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Yael V. Greenberg (YG): Today is Thursday, September 4th, 2003. My name is Yael Greenberg, oral history program assistant for the USF Florida Studies Center. We continue a series of interviews in our studio here in the Tampa campus library with USF faculty, students, staff, and alumni in order to commemorate 50 years of university history. Today we will be interviewing Dr. Bill Heller, who came to USF in 1992 as Tampa’s executive officer and dean of the St. Petersburg campus. Currently, Dr. Heller is a full professor of special education at USF St. Petersburg. Good morning Dr. Heller.


YG: Let’s begin by you taking us to the year you arrived in St. Petersburg and what circumstances brought you to the University of South Florida.

WH: I was appointed and officially arrived at the St. Petersburg campus at that time on August 5, 1992. And kind of an interesting story, I had a number of colleague-friends here at the University of South Florida, particularly in special education with Jim Paul and Lynn Lavely¹ and some others. Bill Katzenmeyer², who had been a longtime friend of mine was at that time, I was looking, was dean here. And so there were some positions opening in the University of South Florida system at its regional campuses. And I looked at the St. Petersburg situation because it’s a county that has almost a million people, and

¹In 1978, Dr. Carolynn Lavely has secured more external funding than any other faculty member in the history of USF by establishing the Institute for Instructional Research and Practice (IIRP), and the Institute for At Risk Children, Infants, and Their Families. She is now a professor emeritus.

²Dr. William Katzenmeyer became the third dean of the USF College of Education in 1977.
it had a good educational program. My area is education. At the same time, it looked like a campus that, to me, was just poised for all kinds of growth, great potential. And uh, was located in a beautiful spot in the city of St. Petersburg. And Howard Hinesley, who was the superintendent of the Pinellas county schools is a former student of mine at the University of Alabama. He got his doctorate in special education, so I was the head of special education there, and I was on his doctoral committee. So, there were a lot of you know, just personalities and other kinds of things.

But the potential of the campus was rather significant, and I had been at the University of North Carolina, Charlotte for 13 years, was dean of the College of Education. And you know, I felt I needed a change and I wanted to come here. A lot of people say you know, Why would you go to a regional campus? It seems to be not the direction one would go, but when you looked at the potential, the location, and then, you know, the opportunity also to interact with colleagues that you like. And also the University of South Florida had an excellent reputation. I liked the quality of the university, and so that’s another drawing point to me. The university was a university on grow. I thought St. Petersburg campus could also be a part of that overall growth and expansion.

YG: In assessing the St. Petersburg campus prior to your arrival, what kinds of things were you hearing about the University of South Florida?

WH: Well, first of all, the expansion of doctoral programs and so forth. I knew it had a good medical school. I knew it had high quality engineering school. It’s always had a high quality School of Education, arts and sciences courses, a good broad base kind of program there. And it was a lot like, in some ways, Charlotte was, also because it’s a metropolitan university, an urban university. And like Charlotte, we had a lot of commuter students and it—kind of a special kind of group. But I think an urban university, and having had experience with an urban university, they have certain kinds of characteristics that I kind of liked because most of the students that you had, they may be more likely to be first-generation students. They usually had their heads on right. They know what they want. They’re willing to sacrifice, you know, the time it takes to get their education. You know, they’ve got family to support and they got jobs to do. But they somehow manage all that, so they’re very unique kind of student, a kind of student that I like. So, the university had that.

But if you looked at it also, you know, its research capacity and its success in research, you had to look at that. And I’d reviewed a lot of proposals in various agencies and USF proposals were always judged to be very good. They did very well in that competition. And then the other aspect of it is, I was very impressed with—what I and a lot of people

3Hinesley began working as Pinellas County’s assistant superintendent for exceptional education in 1978, was named the executive assistant superintendent in 1981, was named the associate superintendent in 1985, and then superintendent in 1990 until 2004.
may look at it but do—their fund raising. The endowment for a university this young, at
the level it was when I looked at it was very impressive. And the way most state
universities are funded, they’re state assisted but they’re not really state supported. And
you really need that kind of external funding from the grants and you also need the strong
donor base. And this institution had both of them in a pretty good quantity for the age that
it was. So we may be talking about 50 years here but when you look at what the
accomplishments are at this campus for 50 years, it’s pretty significant.

YG: What did the grounds of the St. Pete campus consist of when you first arrived?

WH: When I first got there, we had 14 acres under deed to the campus. And it was kind
of goal of mine to see if we couldn’t enlarge that because some of the expansion that we
wanted to do and needed to do would mean that we would have to get title to more
acreage so we could do a campus planning document and make some judgements about
some land that was adjacent to us, or approximate to us, that we could build on. And
immediately I got to—well I went to the city council and asked their person who was
responsible for real estate and zoning and so forth—a fellow by the name, at that time, of
Steve Kirken—and asked him, you know, what I might do to try to get some of the
acreage. In other words, it was always kind of designed to go to the campus, but it had
never really officially been deeded over or titled. And there’s a process that you’ve got to
go through to get the state because ultimately the land, the city then deeds it over to the
state and the State Improvement Trust Fund is then what owns the land. Really, typically
universities, even like this one, were kind of leasing, in a sense, so we’re residents on
state property but it really isn’t owned by the university. It’s really owned by the state.

So I was able to go and get some attorneys. In fact, Roy Harold, who does title work in
one of the law firms there in town said he would be glad to do some pro bono work for
me. So we then moved from 14 acres to 46 acres in approximately the first year. And then
that allowed us then to see the parameters that we would have. And that land then could
be part your plan you did when you went to the city to try to get permission or some kind
of thing to build a building, or if you went someplace else, you actually then had title to
that land. The state did, the state owned that land. So we went from 14 acres to 46 acres
in approximately a year, year and a half.

YG: Being that you moved from 14 to 46 acres, there were obviously some future plans
to expand the St. Pete campus. What were some of those initial plans that you helped to
begin formulating?

WH: Well part of the problem in part of the planning process when I came, the campus
was an upper division only campus. In other words, we were junior and senior and
graduate programs, some graduate programs at the master’s level. And the plan of course
was to build depth in those programs. One of the problems—and they were all by the way, all those programs were really programs offered on the St. Petersburg campus, but under the authority of colleges over here in Tampa. And later we’ll probably talk about autonomy and some of the other kind of things, but you couldn’t grow those programs without good relationships and approval of the individuals over here in the respective colleges. And we basically had three colleges: arts and sciences, and a few programs—majors in arts and sciences. And then we had the College of Education and our programs were really at the elementary level, special education and then we had a master’s degree in curriculum and supervision. And the other programs were also at the master’s level. And then we had English, you could get English education and then social studies and history education.

So we were somewhat limited in the number of programs we had, so our goal was to expand that program. To get more programs that students could take and then get depth in those programs. What we were offering was basically an evening college. We were a lighted schoolhouse. You know, we had almost no courses, no classes before five o’clock in the afternoon. So the campus was essentially empty at that time. And the other thing that we offered—for the most part we offered, like maybe one or two sections of a particular course. So if a student couldn’t get a section of course on the fall semester, the next semester we wouldn’t be offering that course. We didn’t have depth. We’d have the next course in sequence. They’d almost have to wait a whole year to get it. And so, what it meant was that a lot of students then, even though we had a campus over in St. Petersburg, they would have to travel a lot to Tampa because that was the only way they could put their sequence together. Very important for a student who’s on kind of a timeline, wanted to get a degree so they could better support their family. They can’t afford to wait for a whole year to come around.

So our goal was to build some breadth and some depth in our programming. And also to look at ways in which we could ultimately convince individ—you know, people that the campus, and I said this in my—they had an introduction for me to the community, and you know, President Borkowski was there at the—you know he was the president of the university at the time. And the community and I mentioned then that, you know, in looking at the campus and being a part of the interview, it was very difficult for me to see why the campus had never become a four-year university. And that one of the goals I had, and I mentioned then, is that we would work toward becoming a four-year campus, that we could go out to high school and actually recruit somebody to come in as a freshman. You couldn’t recruit anybody, even end of years upper-division programs, by going out to high schools and saying, Well you know, we’d love to have you come to USF’s St. Petersburg, but you’re going to have to wait two years. You’re either going to have to go St. Petersburg Junior College, at that time, or come to Tampa or some other arrangement where you would get your first two years in.

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4An interview of Francis Borkowski is available as part of the USF 50th Anniversary Oral History Project collection.
Now, we had good relationships with St. Petersburg Junior College at that time. And it was a major feeder for us, but again, we could never—we were always very dependent on that particular feeder supply. And you know the growth, as I looked at it, the growth of the campus would never be—and other people agreed with me on the campus and the community. The growth of the campus would always be stymied if we only stayed upper division. And while we made—while we did expand programs and made expansion there, for the campus to really be, to realize its full potential, it was essential that it ultimately, at some point, get four-year status. So you know, those plans were there.

The other plans I had, and the community over there’s been very good to the campus. Every inch of that property that I mentioned, the 46 acres, came to us from the city. And so you know, one of the other goals and other plans that we had—and really very intentional—is to go and make a good partner with the city in our neighborhood and other partners. And I felt that the only way we could really grow the campus and expand it was through partnerships. Partnerships would give us leverage, you know, with the legislature. It would give us leverage even within our own university to get some things done that we might not do otherwise. So, we had a very community-oriented, partnership-oriented kind of planning process. What I would say [was] very inclusive to the neighborhood and to the city.

YG: You mentioned the idea of working with the Tampa campus, that in the early days, particularly when you first started, there obviously was a necessary relationship with the Tampa campus. Can you talk a little bit about the relationship between the St. Pete campus and the Tampa campus when you first came?

WH: Yeah and that was probably, maybe in some ways, the most difficult kind of thing to get adjusted to. Some of those relationships were wonderful. Departments would meet here, meet over there, a lot of interchange, and in other departments and it was, you know, a dog fight. A lot of control, a lot of animosity. So the goal was to, you know, look, you know, we’re all in same business. We all want to serve the students of the Tampa Bay region. We’re all the University of South Florida. So the idea was and the goal was and the motto is, you know, you grow the University of South Florida St. Petersburg, you grow the university. Every one of those students becomes alumni, you know. It doesn’t matter where they graduate, the thing is that they are still a USF student. So we need the programs over here, and we’re not robbing.

At some times I think some of the departments maybe thought we were robbing their enrollments to grow ours. And that was unfortunate because, again the university, and this was one of the things that I liked about the university, it was focused on serving the total Tampa Bay area. And it couldn’t do that if it was going to get into this situation where,
you know, these are our students and these are your students. They really belonged to the university. So you know, that was one of the things that I worked on. And you know, I was a member at that time and—we could get into organizations too a little bit later—but at that time since I was a dean of a campus, I had met with the council of deans over here. And so you would work on those kind of relationships, but a lot of it, you know, really got into departmental politics.

And you know we wanted to make sure, and also we wanted to make sure that, at times there was a vision that if you were on the regional campus, you may be a second-class citizen or you were not quite as strong. And to our orient—we had basically undergraduate programs. We didn’t have access to all the doctoral things, but we had good faculty. And the one thing I wanted to do when we recruited faculty was to have those faculty, who came in, could be interchangeable. If indeed, they wanted to move to the Tampa campus that faculty member would be acceptable over here and then also that the Tampa faculty could want to come, you know, might want come over to the St. Petersburg campus and that they would be compatible there.

In other words, they didn’t want any second-class citizenship and even by programming or anything else. You know, that we wanted the same standards, both in the faculty and in the quality of our programs. But like I say, it was somewhat—that was somewhat difficult to get. And because organizationally, we really had no colleges, we really had no departments, we were all a college from over here or a department from over here. The control factor was a major problem to deal with, and as I say, some departments were just wonderful. You know, I can think of one, criminal justice for example, geography. Those faculty [members] would just, you know, they would rotate meetings and everything like that. I mean it was never like, you know, you’ve got to come to Tampa for all the meetings. You know, they’d be over at our place and we’d be over here.

Education, because I think of my own background and colleagues, a lot of good relationships there. And a lot of the faculty too, had come from the Tampa campus over to St. Petersburg and some faces, you know, there’s always feeling well you know maybe they had been kicked out the nest. And so, but I found that that was not really true. You know, most of it was by choice. And there were good faculty members here. They became good faculty members at our campus. And there are very few instances where, you know, they really had an antagonistic kind of view. But at the same time, you know, when you are a regional campus, you know, at that time the decisions were made—a lot of decisions were made for us [and] many times without a lot of input from us. So, in those cases where we had good relationships, you know, things worked well. And the others that we were always kind of, you know, in a battle mode.
YG: As a regional campus, what is unique about the St. Petersburg campus because certainly all of the regional campuses have a particular emphasis or a relationship with their community? What stands out about the St. Pete campus?

WH: Well, I think, you know, one of the things in my judgement that does and really tried to work on this is, well two things. One is that we really wanted to be a community-oriented campus, and not just for St. Petersburg but the whole county. We wanted to serve the total county of Pinellas. And the other thing is we wanted to be invitational and the thing I worked on, and I had a lot of good meetings with the staff. I think, you know, one of the things that you’ll find just recently, for example, I was selected to be chair of the faculty council which is equivalent to the faculty senate over here. We had good relationships and what I tried to do was build an invitational campus.

And one of the things that I worked with the staff is if—it didn’t matter if you were a person who stopped on that campus and were lost and, has happened in many cases, you were looking for the Dali museum [that] our interaction with that individual was one that that individual would remember as a very positive experience. And on a number of occasions we had letters even written to the newspaper. [A] letter, you know, I’m from out-of-town and I stopped by the campus to get directions. I was kind of lost and the courtesy, the attention I received was something that, you know, they really wanted to write home about.

But that was the kind of way that everybody that came to that campus was a very important person. Now, we had an advantage. We were smaller but we tended to embrace each other, and we saw each other as a family. So that when one of us hurt, kind of we all hurt. But when one of us achieved and was successful, we all kind of radiated that kind of success. So you know, the characteristic of it being a very family-oriented thing in a way, very invitational and also very community oriented. We put a lot of effort into making sure, when the community needed us, we were there. If the community wanted to use the campus, we opened it up to them. And we made it—we wanted to be a neighborhood that was—belonged to everybody.

And it’s kind of interesting, we’ve had people—we decided to do some kind of things unique for the campus. We put kind of a pink kind of processing or dye, if you will, into our cement when we poured sidewalks. And kind of borrowed from pink streets that are south St. Pete. But our campus walks have that kind of color to them. And then the other thing is we wanted to be distinctive in our lighting, so we have round globes. And I’ve had people come from other places and say, Gee, you know. How do you keep those round lamps? We wouldn’t have those—they wouldn’t last a day in our urban city or close to downtown. And the reason is, I say, hey, we hardly ever lose—we lose some for weather, but we’ve never lost one for vandalism, and the reason why is because it’s
everybody’s neighborhood. Everybody is welcome on that campus. And so they have ownership.

You know, it isn’t USF and you stay off or anything like that. It’s their campus. And anytime I spoke to a community organization or worked with CONA, which is the neighborhood council of—neighborhood associations. Now that’s the thing I always say, Hey you’re always welcome here. If you need us, we’re here, but if you need to use the campus it’s there. If you also want to work, you know, we’ve got a nice little harbor, and we built sidewalk around it and put tables there so that it would become almost like another park for the city. You know, it’s there. So we shared our campus with everyone, and I think that has been a significant kind of element in the success of the campus. Everybody in St. Petersburg really loves that campus because it’s theirs.

YG: When you came in ’92, as the campus executive officer and dean, you said that the first president that you met of USF at that time was President Borkowski.

WH: Right.

YG: What did President—first of all, first impressions of President Borkowski and what did he tell you about being a campus executive officer and dean of a regional campus?

WH: Well, I really liked him. You know, he—I guess there’s two things that I remember most about him. He—I’m not always so sure, you know, how he felt about the growth of campus because I didn’t get that much chance up early on. But he was always fair to me, and he was a very warm and personable individual. And like I said, I really liked him. But other thing that was also very memorable is his wife Kay. I—for example, I only met her once. I came down here on my interview and I met the president—and I forget what the other occasion was while I was here on my interview—and I also met her. But when I came down here for my faculty orientation, like all the new faculty, the deans went through the same thing. She was a part—she went to a luncheon, came to one of the luncheons. And, she said right off the bat, she remembered me, she said, “Hi Bill. Welcome to the University of South Florida.” And that’s the kind of way they were.

But, you know, I never have forgotten the fact that this was my, like I say, almost first day on campus. You know, I had the wife of the president, who was just a wonderful person like—and he was saying, “Hey, welcome.” He remembered my name, and he’s always been a good friend of mine. Now he’s gone to Appalachia[n] State and so forth. We kept

5Council of Neighborhood Associations (CONA) is a nonprofit organization with a mission to improve and promote neighborhoods in the City of St. Petersburg.
up, at least we correspond over Christmas. But he came over and met with, you know, the community. He would try to bring the community together. I always saw him as a very supportive individual and also somebody who I think was a good person, who enjoyed being around people. And as a musician, I think he—it wasn’t a performance kind of thing for him. It was just the fact that he liked to share with talents, and so forth, with people. But he was a positive person for me and I always felt treated me very fairly.

YG: As the campus executive officer and dean, what was your vision of the St. Pete campus when you first came?

WH: Well, my vision of course, you know, you get—people saw a regional campus as, and even my colleagues at the university said, Well Bill, you know those regional campuses, I mean they—that’s a tough place to be. Because they, you know got a lot control and other kinds of factor. But at the same time, I could envision that campus and it’s coming out. You know, my vision was clear of being a four-year campus with residential students and being unique in a number of different areas. Not being a campus of having everything that’s the same—that the Tampa campus would have. It had very unique kind of programs. One they already had in marine science. But we sat right across the street from the Poynter Institute. Why not mass comm[unications]?

We also, you know, lucky—I inherited a very excellent historian in Ray Arsenault. But you know, we started in talking to the Florida Humanities Council about bringing the Florida Center for Teachers to campus because once you got that, you know, it fit us. We were interested in teacher education. The county was interested in it. Tim Jamerson, who was the representative at that time from our district, was interested in the Florida Center for Teachers or something similar to that. Betty Castor, who was the commissioner of education at that time, was interested. So I could envision that we could be very unique in certain areas, education certainly being one. History and—now has become really Florida studies—could be another. We could do some things, I think, in business because our business program has always been about half the—about half the size of that whole

6An interview of Raymond Arsenault is available as part of the USF 50th Anniversary Oral History Project collection.

7The Florida Humanities Council is a nonprofit organization established in 1973 and is the state affiliate of the National Endowment for the Humanities. It develops and funds public programs that explore history, literary and artistic traditions, as well as cultural values and ethics.

8The Florida Center for Teachers strives to advance education in Florida at all levels. The center offers graduate-level content to outstanding K-12 teachers, media specialists, guidance counselors and administrators. Since the interview, it has been renamed the Peter Rudy Wallace Florida Center for Teachers.

9An interview of Betty Castor is available as part of the USF 50th Anniversary Oral History Project collection
campus. Now I think that will change. I think arts and sciences is going to be—grow, particularly with our undergraduate program.

But I could see other areas growing. So I didn’t want to be everything to everybody, but mass comm should be very strong. Education, business should be strong. And in selected programs in arts and sciences should be strong. We should have something that ties in with marine science, for example, and in environment science. One of the areas I had is a very strong interest in the environment and environmental education. And how could we plug those things in? So, like I said, I didn’t want to be—replicate programs, for example, engineering. That’s not an area that we would replicate. We had strong College of Engineering over here, strong College of Public Health. Some of those things we could draw on because we were surrounded kind of by hospitals.

So we needed to get a nursing program back. When I came, we didn’t have a nursing program. That had been, for some reason, terminated for lack of resources or something. But it made no sense for us because I could stand in my office almost and hit two major hospitals, All Children’s and Bayfront, with a rock. And we had no nursing program. So the idea was then to get support to get that back on the scene. So you know, the campus is—again, my vision was that this thing should be a four-year campus, should have residential, and should have some very select kinds of programs. And if it does, it will have chance to distinguish itself. The other characteristic is to keep as much as you can for as long as you can, and I hope [what] never leaves is the invitational aspect. And then to give us some autonomy.

You really have to have some chance to make decisions about curriculum and about who you admit and so forth. So from the very first day almost, arriving on campus and looking at it, How can we gain more autonomy? But the goal has always been to be part of the—to stay with the university. I mean, we had a situation where we had a legislator who really wanted to create a separate campus, and we probably have some who still do. And there’s just too many benefits to gain being a part of a larger University of South Florida system so that Lakeland, and Sarasota, and us, and Tampa could all be a part. But there would be some things that would be very, very difficult to ever have on your own or you couldn’t really afford.

You know, UNC Charlotte, when I came here, was a part of the University of North Carolina system. The University of North Carolina was a great name to have on your diploma. It could be at Charlotte, but still the University of North Carolina. And the other thing though, being part of a system, you had certain kinds of things that you could gain from that you know, whether it might be purchasing, it might be curriculum organization, control of you know, competition, replication of programs that didn’t make sense, that kind of thing.
So, you know, we kind of had a lot, so if you looked at, you know, the St. Petersburg campus, all that potential is sitting there. Then it was just a matter of time to try to develop and put into place, but I could see a small university—part of the larger University of South Florida system. But to try to get autonomy was the next issue. How can you make sure you can make some decisions that are appropriate for that campus? Because a lot of times we were getting decisions made for us that may have fit Tampa and a large program but not the needs of Pinellas County or our particular campus.

YG: Let’s talk a little bit more about autonomy because certainly autonomy has been an issue not only with St. Pete, but Sarasota and Lakeland as well. Is it the goal of USF St. Pete to be completely autonomous or—and why is it necessary to become more autonomous?

WH: Well I think, you know, you—I think you have to look at autonomy on kind of a scale if you will from zero to something. And you know, what does total autonomy mean? To some people it means, well you’ve got to be totally separate and you can’t be a part. You’ve got to be your own university and all this. See I don’t buy into that. I believe that you can have a lot of autonomy and feel very comfortable and satisfied with that autonomy, but still be part of bigger operation. Now, you know, I think what, where the big rub comes is, how do you—who really makes the decision for the campus? And, do you have to call home all the time before you do something or are you given the authority, vested in you as an officer of the campus, to make those decisions? That some of them may not be what the—somebody else might have made for you.

And, you know so, the person who’s the head of the campus, in my judgement, first of all should be selected by the campus and really should have his or her primary responsibility to a board that’s for that campus and searches for their leader. And that that leader then is responsive to the needs of that particular campus: faculty, staff and students. Now that doesn’t mean, you know, and it’s just like in the University of North Carolina system or other systems, that you know, there isn’t somebody who ultimately is a head of that. You know, in Charlotte we had a chancellor. He reported to a president of the University of North Carolina system. That’s what I think ultimately we would see as autonomy probably for the St. Petersburg campus.

Have a University of South Florida system, you know, and in this case, President Genshaft would be the head of that. And the president then would be selected though, or the chancellor whatever you wanted to call it, for the regional campus or for the USF St. Petersburg campus is now what it has become. It’s become—you know, it’s got its own name and some other things. It’s got its own budget. But it’s not fully autonomous because the campus head still reports and works at the pleasure of, not the faculty but the pleasure of the president of the Tampa campus. And that’s where I think the autonomy—
and where the autonomy is going to negotiated is probably going to come. How comfortable would the president be releasing a lot of authority to that individual? And would be president ever be comfortable in saying, Okay, and would this board of trustees over here be saying, Okay, the University of South Florida, St. Petersburg, you know, you have your own board. The governor will appoint a board for your campus because our campus board now is appointed from over here.

You’d have your own board. That board then would select its executive in consultation with the faculty, and the staff, and the students. That person would, you know, essentially have the authority to run the campus but not be able to run it without looking at the broader picture of how the university wants to expand itself in the region. And so you know, Charlotte was a—UNC Charlotte was a good example. Charlotte was different that Raleigh. Charlotte was different than Cullowhee or Greenville. All of them had different kinds of needs, but you know, the president of the University of North Carolina system, though, could differentiate and say—when the chancellor at the UNC Charlotte made a decision, he was making it and had justified it based on that particular need. But he could make it. And in this particular case, we haven’t gotten there yet. So I think that’s the—I would see that’s the next step in the autonomy here because we’ve got some fiscal autonomy. We’ve now gotten our own colleges and, I mean, we’ve got organizational autonomy to a particular level.

But then I think it has to go because one of the things we would like to get is separate accreditation by the Southern Association of Colleges and Schools. And I think this whole issue of how autonomous a campus is, is something that they’re going to have to deal with. But it’s not insurmountable. I think good people working together can get there. But I do not—I’m not a supporter of a totally separate University of South Florida, St. Petersburg. I never have been. If I probably wanted to do that, I could have done that when the legislature wanted to do it. And I probably could have given him a lot of support. But that would have been against my value system and against a lot of what my faculty wanted, and staff wanted.

We really are proud to be a part of the University of South Florida, and we don’t want to become the Sunshine University or anything like that. We’re kind of glad of what we got in terms of relationships. We’re just like—kind of like an adolescent wants to grow up and be out on his own. Once you get to be 21, you really want to make decisions for yourself. You don’t always want to have to call Dad and Mom and say, “Is it okay if I do this?” Sometime Dad and Mom got to give you the opportunity to make decisions for yourself. Some of those will be good. Some of them may not be so good, but you know, you kind of learn from the ones that are maybe are not so good too. But you got to have that opportunity to be independent and yet with the support and the protection of the family. My kids, I have three, are very independent but yet they never cease coming home and we’ve always kept a nice connection, a relationship. So you know, that’s kind of what I see autonomy ultimately becoming here.
YG: Where do you see USF St. Petersburg in ten years?

WH: Well, I see it as probably being a campus—our goal is to, you know—we’ve always put the goal there to have a population of somewhere around 10,000 students. I would see it meeting that goal. I would see it having programs of distinction. The interim vice president, Ralph Wilcox, built on some of the same things that I would have built on. Those programs being, indeed, distinctive. And then residential, I would see—I would like to see somewhere around 3 to 4,000 students living on the campus because that’s—it would give it a strong base in terms of economic support. There’d be fulltime students, which means you could plan on programs because you know you’d have students there who were going to take those programs.

Commuter students, you know, come and kind of go. You can’t always depend on them being there. It was also give you a reason to make sure you had courses during the day. You’d maximize the use of the campus. And since we’ve gone four year, we have put in a lot a day programs. And the campus is becoming more of a residential campus. It’s very difficult for student government to get any kind of student commitment going because the students never had a commitment. You know, they were fast food people: come in, take your course and drive back out. And now we are getting students who are fulltime, and they’re expecting some of the kinds of activities to be on campus. Almost to the point at which we need to get a student center, so I would see a student center there.

I would see a lot of collaboration—continued collaboration with the community and possibly, a lot of it may be in the fine arts, which we really—the performing and visual arts, which, you know, possible there to be some way we accomplish that because we also have an excellent program over here in the fine arts. You know the visual and performing arts. So how do you get something that takes, you know, St. Petersburg, I think which is developing a lot of excellent culture. We have excellent theater going on in the American Stage\textsuperscript{10} and the Palladium\textsuperscript{11}. How do you build that all in and get the campus to be a partner to that?

So, you know, I definitely see the campus of 10,000 students. I still see it as the University of South Florida St. Petersburg. I would see probably a chancellor or some other kind of oriented organizational structure there instead of a vice president and CEO.

\textsuperscript{10}The American Stage Theatre Company was founded in 1977 as The Palisades Theatre of Florida as a theatre for students and educators. It is non-profit theatre that attempts to connect and engage the community through meaningful stories.

\textsuperscript{11}The Palladium Theater was given to St. Petersburg College in 2007 and is now called the Palladium at St. Petersburg College.
I would see a chancellor, more autonomy for decisions being made specifically on that campus. And again education would be, hopefully continue to be a strong program. The arts and sciences would definitely expand. We would probably have some joint doctoral programs with Tampa. Education would make sense. Business would make sense. I don’t see, you know again, this would be, I think—I wouldn’t see the necessity for the University of South Florida St. Petersburg to have doctoral programs. But it would be nice to have joint programs because of the strength that applies over, over here. Also, I think that doctoral programs give faculty a chance to interact with doctoral students, which most faculty really do appreciate. It gives them a chance to do some research, get graduate assistants, that kind of thing. So I see that.

I’d see our graduate programs probably expanding more. Even the education program expanding. We’ve been basically elementary, as I mentioned and special ed but to go more into secondary, so we could put students into secondary schools as well as in the elementary schools. So again, it would be—and I would hope it never gets much larger than say the 10,000 students. Given where the land base is and everything else, I think that’s about, you know—that would be a realistic kind of growth.

And I can remember too going to Charlotte, we had about 8,000 students when I moved from the University of Alabama to Charlotte. And interestingly enough, I taught a course in Foundations of Education. At 8,000, I saw most of those students, believe it or not, walk across campus. Sometimes we interacted. When it became 16,000, I lost it. You just didn’t see that interaction as much. And of course, we’re so huge here, and one of the things that students like—and we’ve have students, you know, many students come over from Tampa who, you know, may be over here taking most of their courses but come over there to take some courses because they like the atmosphere. It’s smaller. It’s more personable, that kind of thing. It’s not so big.

YG: Two final questions. In your 11 years of history with the University of South Florida, what are you most proud of?

WH: Well I’m most proud of the, you know, growth that really occurred on the St. Petersburg campus. And I like to think that I had a part in that. And you know, I didn’t do it alone. I was very fortunate. I had excellent faculty and excellent staff and good students to work with. But that campus doubled its size, not just in physical size but we doubled our enrollment. We became a four-year campus. We became approved for residential programs. And we have a good reputation, and we do have a great reputation with the community. I really built the fabric, I think, which is, very proud that, you know—there’s a lot places where towns and gowns are very separate. We’re not that, and I hope it never happens because as, again, we’ve been real partners. And the other part of that is to build a partnership.
I think anybody would tell you that much of the growth that we achieved over on the St. Petersburg campus, we achieved because we formed partnerships, you know with All Children’s Hospital, with the Florida Humanities Council, the City of St. Petersburg, or the Poynter Institute. Those partnerships allowed us to grow and get some real leverage. And I guess the other accomplishment is the climate on the campus is still one of anyone who is there is the most important person in anyone’s life at that particular moment. We really care about the people who come there. We care about the students. We care about each other. And you know, I think most people would say, you know, the kind of legacy I left there was that. It was a wonderful place to be. People really enjoyed coming to work at the University of South Florida St. Petersburg, and they also enjoyed studying there. They got good faculty and good caring relationships.

So, you know like I say, I developed the campus. There’s no way in the world, I think, that campus will stop growing because all the things have been put into place. And I think regardless of who the leader is, it’s a train that’s unstoppable right now. And it’s got an image and it’s got an energy that is going to sustain it I think for a long time to come. And I feel that the ten years that I’ve put in there were ten of the best years of my life, most rewarding. And I look back, and I’m going to be able to look back in another five to ten years and see everything that was put into place, those blocks built upon.

YG: Final question. If you could leave a final sentiment either to past colleagues, students and staff or to future colleagues, students, and staff, what would you want to tell them about the University of South Florida?

WH: Well, you know, I would say that first of all it’s—it carries the name South Florida, which is kind of a misnomer geographically, but this university is, I think, one of the dynamic—and maybe a region that’s got couple of hearts. It’s probably got an economic heart and an intellectual heart. But there’s no question that the heartbeat of the Tampa Bay region, I think, is centered in the University of South Florida. It adds so much to the quality of life that people really—it’s something you can’t quantify but it’s there. You know, whether it’s somebody at the Moffitt center or somebody in the medical school, you know, some of the research that goes on there, or it’s just somebody coming out of the School of Social Work and doing something with a social agency. It touches a lot of lives in this particular area, and I think you know, Betty Castor did the study, you know, what is the economic impact of the university. Very, very significant.

But I think David Stamps and some of the others looked at engagement of the university by its faculty and others. And what is the—what is the contribution of that? And I think

12 The Poynter Institute was founded in 1975 by the owner and chairman of the St. Petersburg Times (now Tampa Bay Times) as a journalism school. It is now a non-profit school for journalism that, in addition to training journalists, offers training for educators, newsroom professionals and journalism entrepreneurs.
that's a very significant thing. So I see the university as a very, kind of, almost like a human element in a region that's trying to find itself and to get identity and grow. So I—and the university is going to continue in that direction. So I’m very positive. I feel very good about the university I’m a part of, and I’m getting close to retirement, so you know, but I will—how—you know, I will always have that opportunity to come back and forth in whether I want to take a course, you know, as a retired person or whatever out of the university. But, for a young university, it’s a great university. And it’s a great university now not only because of its educational programs but because I think it does engage itself with the region.

YG: Dr. Heller, I want to thank you very much.

WH: Well thank you. My pleasure.

*End of interview*