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Panel 13 and Panel 14: Coming of Age: A Campus of Regional Significance (1968-1977)

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This much he knew: Florida Presbyterian College, his “neighbor down the street” had started to attract more of its students from outside Florida. While there was a healthy market for liberal arts majors in the 1960s, there was also a much greater—an un-tapped—need for undergraduates with training in business, education, and other professions who would remain in the area after graduation.

In the fall of 1968, the Bayboro Campus offered a variety of junior, senior, and graduate courses that emphasized a “2+2” partnership with St. Petersburg Junior College and its readily available source of graduates. This arrangement became a model for other community colleges and upper-level university transfer programs throughout Florida.

To accommodate more classes, the dorms on the first-floor of ‘B’ Building were renovated into eleven classrooms in 1969. By 1970 students could complete upper-level degrees in Elementary Education, Engineering Technology, English, Psychology, History, and Engineering Administration, as well as a graduate-level credential in Marine Science.

Additional full-degree programs available at USF St. Petersburg by the mid-1970s included Accounting, Management, General Business Administration, Social Science Education, Sociology, Political Science, Geography, and Criminal Justice.

Tuttle’s leadership at the Bayboro Campus came at a transitional point in the University’s history. By the late 1960s, USF experienced a dramatic increase in graduate programs and faculty faced new challenges as research became an increasing part of the institutional mission. Many of the faculty in the College of Basic Studies—pioneers who built USF’s academic foundation as outstanding teachers—grew concerned with the new emphasis on research.

USF President Cecil Mackey moved the lower-level curricula from the College of Basic Studies to other academic units in the early 1970s as a way to professionalize the faculty. Many outstanding teachers feared that the new focus on research would displace them. Between 1968 and the early 1970s, Tuttle led many of the best and enthusiastic faculty—folks like Harriet Deer, Bob Hall, and Jack Robinson—across the bay. This emphasis on teaching also played out in recruitment efforts to land new faculty, such as the globe-trotting and ever-dynamic Harry Schaleman.

Some Dollars Short and a Year Late

A longtime resident of Pinellas County, John T. Ware knew that educational opportunities could open new doors. He earned a degree at nearby Stetson’s College of Law in 1961 and was elected to the Florida legislature a few years later. An early advocate for the Bayboro Campus, Ware drafted the enabling legislation that became Chapter 69-363, Laws of Florida.

With the stroke of a pen the newly renamed “University of South Florida—St. Petersburg” became a “legitimate” entity in 1969, the first branch campus in the State University System of Florida. This momentous occasion occurred almost a year after the classes actually started on the peninsula!

Wear became a true friend to the campus. He fought for equitable funding. He also battled against his colleagues in the Pinellas County legislative delegation during the mid-1970s, especially after some lawmakers tried to move the campus out of St. Petersburg.

When Tampa legislators threatened to rein in the fledgling campus in 1971, Ware did not mince words: “I don’t think USF in Tampa is this befuddled in the leadership style of the man in charge of the operation—Dean Lester Tuttle. I still remember Lee, in his casual attire, walking the hall on the second floor of the ‘A’ building, where the faculty offices were located, stopping or humming some tune, stopping to say ‘hi,’ and like the Pied Piper, leading us behind him to the coffee room for extended conversation.” —Steven F. Lawson, professor of history at USF, remembering his days at USF St. Petersburg in the early 1970s.

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When Tampa legislators threatened to rein in the fledgling campus in 1971, Ware did not mince words: “I don’t think USF in Tampa is going to offer the solution to our educational problems.” Indeed, Wares efforts during the early and mid-1970s set the stage for the state’s December 1975 approval of plans for Phase I expansion.

Later a circuit judge, Ware remained an influential leader in Pinellas County politics through the 1970s and 1980s. He passed away on August 20, 2005.