stay there.

We will expand our graduate programs in Gwinnett County and the undergraduate programs in Griffin and Tifton.

As I have told you before, any significant increase in enrollment in Athens, in addition to a policy change, would require hundreds of millions of dollars in infrastructure spending on the part of the state.

If you have been on campus recently, you have probably seen the two major construction projects currently under way: the practice facility for men's and women's basketball and women's gymnastics adjacent to Stegeman and the construction of the new home of the Lamar Dodd School of Art on East Campus.

The new art school will bring together departments which are literally scattered across campus in a facility befitting the legacy of its namesake. The project is on schedule for completion in the spring of 2008. The practice facility should be completed this summer.

On the horizon are an expansion of the College of Pharmacy building, which will help us meet Georgia's critical need for pharmacists and which the Governor also included in his budget; the construction of a Special Collections Library on Hull Street; and an expansion of the Georgia Museum of Art.

Finally, we will see movement this year on the expansion of the Tate Student Center, beginning with the construction of a parking deck in the Tate lot. The Tate expansion will be built on top of the deck.

In every sense, the fate of UGA and the fate of Athens are intertwined. I like living in Athens and entertaining at the President's House. My wife owns a house here. I am a taxpayer and I am invested in this community. Athens is my home.

Likewise, the University of Georgia bears a statewide responsibility as the flagship institution of the University System of Georgia. The land-grant mission charges us to teach, to conduct research and to serve the people of the state by connecting the resources of the university with them. We must balance our responsibilities as a citizen of Athens-Clarke County with an historic responsibility to the entire state.

As I said in last week's State of the University address, ultimately what is best for the state has to be our priority – and I believe that what is best for the state is what is best for Athens as well.