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Wednesday May 26, 2010

Wenxian Zhang, Alia Alli & Jennifer Ritter

WZ: Good afternoon my name is Wenxian Zhang, Head of Archives & Special Collections, today is Wednesday, May 26, 2010. With me are two students: Jennifer Ritter and Alia Alli. We are going to interview Mr. George Herbst, Vice President of Stetson University, and former (Herbst laughs) Vice President of Rollins College in Finance and Treasurer?

GH: Correct.

WZ: Tell us your family background, where you grow up.

GH: Oh my goodness. (laughter) I was born in Saint Louis and grew up in Saint Louis, went to college at Saint Mary's University in San Antonio, Texas, got an undergraduate degree in political science, and then later an M.B.A. from the University of Notre Dame.

WZ: Okay, what made you decide to major in political science?

GH: (laughs) A dynamic professor at Saint Mary's University. I was just enthralled, by political science.

WZ: Mm-hm.

GH: And most of my job is really not finance, it's measuring the political climate and temperature, and so much of the job of an administrator is to handle the political environment on a campus. It's put me in great step.

WZ: So after you had finished your college education, then you had a career in education?

GH: Right, right. I was a member of a Catholic religious order that ran schools and universities, of which are Saint Mary's University, University of Dayton, Chaminade University in Hawaii, plus a lot of high schools across the country. I was a member of that order until 1978, when I got my education - you know - both my degrees while a member of the order and I started off as a teacher. I started with fifth grade, taught everything through high school, and then went in to administration. And I guess it would be a long time but (laughs) - I actually, more of my career, thirty-eight years I've been a chief financial officer at education institutions, originally, in high schools, and then for the last quite a few years in higher ed.

WZ: So, before you came to Rollins, I understand you were vice president at the University of Dallas.

GH: Yes, I was - prior to the University of Dallas I was actually the vice president at Cranbrook Educational Community in Bloomfield Hills, Michigan, a large, very complex educational complex of elementary, day and boarding, an art museum, a science museum, a graduate school of art and architecture, a historic campus that is not just a historic designation but is a national historic landmark equivalent to the Empire State Building or some category like that. So, I was the vice president there and then from there in 1992 I went to the University of Dallas and in 1996 I came here, to Rollins.

WZ: Tell us about your career at UT, Uh, University of Dallas.

GH: At the University of Dallas?

WZ: Yes.

GH: Uh, well I was only at the University of Dallas three and a half years. And you know, I was a traditionalist just as I had at Cranbrook, and just as I had here and just as I have at Stetson. It's the full array of responsibilities. I'm both the chief financial officer, the chief business officer, handle all non-academic administration. Responsible for everything from finance, budget, investments, insurance, legal issues, to auxiliaries, food service, bookstores, post offices, print shops, security, safety, facilities, construction, um - you know - information technology, (thud) but I'm used to a broad array of responsibilities and that's what I've had in all of those positions.

WZ: So what make you decide to come to Rollins?

GH: (laughs) You know, I knew of Rollins and thought it was a very attractive - you know - opportunity and I was impressed by President, Rita Bornstein, and her vision and where she was in terms of her presidency, and where she wanted to go, and I was in that search process for some months and I was one of four finalists, and then one of two finalists, and then was selected and came here in January of 1996.

WZ: So what's your first impression of Rollins?

GH: Wow, that's a long time ago. (Laughs) I was very excited to be here and I had - it was a great time in my career, because I considered Rollins to really be the capstone of my career. You know, I had been a teacher, administrator in a number of places and here was a chance to kind of bring it all together. Had many of the same characteristics as Cranbrook and, in fact, some Cranbrook students and parents who have visited over the years and have - you know - some of whom have enrolled here - often say that Rollins is the Cranbrook of the South. Soon Stetson will be the Cran - no, I'm just (laughter), but uh, it was just for me, it was a chance to do it in a warm climate. I'm a warm climate person, having lived a lot of my life in Texas that Michigan after fourteen years was a little wearing. So, and the opportunities at the University of Dallas were somewhat limited going forward, but the opportunities here were immense and so I - the challenge was there. We had extraordinary leadership in Rita Bornstein, and so I decided to come here, and was here for twelve and a half years.

WZ: You mentioned challenges, so what is – what was the financial situation when you first came on board? What are some of the major challenges that you deal with?

GH: Well, I succeeded a very well known financial officer in higher education, Lou Morrell, Lou's large, primary expertise is in endowment management. He spent a lot of his time doing that. He was a tough, tough administrator, and was more interested in the end result than necessarily the process; and I'm much more process-oriented, but in his five or six years here Lou cleared up a lot of issues. He - there were some deficits in Rita's early days that she inherited that he straightened out. There were some things like post retirement benefits, contracting the bookstore and a number of things that - you know - were appropriate and needed to be done and Lou did it in his time. He set a good structure for the College's investment management, and – so when I came here I would say the finances were balanced, but not- you know - not extremely healthy, but they were not in deficit as - you know - many institutions and places find themselves at times. That had been cleared up but the endowment at that time was about one hundred sixty million dollars. There were about 1340 - if I recall right - undergraduate students. The facilities were in serious need of addressing. Capital renewal and deferred maintenance – you know - issues, Rita was in the earliest stages of a capital campaign that had not been announced yet but a lot of major gifts were being secured. And so it was on the edge of things.

The architects-the first architectural firm-was selected, Shepley Bullfinch, a national firm out of Boston done a lot of work in higher ed., were on board to do the campus center, which was the lead project out of Rita's - you know - campaign and era. Addressing what had been a long, long standing identified need here at Rollins. I often said that I was here six weeks and the architects started coming and it never ended. In my subsequent almost thirteen years - you know - tenure after that so, it was good but it wasn't solid, but it was - the stage was being set for a really, really sound financial base for the institution, which ultimately - you know - under the leadership of Rita and the Board and with some assistance from me, we were able to establish a healthy financial position for the College, both in the growth of endowment, the growth of enrollment, which by the time I left was almost eighteen hundred undergraduates, and I had in my time completed thirty major construction and renovation projects here.

JR: You talked about the College being on the edge of things. I read in one of the files that they were on the cusp of the SunTrust Plaza project about the time you arrived. Can you uh, tell us a little about that?

GH: Sure. The word SunTrust Plaza wasn't, didn't exist when I arrived here. The concept of developing the property that the College owned a block down the street on Park Avenue directly across from city hall, the College had purchased that in the 1960s. A lot of people - you know - years later thought the College had got some sweetheart deal or something, but in fact the College bought a building that no one else was interested in. Bought it with some multi-year payments to the public school district, who had abandoned the use of it, and no one else wanted the building. The College paid the appraised price at that time – you know - which I guess would've been in the mid-

seventies or something like that. Would that be right? Uh, sixties, sixties or seventies somewhere in there. But when I came, one of the projects that were in front of us was the development of that property. The College had put out several proposals for ground leasing of that property over a number of years. Those ten years previous, the College tore down the old elementary school building there, which - you know - Thad Seymour did as president. It was a very good move and he did it quickly because it was somewhat controversial. Some people thought that the building should be renovated as a historic building. But in fact, it was in such poor condition that, I'm told, that a small bulldozer touched the corner of it and it literally almost, essentially collapsed. So, it was in really poor condition and it made no sense for the College to try to retrofit that, but then for ten years it was a dirt parking lot, out there. Right in the heart of downtown and one of the questions always was "What's the College going to do with that large piece of property - you know - on Park Avenue?"

And when I came we were in, had just started the third attempt to ground lease it. Ultimately, when the proposals came in on that, we came to a similar conclusion to the previous one, that it really didn't make any sense. Because by the time someone developed it and the developer got their share out of it, there wasn't really anything left for the College; and one of the issues was that the parking that was there was needed by the College, and the parking had to be replaced, plus parking was required by code for any building you built there. So in order to build on it, you had to build a structure and parking structures are expensive, although in hindsight that one was an inexpensive one. But in its day it was expensive. And so, we decided after reviewing that third-round on ground lease proposals that we would not go that way, and we explored a self-development option where the college would develop the property itself. And therefore there was no middle man - you know - in between. And the numbers looked workable, with that scenario. And so, we embarked on that, we put together a team, it was a committee called the Park Avenue Committee of the Board of Trustees. Harold Ward, a long time and just a significant and very important member of the Rollins Board, was the chair of that committee and Allan Keen and, I remember later it was Bill Frederick was on there - the former mayor of Orlando - John Tiedtke, a historic figure to Rollins and a former treasurer of Rollins and a very wonderful individual, who was a good supporter and friend of mine while I was the treasurer here, John was on that committee. And we ultimately selected a consultant, at the time, we choose a firm called Faison. Actually, it was out of the Carolinas I think - they had a local office here - to be our developer, that was engaged by the College. With that then, we went about a process of selecting an architect and a contractor and we did a request for proposals. We ultimately selected RTKL out of Baltimore, architectural firm that has - that particular office had a lot of experience in doing mixed use commercial development, because there are some very specific requirements to design a building that works and they had a lot of experience in that. And then we did a selection process for the contractor and we selected Jack Jennings & Sons here from Orlando as the contractor. That made the team.

I was the College's representative and the leader, essentially of that, the go-between between that committee and the trustees and then we had Frank Herring who was the head of Faison here locally on the team who still today, I believe, is a consultant to the College on real estate matters. And RTKL and Jennings that became the team that ultimately developed the project: determined what code would permit, decided that what

code would permit we couldn't build and justify financially, so we had to change the comprehensive plan and the codes of the city of Winter Park to permit a three-story building on Park Avenue and a few other things that went with it. It was a very, very contentious period because a number of other major property owners felt that the College was using its tax-exempt status, when in fact, it is a fully taxable project. The borrowing was taxable, to build it - any expense related to it is taxable, it pays property taxes, but nonetheless it was cast as the College using its tax exempt advantage. So, there was a lot of opposition. Ultimately, it took us eight months to get it through the city. We did have a lot of support from the city's planning department and others for the project, but we had to get the votes of the city commission and to overcome the objections.

Um, there was one woman, I'm trying to think of the stories, and I just came from the president's office on my way over here and asked Lorrie Kyle who's the historian (laugh) of Rollins College, what stories should I tell? (laughs) There are so many. The one story was that there was a woman by the name of Peggy Strong who, whose husband had been a mayor of Winter Park, the family has been a long time Winter Park family. She's very involved in kind of retaining the old, what was perceived as Winter Park, and Peggy and a group fought us at every meeting. And as time went on and the months went on - you know - the number of people that showed up diminished, diminished, diminished, diminished until at the last meeting, I think Peggy was the only one there. She did not say anything at that meeting and ultimately we got a five-0 vote, the city commission in support of the project. But the story connected with that is years later after the project had been built and this goes back maybe now five years ago from now, when her son, David, was the mayor. And I was sitting in the city commission chambers, as I often went to city commission meetings, and they were talking about a development and there was some criticism of it, and Peggy was in the audience, David the mayor sitting up there presiding. My cell phone rings and it's Rita Bornstein and I ignored it the first time. They're going on and David is saying "Well, you know the example of really good development in Winter Park is SunTrust Plaza and that's the way development should occur. The way, the process that they went through, the outcome, they've been very successful and it is the model of good development in Winter Park." My phone rang again, it was Rita, so I went out of the chambers and answered it and I said, "Rita, you won't believe where I'm at and what's going on here." Here I am in the city commission chambers, the same committee chambers that - you know - was probably almost eight or nine, ten years before we had gone through all the controversy to build it, and here is Peggy in the audience and her son, the mayor, sitting up there with me in the audience, and Rita trying to reach me on the phone, and David is saying what a great project SunTrust Plaza was. So, I said "I should live so long to have gone through all of that and in the end see it held up as the model of good development." That's the SunTrust Plaza story.

But it's named SunTrust Plaza, because we, the trustees were very focused on having a quality credit tenant, and tenants, and we were not allowed to start construction until we had a sufficient number of leases so that it would not be a burden to the College. And when we examined all the leases, the words from the trustees were, Credit, credit, credit. And so the one of first, the first big that we had was SunTrust Bank, and it actually is a twenty year lease, with two ten-year renewal options. The debt on the property was, that we put on it at the time, was a thirty-year debt, I think. So you know, if they exercise

all the options they can be there ten years longer than the debt. And they took a major portion, a twenty-year lease is almost unheard of and given what's happened to the banking world in recent years (laughs), SunTrust may regret actually having entered into that, when in a heyday it just seemed like the thing - you know - to do. But then we secured Merrill Lynch, Restoration Hardware, the GAP, Coldwell Banker, all these people, Starbucks, all these you recognize as not start up entities but entities that had good, strong credit. Some of them had their ups and downs - you know - over that period of time, but they're all still there.

WZ: So what made you interested in architecture in the first place?

GH: (laughs) Well, a lot of people say that I'm a frustrated architect, and it's probably true. Actually architecture is my favorite form of art, and I consider it a form of art. I'm very focused on, attentive to the details, you know, I'm not the one to say whether or not the rebar that they put in the concrete is the right size and following the specifications. I have people who do that kind of thing, but I was the one through all of the projects that were done here who was the final arbiter - you know - of anything design wise on the buildings. When it was necessary I obviously consulted with Rita Bornstein; she and I were very close partners in all of this. But more and more as time went on - you know - everything was pretty much turned over to me. We had built a very trusting relationship and effective working relationship that I knew where she was at, she knew where I was at, and - but it's one of the things I'd never relinquish to construction managers or to facilities people. I always held the final decision on any question of architectural detail.

WZ: So, thirty buildings, that's half of this campus. Tell us some other major projects you get involved with.

GH: I probably touched every building on this campus in some way, in that time. I did this morning actually sit in my office in Deland and try to (laughs) develop a list. I'll just run down them: the Cornell Campus Center was going on at the same time as the SunTrust Plaza. The addition to the Olin library was going on at the same time. So I had three projects in my first two years. Essentially, for probably seven years or so I had at least three projects a year. They would just roll. And while we were doing buildings, these we were planning the next group, and they would start construction, and we were planning the next group, and so we were just rolling through it. And one of the stories I told Lorrie Kyle that I would have to tell was, you know, we obviously had the campus torn up constantly and at one point on the parking lot on what would be the, let me get my directions straight, I'm used to Deland directions now, on the parking lot side of the science building in front of the administration building on the lawn there, there was a huge pile of dirt and a construction fence, along with it was one of the signs we used a lot in those days which said, Rollins on the Move! Um, and there were buttons that said Rollins on the Move, it was used on all the signage, it was used in a lot of publications, and Rita said to me, "Oh, see all that piles of dirt out there - you know - I just, I don't know about that." And Ted Hoepner, who was actually the chair of the Board at the time, who was a chief officer with SunTrust Bank, Florida, said to Rita, "Rita, that's Rollins on the move." Uh and ever after since then it was all fine: the piles of dirt, the construction

fence, all of that was images of Rollins on the move, and literally it went from one area of the campus to the next. When we did projects we defined zones around them. And so, we branched out from the Cornell Campus Center for example, and built various plazas and so forth in front of it. The gazebo and the retention pond, the bridge, going down to the lake and all of that; so we took zones outside each project and over a period of time, having done that much work. I mean it wasn't, but seven years or so down the road when all of a sudden the campus started to look dramatically different, and there were just pieces then to tie together, which is what we engaged in to make the campus unified as a whole.

Other projects include the Bush Executive Center, an addition to the Crummer building, the Alford Sports Center, the Rinker Building, the McKean Gateway, the Cahall-Sandspur Field, Barker Stadium, the Comstock Building, which is where the institutional advancement office is, which we bought and renovated. Sutton Place, I bought that building, there's a whole story of acquiring Sutton Place. And then Ward Hall was one of the more latter projects that I did here. The Keene Music Building, Cornell Fine Arts Center, the Rollins and City of Winter Park Softball Field over at Lake Island Park, roads and parkways such as Tiedtke Way, there was never a road that connected over to Ollie, that whole thing is all totally new, that area behind what was the Gymnasium at the time before the Sports Center was considered largely the back forty. We didn't even own all of the land there and we had actually acquired the land and then began to tie over there, after we bought Sutton Place; but 120 West Fairbanks, which is today an academic building, the Knowles Memorial Chapel stone restoration project, the massive underground projects of installing the chiller loops. All of the buildings when I arrived here were, had their own stand alone air conditioners outside of them. And so these were just outside of every building either in the shrubs or outside the shrubs, and sometimes without anything blocking it, were air conditioning units that were chilling that particular building. We gradually did a process of installing chiller loops and tied all this together so that the chiller equipment is in basements of buildings and so forth. So you walk the campus today, you don't see, you know, air conditioning units standing outside of a building.

The Rice Family book store, residence halls, every residence hall I touched in some way, in addition to the major work of Ward Hall, another one that I really enjoyed doing was the renovation of Pinehurst. I was in my latter time and it was a fun project, but I also did all the common areas in all the residence halls, all the painting and furnishing, lighting, laundry rooms, kitchens and every one of the residence halls. When I started here only one percent of the beds in residence halls were protected by fire sprinklers. By the time I left, we were at maybe 95 percent, so we'd installed fire sprinklers in all of the residence halls. That was a voluntary project of the College, not required by code or by the city, obviously was well received by the department. But it was a commitment by the Board of Trustees, saying: "Life safety is the number one priority," and our greatest risk, of course, was a risk of fire in the residence halls. And so we took that on but we'd renovated building after building. I mean to tell you every single building, there were renovations that occurred. That's a kind of a list that probably not all of them, but it's a lot of them.

I also, acquired a lot of property for the College. There were people who thought that uh I didn't see a real estate deal I didn't like; and I had to remind people that, tell

people that, you know, I had calls, probably a week didn't go by that I didn't have somebody calling to sell the College a piece of property. And so I turned down far, far more than I ever bought. But we certainly did extend the College out, everything from where the Rinker building is, we didn't own that. There was an old automobile dealership there; and in fact, after we bought it, it was vacant and we used it as the book store in the process of the campus center to building the book store. And then ultimately tore it down and built the Gateway and the Rinker Building and the Sandspur, Cahall-Sandspur Field and Barker Stadium. But Sutton Place was another example of a huge piece of property, there was the Institutional Advancement, you know, is 120 West Fairbanks. It just goes on and on, I mean I bought a lot of property, where the Lawrence Center is, we owned part of that block and we bought the rest of it during my time. So..

WZ: Yeah, tell us about your acquisition and renovation of Sutton Place.

GH: Sure, we were doing the campus master plan in the early 2000s, and I think the date of it is, the published date is like October 2002, but we started on it probably in 2000. And one of the things that we assessed, as with almost every college campus, so many of your buildings are really residential buildings, housing students. And at the time we were full. As enrollment had grown, we were full. And so there was a recognized need for additional capacity. It was also recognized that the condition, this was before we started putting in the sprinkler systems, before we started renovating the common areas, before we did most of the residence hall renovations, they were kind of in the second half of my time here. So we had what we described as a quantity and a quality problem, and I told the executive committee of the Board that we could solve, I thought, the quantity problem by purchasing Sutton Place. That the quality problem was going to be a multi-year problem and much different, but that we could go at that. The files that we had in my office show that when that building was built in the sixties, early sixties, every president and every treasurer of the College had some hand in the file, some interest in the property, some discussions about the property, but nothing ever really happened.

So, the building was then not quite forty years old but it was a solid, you know, concrete masonry building. It was built at a density that could not be built in Winter Park today; you could never get a building approved like that. So, it had immense value because of the density and its location to the College. So we decided to make a run at it. I contacted the people in New York that owned the building and they agreed to talk if we got an appraisal, so we got an appraisal done of the building and I think it was in the, around seven million dollars. And so to show our real interest, Allan Keen, a trustee, and Victor Woodman, an attorney who worked on all of the real estate projects while I was here, he, the three of us flew to New York and met with the owners of the building. Ultimately it was the right time for them and the right time for us. They had owned the building long enough it was time to move on. It was before the real estate boom that occurred a few years after that in Central Florida. So we offered to pay them essentially the appraised, you know, price for the building. In the end, I think we paid a couple hundred thousand dollars less than that, because the inspections identified the presence of asbestos there, which we knew, but we used as a negotiating tool to do that. We then started about a plan of announcing to the residents because it was an apartment building,

people just had leases, no ownership, that the College had bought the building and that it was going to convert the building into student residences.

There are, I think, seventy apartments there, something like that, and it could house around 275 students. The acquisition of that increased the housing capacity of the college, in one move, by 25 percent; a huge move. And got us a style of housing we didn't have. But we had to vacate the building. So we announced that in a year and a half we were going to close it for the summer and we were going to remove the asbestos. The only way we could remove the asbestos from the hallways was to close the building, because you had to go through the hallways to get to the rooms. You couldn't remove the asbestos and have people living in. Well, we gave people an extended time on their lease and offered them to get out of their leases early and so forth. But you could imagine the press, there are newspaper articles about it. There were clips on TV. They of course always put the little ninety-year old lady that they always put out in front of the TV and press cameras that this College was putting these people out of their homes, their homes, their apartments. We gave them an extended lease, we gave them an option to get out of them, we gave them an option to stay longer to provide time to find, you know, housing. So from our conscience point, in our conscience, we knew that we were being more than fair. But of course, when you get a press story going, it's sometimes hard to be heard above the noise. But, we went through with it and in that one year we actually had students and residents living in the building. Because some left, they were happy to move on, some needed to move on, because there were some people who really needed to go to assisted living. There were repeated fires in their kitchens and things like that, they really needed to make the decision that they hadn't made. But gradually, they all moved out of the building. It's a story long forgotten. But it was quite intense and I was interviewed on by the press, TV, and news papers repeatedly, you know, during that time. It was a small version of the SunTrust Plaza.

WZ: Okay, tell us about the renovation for Pinehurst, which is on the *National Registry of Historical Places*, and also won award for the work.

GH: Right. Pinehurst had been renovated in many times over the years; of course, as you know it's the one original building. And the most recent renovation prior to the one that we did back in around '97 or '98, was in '85, and it was a renovation of the building at the time. Uh, but it being a wood building you can imagine the wood rot that we were experiencing and it just was showing, you know, its age. And so we hired actually the same firm that did the architectural work for Ward Hall from Virginia. They have extensive experience in historic renovations; they've done the governor's mansion in Virginia and things of that sort. So, working with them we actually went through archives and looked at photos, we found that at one time in its history it had shutters on it, and so we put shutters backs on. But we really removed all of the exterior wood of the building, insulated it. We actually used Hardie Board, which is a much more durable wood product. Unfortunately, it didn't come in the same dimensions as the wood that was there, so we had it milled. We had the wood cut down to the size of the siding that was on the building. So we tried to stay true to the architectural heritage; and some years before we had added the accessible ramp on the building, again trying to adapt that building in its historic style. It was a fun project, because I worked with a lot of students

on it, and I think the article that's about me in the alumni magazine speaks of it, and I said that was probably my favorite project of all the awards, I got an award from Pinehurst that I have on my shelf at home, making me an honorary member of the Pinehurst Society or something there. Actually it meant more to me because it really came from the students in appreciation of what we had done there. And the students were very supportive and cooperative. A lot of it had to occur while students were living there.

WZ: Mm-hm. The Ward Hall also turned out to be very successful, very popular with students. Tell...

GH: Right. That was a recognition that that building was needed serious work. And it was one of the big buildings. There are three big buildings on campus other than Sutton Place that in many ways architecturally I would've considered them to be background buildings. They're not brothers or sisters uh, you know, or grandfathers of other works. I mean, there are master works. This, the Olin library, is a master work of architecture. And when we did the Cornell Campus Center, the challenge was that it had to measure up to being next to this building, and I think the architects did a great job, you know, in doing that. But these other buildings were built in the sixties and the seventies, when a lot of college campuses had buildings built at that time and they're all just basic concrete block buildings that were put up as enrollment grew in those eras, and there was little regard for architectural, you know, detail and significance. But we looked at that building, it was actually the newest of the residence halls on campus, and I think in its early days uh, your records would support, that it was called the New Hall, before it ever had a name. And it was the newest of the halls, believe it or not. And yet it needed to be renovated and so, we had this architectural firm out of Virginia that, Hanbury Evans Wright and Vlattas, who did the work on Pinehurst and who did the residence hall master plan with us, they came and we took a look at the building. When you first went into Ward Hall, it was kind of an octagonal room and there, if you remember, it had a wood ceiling. There were doors that blocked your view into a recreation room that was there and there was no, really, natural light in the space. And there, the stairway and all that's there now, didn't exist. The second floor carried all the way over to the outside wall. But the architect, Jane Wright, who is truly an expert in what is called the student experience, and there's not a lot of residence halls where, because she came in there and she called out several moves that could be made, on her first visit. You know, open the lobby to the second floor, have a stairway that connects the first and second floor, put a classroom upstairs in what were rooms, open the views to the lake, take down the doors, open that view as you come in, lower the windows to the floor so that you got full lake view and some of those moves; and actually, those turned out to be the right moves and that's exactly what we did with the building. But we essentially took that building back to its concrete structure and re-built the building; and uh it's, and we actually did it in a, in the course of a summer. I forget, I think we had eighty-two days or something to do it. But we started some of the work early, what we could do while students were still here a few things were done and we had a highly organized project but we started at the end of one school year, totally renovated, stripped it all down, rebuilt it back and had it open for

the start of school. The landscaping work around it was pretty much done although the stairway that is off the back was a later project within the year after that, I think.

And one of my last projects that Jane Wright actually designed was the new entrance to Elizabeth Hall. Um, I left that in terms of its design concepts, and we had received a gift from the, a grant-from the Genius Foundation to do that work so the money was there, the general plan was there and I retired. And I've never been in the building so, someday I'll have to go visit.

WZ: Uh, tell us about how the decision was made to have a presidential house built on campus.

GH: Sure. Rita Bornstein and her predecessors had houses off campus that the College owned. Thad Seymour had one and it was sold before Rita came. When Rita came, one was bought over on Harris Circle in Winter Park on a very small lake just up off of Aloma, not even Aloma there, it's still Fairbanks and whatever (laughs) road it's become up there. And you know, Rita had decided that she didn't want to move, you know, at the end of her presidency. She wanted to enjoy the end of her presidency. So, a year or so before she was to step down, she bought a condo in Orlando; it's actually the same condo building I live in, it's a condo that I owned at one time, actually. And we're in constant communication as you can imagine, living in the same building. And so I said to her, you know, "We could sell the residence because we don't know what the new president is going to need. We actually could build a residence on campus as so many of our peer schools have, where the president is visible and there can walk to campus, can be out." And at the time we owned that property we really weren't sure what to do with it, we actually had offers to buy it, and we didn't sell it, fortunately. On it were two old wood frame houses that were historic, but they had been renovated over the years, I think even before the College was given them, into kind of like rooming houses. And so there were six, five or six-little apartments. Some of them you had to go through the bathroom to get to the living room, that kind of funky stuff. They were really in bad shape. And then the former DuBois Health Center was there, but it wasn't used as the health center anymore, the health center was in Elizabeth. It was used as institutional advancement which also wasn't a great location, and we bought the building over on Comstock for them so they were moving out.

So, it seemed like a natural place to put the president's residence to kind of border what had then been developed into some, you know, condos and other developments at one point that was all in the eighties and nineties, that was all just open land, but it had been developed into high-end condos. What's the buffer between that and the College? And so it seemed like a president's residence there served that purpose to put the president near, adjacent to the campus and available to the campus. And the advantage was that I wasn't going to live there, Rita wasn't going to live there, we were way away from selecting a new president at the time, so the new president wasn't going to get tagged with having built, you know, his or her own home. So it really was the moment to do that.

And we engaged a local, very competent, local architect in Winter Park, John Cunningham, to design that building. He is also, did the redo of the Keene Music Building and the Cornell Fine Arts Museum. But John designed the house and the house

was designed with the concept that there was a living space upstairs and entertaining and living space, if the president chose to use it, downstairs. And I think it's about seventy-two hundred square feet, but it was designed as a mix of public/private. Some people said it's like the White House where you can live upstairs and the downstairs is really the public space, but the president's family can also use the downstairs if they choose, depending on how they choose to live. So, it was a moment and we were deep into the construction of it when the presidential search was going on, because I served on the presidential search committee, and reviewed the plans with various finalist candidates and things like that. But they were not tagged with it, it was actually, we actually had to rent a place for President Duncan for about a year while we finished the construction of the building. So, we got, actually we bought a house, this was in the boom market of the early nineties President Duncan started, or I guess it was the in the thousands, two thousands. President Duncan came around 2004, that was the boom period of the real estate market. We bought a house and sold it a year later and made (thud) four hundred thousand dollars or something like that. And Frank and Daryl Barker were the major donors to that project and that's why it's called Barker House.

WZ: You mentioned you worked with Rita very closely. Who are some of the other key people that you worked with here at Rollins?

GH: Obviously, President Duncan. I was on the search committee for President Duncan and I served as his CFO for four years before my retirement. So obviously Rita and Lewis, very, very close with. I worked very closely with the Board of Trustees in my time, you know, Harold Ward, Allan Keen, Bill Frederick, Charlie Rice, in a major way, Charlie was the chair of the finance committee when I first came here. Then he became chair of the Board and Harold Ward became the chair of the finance committee. And then when he stepped down from being the chair of the Board we ask him and he became the chair of the investment committee, of the Board. So I worked with Charlie through that whole time, I worked with Harold through that whole time. Allan Keen I worked with on every real estate transaction. Ted Hoepner is the chair of the Board. So I worked with a lot, with the Board of Trustees during my time. Ron Gelbman, and I could just go on with the number of people that I worked with, you know, on the Board.

I also worked very closely with the city of Winter Park. I was on probably an average of three committees or task forces at the city of Winter Park during most of my time here. And in the latter years I was the vice chair of the Economic Development Board, and my earliest committee appointment was the, in 1996, I was on the Citizens' Review committee for the re-do of Park Avenue that ultimately made the big decision to brick Park Avenue. But all the benches and sidewalks and all of that, but I was on the committee that did the historic preservation ordinance um, I was on the commuter rail task force, which the commuter rail of course is a huge issue here, uh we actually voted about twelve to three to support commuter rail. It's still a raging issue (laughs) in Winter Park. But I was on that, I was actually on a previous committee on light rail that the committee did not support, even though I had supported it at the time. So I was on constant committees and boards at the city and so I had a lot of interface there, and I was of course the, Rita asked me when I came here for me to take her place on the Board of the Chamber of Commerce that she was going to work more regionally, and particularly

nationally, which she did and really kind of over time Winter Park in a way became my territory. Board members used to call me Mr. Winter Park, that kind of thing.

But I was forced into it largely with SunTrust Plaza. I was the one who had to go out and present it to rotary clubs and Chamber of Commerce and all kinds, anyone who would listen, I presented the project. And so it forced me out even in my earliest of days, I was a newcomer here. And four years later I was asked to uh, by that time SunTrust Plaza was up and built, the question, "Is Rollins really going to do this?" was answered in a very visible way. And I was asked then to be the chair of the Board of the Chamber of Commerce. I wound up serving in that capacity for more than a year and a half, because my predecessor left during early in his term was moved out of town for a job, and I was very active with the Chamber all of those years. I was, I made a, after I was the chair, and we were going through every year and they'd been before I started, you know, and came here it was all a discussion of having a home for the Chamber of Commerce, the home for the Chamber of Commerce. And they bought a piece of property over on Morse Boulevard for two hundred thousand dollars back probably in the early nineties, and uh but never had the money to build anything on it. But it was in an old meat packing building up on New York, which has been torn down, where the Chamber was, and so they'd gone through various scenarios and nothing ever happened, nothing ever happened. It was right here on this campus where I was the chair of the nominating committee because I was the past chair of the Board and during the process of selecting candidates for the Chamber Board, I made a passion statement about what could be done about the building committee. I mean, the guys who chaired it were wonderful guys, but we needed to move this on, here's what we could do, and I think we need to get somebody on who can help work on that. They all looked at me said: We think you should do it. And of course (laughs) it was not in my mind at all. So I finally became after being the chair of the board, I became chair of the building committee. And I led it through a process.

I was so tied in with the planning department and with the city, some days I thought I should have an office over there, I was over there so much. But um, I knew that the city wanted a welcome center and I knew that the city had a parcel of land there on-Lyman? Was it? Yeah, Lyman. See, I'm a little out of Winter Park these days (laughs). My mind is in Deland. But, and so I went to the chamber group, the building committee, developed and looked at all the scenarios and thought that being near city hall, being just off the down town we could not afford to do anything on Park Avenue, but something near Park Avenue made a lot of sense. And we knew that the land had increased dramatically in value and so I ended up talking to the planning department at the city and I talked about this prospect of a partnership and ultimately went and sold it to the city commission that the chamber and the city could get more working together and partnering than they could do going on their own. The city was never going to be able to get a welcome center; the chamber was never going to be able to be able to get a home. But the two of them together, the city had some CRA funds, they had the land, the chamber could sell this land and contribute, ultimately the chamber sold that land for probably 2.2 million or something like that, I mean it was a huge, it was in a boom time again, we sold it at the right time, created an endowment for the chamber, gave the city nine hundred thousand in exchange for a ninety-nine-year lease. So, the chamber's on the second floor and the welcome center's on the first floor and it's operated by the

chamber but, that was a partner project that I did. And so, my, I was very, very out into the local community, and my last tie to the chamber was actually when I was on sabbatical here. They were between presidents and they asked me and I served for three months as the CEO of the chamber. But that building over there is another one that I'm pretty proud of that was actually pulled, that project off, and so it's a great partnership between, you know, the two and it's a legacy in the city.

Now I've, I'm probably going to be known for being the builder during this era. But I also felt that there were a lot of other things that I was able to do in my time here. And one of them was the, to really working with the president and the board to um, re-achieve financial stability and financial health. When we first issued the bonds to build the Cornell Campus Center, and then ultimately the bonds for SunTrust Plaza, and then every year and a half or so we issued more to actually do more work and backed it by a lot of good fund raising and paid it off as we went on. We were not in a position to go out for a bond rating. We just were not, we were balanced budgets we had balanced budgets every year I was here. There were no deficits. But uh, we were not that strong that we could get a really good rating. And I didn't want to put Rollins' name out there, you know, compared to the other institutions in the state of Florida (paper shuffling), to the schools in the colleges, Associated Colleges of the South, I didn't want to be an "also ran" in a rating. It was only in my last year here that I felt that the college had achieved financial stability, that we had built the endowment. And a lot of people think the endowment building came from the Cornell gift. Certainly the Cornell gift was significant, and I was the one who closed out that estate and dealt with all of that. But um, the financial health had been achieved prior to the Cornell gift; the Cornell gift was over and above in strengthening the financial position of the College. I have to tell other institutions always, they all say, Well, yeah Rollins has had the Cornell gift. I'm going, "Let me tell you we built financial health and strength there before the Cornell gift. The Cornell gift was on top of that and made it stronger."

But we went out-I'm trying to think in what year now, uh ninety, excuse me, 2007. Because I returned 2008, 2007. And we went to Moody's for a bond rating and we received an A1 bond rating, which is the best rating of any private, you know, college or university in the state of Florida. University of Miami is an A2, Stetson is an A3, there are a lot of those in the Bs. But Rollins was rated the highest by Moody's for its financial health. But it was also very stable. I did it partly because Lewis had been there then a couple of years, I had been here twelve years. I was nationally connected in higher ed., and was a known entity to Moody's and a lot of their things. It's about the management of a place, and I knew I was going to retire. I didn't tell them I was going to retire. But I knew I was going to retire and I felt it was the time to get it rather than have someone new come in and they're going, well, you know, we want to wait and see how the management goes. So we used that just strategic moment in time to do that, to really, that to me was what really certified that we had really reached financial health at Rollins College, and that came from just shortly before I came here when Lou Morrell had to get the College out of deficits, and it was touch and go but balanced in my early days and it just continued to uh, improve over time.

Well, we did a lot of other things I mean we, those were the days of technology of course in the mid-nineties, I mean, we put in the completely wired, uh you know, data network across the campus. We did the first, in fact one of the first colleges in our

category, to do an IT master plan for the College. We took on energy management and lighting retrofitting that some places are still doing, we did all that in the mid-nineties and saved a huge amount of money through that. But there were just a lot of things business-wise in terms of policies and procedure, adopting best practices for Sarbanes-Oxley, establishing moving the endowment committee from a sub-committee to a committee, adopting the practices of Sarbanes-Oxley for our auditing, for financial management, putting in various policies and procedures relative to the best financial practices. I had very good finance people working for me and I am, tell people I'm an M.B.A. I'm not a C.P.A. and so I'm not a financial, I'm C.F.O. but I am not an accountant. And so I don't do accounting. Accounting bores me. I know the importance of having it done, and for it to be accurate and so I always have, you know, good staff working for me. But that is not what I do. I am an institutional thinker, my desire was to work with the president and the board to move the institution forward, and I think the record shows that it was a great era under Rita Bornstein, and President Duncan continued in the movements to advance the College.

WZ: So now, looking back, how do you view your career twelve, thirteen years at Rollins?

GH: Well, I thought that that was the capstone of my career. I thought that for quite a while, that this was the chance to bring everything together that I had learned, you know, and when I retired, I'd been thirty-eight years a C.F.O. and so I learned a lot. And I was able to bring that to bear for Rollins. It was a great era, I mean it was an era that, you know, it's hard to replicate because it was a good, strong financial economy, good economy, and a president who was an extraordinary fundraiser, who had a clear vision of where the College should go, was building a national reputation for the College, Rita has the absolute sense of right and wrong. When Rita rendered an opinion on controversial issues, she knew what the right answer was. She is now, today a national recognized expert on American college presidency and in good board governance, and she's sought out by the press and by institutions for her expertise in that regard. So those were great times and I really considered it the capstone of my career. This was it, I'd done it; and I was given a sabbatical by President Duncan and I ended my official appointment at the College the end of May of last year. So, 2009? And then I, I was getting bored. Because I was doing a lot of accreditation work with SACS, I had done a lot of international and SACS visitations. I've been to Dubai, couple of institutions in Mexico, plus a lot in the U.S. I was very involved with NACUBO - National Association of College and University Business Officers - I was chair of the annual meeting that was held in New Orleans right after the hurricanes because no one down there, you know, could take a task on. So I was on a lot of national committees and so forth in my field, and so it just seemed like this was just the culmination of all this.

But, as I retired I stepped out of everything in Winter Park. I stepped off all the boards that I was on. I have since gone on the board of the Winter Park Health Foundation, but that was a year and a half after my stepping down. I felt it was not fair to my successors to have what many of the board members called Mr. Winter Park to be, you know, out in Winter Park and uh have any confusion about who represented the College. So I stepped out of all that, the accreditation work diminished because I was no

longer an employee a higher education institution. And I was trained by the Association of Governing Boards for some consulting work but hadn't started anything yet, when a long time friend of mine, who is a former C.F.O. at Furman, is a member of the Associated Colleges of the South, Wendy Libby, became the president of Stetson University last July. And in August she asked me to have dinner with her and I did. And she asked me if I was bored and I said yes. In many ways I'd probably retired a little bit before I was ready; even though I was seventy years old when I retired. I uh, she asked me if I would come out of retirement and work for her at Stetson. So I thought thirty-eight years was enough as a C.F.O. I'm now in my thirty-ninth. So I'm the, currently the chief, the vice president for business and chief financial officer of Stetson University in Deland and actually, the entire university including the campus in Celebration, the law school campuses in Gulf Port and Tampa. So, I'm back in the heat of it.

AA: So aside from all the buildings that you constructed at Rollins, we also read that you constructed your own home the Lugano Vista.

GH: (laughs) Yeah, right.

AA: Can you describe to us what that was like and what inspired you to design it that specific way?

GH: Frustrated architect. (Laughter) I'm a modernist although I have worked in a variety of settings and I, the Spanish Mediterranean style here, I believe is appropriate. I believe in it being contextual, the work being contextual but I believe it has to be really good work. It cannot just be a barrel tile roof and a few arches and say that's Spanish Mediterranean. And there's, you look at these buildings and there's a lot more to it than that. And you compare these buildings to a lot of buildings around even Winter Park that people would call Spanish Mediterranean, they don't measure up to the character here. But as a modernist I really liked the work of Richard Meier, who did the Getty Museum out in LA, he's a modernist: clean, white architecture, very much in the Bauhaus architectural tradition. And so I hired a local architect, John Cunningham, who was working for me building my house before he actually worked here. And in fact, when I recommended to the board for work here, I disclosed that he was doing my residence, he had designed my residence and I wanted them to know. And they said, what we want is who you think is the best. We're fine with it, you disclosed it and we're okay. So John actually is a very talented architect, can work in numerous architectural styles and he designed that home. Controversial because it's a modern home. It's on Temple. When I tell people that I owned, I used to, they say where did you, I live in Orlando now, I said I lived in Winter Park one time, the white house on Temple. And before I can even get that sentence finished they say, Oh, the one with the red sculpture outside of it? We know that house. Everybody knows that house. While it was, one good thing about Winter Park is that it's eclectic architecture. It is not Celebration, it is not Heathrow, it's not a planned community. I think sometimes people in Winter Park today forget that the eclectic nature is what makes Winter Park. Excessive codes and controls are a mistake. Because they will get you what you get when you get a planned community, is everything looks the same. And that's not the character of Winter Park. But when we were building

it, of course it was very different. But John Cunningham used to tell people, when they would ask him about it, he would tell them “I’m building a historic home. Fifty years from now that will be a historic home.” Fortunately, when I was nearing retirement I sold it at the latter part of the real estate boom. I’m glad I sold it then (laughs).

WZ: Any other questions?

AA: Um, there was also the Herbst-

GH: (at the same time) Overlook?

AA: -the building was named after you on campus. Do you mind speaking about that a little bit?

GH: (laughs) That was called the overlook. It could be the walkway, the bridge, but I think we called it the overlook before my name was ever connected with it. Uh, it was done by Carol Johnson the landscape architect and I would be remiss not to record my thoughts about her. I mean, Carol today is eighty years old. I’m actually using her at Stetson. And right now she’s on her way to China to deliver an address to a conference. So, she’s awesome. She’s internationally recognized and we hired her after a search for a landscape architect, because president Bornstein was very frustrated by a lot of architectural work which looked like resorts or office buildings or planned communities and that’s not collegiate architect-landscape. And so we ultimately ended the search we hired Carol in probably ‘96, my first year. And she was the one constant hand to the campus. Different architects did different buildings, and I know them all and I can tell you about all of them, but Carol and her firm out of Boston were the constant landscape architects for the campus. And she set about a Rollins design; just as today for me she is doing a Stetson design. I mean, everything is unique and she is not a plant picker, she is really a visionary for the look of a place and the setting.

One of her first recommendations and decisions was the addition to this building was set back because originally it, as you approach the front of the building, it was almost parallel to the front of the building. And it would have blocked the view that exists of the lake out there. And her first recommendation to us was, “No, no, no. Do not let that building, that addition to the library be built there, because you will block a wonderful vista toward the lake.” And so the building addition on this building is set back, and it is set back because of her recommendation on her, probably her first visit here. But she really has been the constant so, all of the look of Rollins, the standards on sidewalks and benches, how walls were built, and the stone caps and all of that stuff, there is a consistency of it that’s come over time, and that’s come from Carol. Carol founded her own firm; she’s a graduate of Harvard. Uh, she was one of the first leading women in landscape architecture. In fact, when she went to get jobs in her early days, people weren’t ready to hire women. She ultimately founded her own firm. It’s a sizeable firm in Boston, was in Cambridge originally, now it’s in Boston, and she only works herself on projects that she likes to do; and so she loves work on college campuses and after doing work here, she had done work already at Bowdoin, and Colby, and Harvard and a lot of places, but she got a lot more accounts, Agnes Scott, and a lot of other places, Rhodes

and others, after working here. And she's now doing Stetson. But she hasn't had a, she sold the firm to partners years ago and so she has just continued what she loves to do. She's not managing the firm even though it carries her name. But truly, Carol Johnson and, I would recommend that you sometime get Carol, because she does, still works here. She was on her last, second last-visit, she was both at Stetson and then at Rollins. So you ought to try to get an interview with her, and let her tell you about what her vision was and how she really unified the campus through its landscape. Um, which project were we on when I got diverted off onto Carol?

AA: (laughs) We were talking about the Herbst Overlook.

GH: Oh, the Herbst Overlook. Okay, well Carol you know, as is typical of Carol, said "Those are wonderful cypress trees there" and we were doing that roadway going over there, at that point let's just say the back forty. But we were designing a road through there and wanted sidewalks along with it so that students could, you know, get along the water and get over to Sutton and places there. The problem was that the cypress trees were there on the lake and the tennis courts were already there so we had a narrow corridor to go through and we could have torn the trees down, you know, and built all on there. But she said, "No, I think we ought to make an experience out of this. And so we'll create a boardwalk out there." And that's what she designed, that boardwalk out there where you can actually walk out along the lake and then catch the sidewalk going back up. That was done to preserve those trees. And then during the capital campaign, President Bornstein asked me to make a gift to the campaign, which it's hard to tell Rita no. So I did, and she named the, it was then called the Herbst Overlook after me, my good friend Rita Bornstein.

WZ: That's really a wonderful story. Anything else you would like to share with us?

GH: (laughs) Well, the stories could go on forever. It's just, it was a great, great era and I will always remember my time here at Rollins. And truly I even tell the people at Stetson, my career ended at Rollins. That was the end of my career. I'm doing this as a favor to a friend who is the president. It is not a career move for me, I am not going anywhere from Stetson except to try retirement a second time. I failed retirement the first time. I really didn't have much to do other than my puppy, and after she got a few months old she didn't need me. But she rides every day with me up to Deland, and in fact this morning I was going to leave her in Orlando. Which I do when I have to come back in the afternoon and here we are two-thirds of the way up, which I'm so used to having her in the car with me, and I look and she's in the car. And I'm going, "I have to be back here early, I have to be at the College at three-thirty." I was gonna leave at the last minute up there, well I had to factor in, I had to take her to downtown Orlando and drop her off. So I left a little early to drop her off at the condo but you know, it was a great, great time. I have nothing but the greatest admiration and as I say, Stetson is really a chance for me to stay busy and to use my expertise and it is not a career move. My career, the culmination of my career really was Rollins College.

WZ: Thank you so much George -

GH: (at the same time) You're welcome.

WZ: - for all your contribution and for helping us preserve the history of Rollins College.

GH: You're welcome and we tried to keep good records, took a lot of photographs and so forth and turned them all over here so hopefully, and I know you guys are doing a great job, in fact I was involved in building this space for the archives and I think it's an important part of the traditions of the place to record things and to get to keep good documents and records, because it really, as you go forward, you really build on the giants who came before you. What we accomplished in our era really goes back to the earliest of days and what they built about Rollins and we were able to build on that; and hopefully, future generations will be able to build on what we were able to do in our time.

WZ: Great, thank you.

GH: Thank you.