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A Look Back: Oral Histories from UND Professionals

Brenda Haugen

University of North Dakota

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A Look Back...

Oral Histories From UND Professionals

Written by Brenda Haugen
About the Author

Brenda Haugen had a career as an award-winning journalist in North Dakota and Minnesota before finding her niche as an author. In her current career, she writes and edits books, mostly books for children. A graduate of the University of North Dakota in Grand Forks with a degree in journalism, Brenda lives in North Dakota. She also works with the University of North Dakota Office of Ceremonies and Special Events conducting interviews and writing narratives about honorees for the annual Founders Day Celebration.

A Look Back:

Oral Histories from UND Professionals

Interviews conducted by Brenda Haugen.
Stories written by Brenda Haugen.
Forward

The University of North Dakota is proud to present this booklet of oral histories. The six persons who were interviewed for this publication represent more than one hundred years of service to UND. Their stories cover a time period from the 1940s to the present. Times of celebration and tears, challenges and victories, and huge change all make these stories interesting to read.

Each story in this collection is unique and contributes to the collective memory of the 127 years since UND was founded. The entire University is indebted to those who agreed to participate in the interviews and thankful for their willingness to do so. On behalf of that community, thank you.

Robert H. Boyd
Chair, Quasquicentennial Observance

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Crow's Time at UND a Wonderful, Sometimes Wild Ride

Bill Crow remembers a wild ride through campus about 35 years ago with future UND Vice President Jerry Skogley at the wheel.

“I swear to God he must have been doing 70 down University Avenue, but I didn’t really care,” Crow said.

The reason he didn’t care was because his appendix had burst, and Skogley was rushing him to the hospital.

At the time Crow was working for Skogley, who was the business manager and comptroller at UND. That Friday, Crow had called in sick, and Skogley had stopped by after work to make sure he was okay. Crow felt ill, but he didn’t know what was wrong. The two visited for a while, and then Skogley went home. Suddenly, Crow knew what was wrong. He said he realized the moment it happened—his appendix burst. Crow immediately called Skogley, who drove back to take his friend to the emergency room.

“(We) went down University Avenue awful fast,” Crow recalled. “That’s when the hospital was downtown.”

Skogley’s wife, Marilyn, and daughter Karen came over to take care of the Crow’s baby so Bonnie Crow could be with her husband at the hospital. And the Skogleys weren’t the only part of the UND family that showed concern. Lyle Beiswenger covered for Crow while he was recuperating, and UND’s president personally made sure that Crow didn’t worry about work.

“On Monday, the first person who came to see me other than my immediate family was Tom Clifford, and he just says, ‘Your biggest job right now is just to get well. Don’t worry about anything. Don’t worry about budgets,’” Crow remembers. “It was a terrible time of the year because spring is when they do the payroll budget, the annual budget, and we were doing a biennial budget that year and some other reports that had to go in.

“(Clifford) was really quite a man.”

Born in Wisconsin, Crow moved to Cavalier, ND, before spending his high school years in Warren, MN. After his freshman year at UND, Crow joined the Army and served in Korea. Upon returning home after his military service, he came back to UND and earned a bachelor’s degree in marketing. After seven years in business, he decided to change careers and returned to UND to earn an accounting degree.

“That was it,” Crow said during an interview in his Grand Forks home. “I’m here ever since.”

During the fall semester, Crow had been working at Sears. After Christmas, he got laid off, but he wasn’t unemployed for long. Crow was taking an accounting class with UND’s internal auditor, who asked if Crow was interested in working for him that semester. The assistant comptroller had taken a job setting up a uniform accounting system for higher education and was on the road a lot, and someone was needed to fill in during his absences. Crow jumped at the opportunity.

In time, Crow moved up to assistant comptroller. And when Skogley moved into the vice presidential role, under President Tom Clifford, they offered Crow the newly created job of budget director.

“I just worked there, and I happened to be at the right place at the right time,” Crow said. “That’s before all this affirmative action stuff. It was a lot easier. ... It worked out well for me and I think it worked out all right for the university, too.”

Crow would serve as budget director until his retirement in the early 1990s.

“I was very happy with the job,” he said. “I thought the world of people, all the way from Tom down to whomever. There’s just a camaraderie with the guys.”

They’d work hard, but they’d have fun, too.

“In those days, for example, we’d come in on Saturdays,” he said. But those working Saturdays were more casual. They’d tell stories and get to know each other while still getting their work done. And, of course, they’d often break for lunch together at Whitey’s in East Grand Forks.

“We had a good bunch of people who worked well together,” Crow said. “If you had a problem, they helped you out.”

But they also gave Crow the opportunity to learn. He remembers the first time he did annual statements, working on a Saturday morning. Carl Long, the assistant comptroller, was there with his dog.

“I was trying to get the thing to balance, and I was just having a terrible time,” Crow now remembers with a smile. “Carl was sitting there. He could have done it in five minutes, but he wanted me to figure it out by myself so I knew what I was doing.”

Finally Crow looked at Long, who had put his feet up on Crow’s desk as he petted the dog. Any tension that may have been there quickly dissipated when Crow saw Long was wearing one red sock and one blue one.

“We laughed,” Crow said. “(And) I finally figured it out. It was good for me, too.”

Crow also learned that it didn’t pay to get to worked up about things. He remembered one of his first meetings with the board.

“You get a little nervous when you’re sitting up there,” he said. “You never know what kind of questions they’re going to ask.”

Crow believes either the payroll or annual budget was up for approval. At the time, the budget was about $175 million, so he figured he’d be spending some serious time before the board explaining the budget in detail. He was wrong. It took the board about 10 minutes to approve it. They had bigger things on the agenda.

“They sat and talked about what color they were going to paint one of the dorms for about two hours,” Crow said with a chuckle.

In reality, the budget wasn’t less important to the board than the dorms’ décor. Crow quickly came to realize that the board members had respect for office staff and trusted they were doing the right thing.

But that doesn’t mean putting together budgets was an easy job—especially in tough times.
“You never had enough money to go around,” he said. “So hard choices have to be made.”
But Clifford, in particular, always seemed to find a way to come up with funding for projects he deemed important.
“Tom was a builder He wasn’t a tearer-downer,” Crow said.
He wanted money for married student housing and new dorms, for instance.
“Sometimes you got into a little fix,” Crow said. “Where is this (funding) coming from? Well, he’d always come up with something.
“He wanted dormitories for the students.”
Implementing an employee health-care plan was a challenge, too, particularly since the cost came out of each person’s salary. People were happy to have health care, but it was more of a hardship on some than on others, though the plan was set up to be as fair as possible, he said.
“There is no fair way to do it,” he said. “It’s just like taxes.”
But despite how heated discussions can get when trying to create budget or find money for specific projects, at the end of the day, the staff always remained friends. In fact, Crow said, they’re more like family.
“It was the people,” he said of what made his time at UND special. “I miss the people so much.”
Even though he’s retired, Crow still gets together regularly with many of his UND friends. And one became more than just a friend. Crow met his wife, Bonnie, also a UND graduate, while she was working in the Aviation Department as the administrative assistant to John Odegard. The couple has two grown children, April and Paul, who also are UND grads.

People who’ve known Gordon Henry through the years wouldn’t be surprised to hear that now, in retirement; he’s giving talks to various organizations about caring. It’s something he was known for back in the days when he was head resident in UND’s dorms all the way through his retirement as vice president for Student Affairs.
Henry came to UND in the summer of 1965 as a graduate student, enrolled in counseling education. He and his wife, Pat, had been hired to work as head residents, and Henry had decided to further his education at the same time.
The couple lived in Budge Hall, about 40 feet straight east of Twamley. Today it’s a parking lot where the president and vice presidents park their cars. But at the time, Budge was an old brick building whose basement housed the campus library.
“What my wife remembers about it was that there’s an area in the basement where you could take the steam pipes and open them up and the water would come down on the floor and it would form steam and you could go down there and have a sauna,” Henry said with a smile.
The couple lived in Budge for just a summer before moving to Squires Hall in the fall. One of Henry’s most vivid memories during his time at Squires involves a huge blizzard and an artist-in-residence.
That March 1966 blizzard was one of the worst in the city’s history, Henry said. It dropped about 26 inches of snow that was blown around by 50 to 75 mile per hour winds. Henry remembers looking into a parking lot and realizing he could barely tell there were cars buried under the piles of snow.
At the time, Squires was home to Arvid Fairbanks, an internationally known sculptor who was serving as an artist-in-residence at UND for a year. Fairbanks was famous for his busts and statues of Abraham Lincoln.
During the blizzard, Fairbanks set up a table in the Squires lounge and started to work on a sculpture. At first he was alone. Then John Conrad, a football player living in Squires, came to the lounge and started to watch the artist work. Fairbanks started talking to Conrad about artistic form. Soon two or three other students joined them. In time, the group grew to about 300 people, each so attentive, you could have heard a pin drop, Henry said. As Fairbanks talked, the audience could see a sculpture of Lincoln develop. People were spellbound.
“I’m sure there’s a lot of people who still remember that experience,” Henry said.
“That to me was the best demonstration of education I’ve ever seen.”
If the event had been planned and advertised, no one would have shown up, Henry said. But because people had the free time because of the blizzard, and because Fairbanks had such magnetism, the event just developed.
“It was through that experience I became aware of the potential of residence halls and how they could really impact people’s lives,” Henry said. “It wasn’t just a place to sleep. It could be a place of learning.”

The Henrys stayed in Squires for a year before moving to Walsh Hall, where they would serve as head residents for three years. And it was quite a bit bigger than Squires. While Squires housed about 200 men, Walsh held more than 430.

“It was a big hall,” Henry said.

But the Henrys knew every young man who lived there. Every year they invited each Walsh resident to their apartment for coffee or juice and cookies. In fact, they became so close, that when Pat became pregnant with the Henrys’ first child, the students in Walsh learned how to deliver a baby in case Gordon was gone and there was a storm.

“They were serious,” Henry said. “It wasn’t a lark.”

The students also dipped into their own pockets to purchase a high chair, a playpen, a new suit for Pat, and a new outfit for Gordon when the baby was born.

“We literally cried,” Henry said.

The Henrys worked to better the lives of students, too. Along with having an open door to any student with a problem, they also started offering other services to students. They developed the first dorm office where the mailboxes were located. The office was open in the evenings and offered basic services, including a dry cleaning service. They even sold popcorn, and the students loved it.

“We were the first residence hall to have a service like that,” Henry said.

Henry also developed the first conduct council in the residence halls and helped develop the first interhall council—all with the goal of bettering the lives of students. But, as one might expect, all was not roses and sunshine all the time for the head residents. Broken rules were followed by consequences, which were sometimes tough on all involved. One rule that students sometimes tested involved alcohol. If even an empty bottle was found in a dorm room, the student automatically had to be out of the hall within 24 hours. There was no way of arguing your way out of the consequence.

“I lost one student who was just like a son to me,” Henry said of bottle policy. “I cried like a baby.”

During the Henry’s first few years, they also dealt with spring riots and pantry raids.

“It was terrible. It was not a fun time,” Henry said. “There was lots of tension.”

Henry said the problem was alleviated with a change in the school schedule. When he first came to UND, he said, fall classes started in mid-September, and spring semester didn’t start until February. When fall semester started in August and spring semester ended in May, the spring riots stopped, he said.

And the Henrys certainly didn’t need any more to occupy their time. Along with being head residents and now parents, Gordon Henry also continued his schooling. After finishing his master’s degree, Henry decided to go on for a doctorate in counseling at UND.

“I found out I liked working with students,” he said.

He finished his degree in February 1970 and was hired as UND’s assistant dean of men in July. His responsibilities included discipline and working with student activities. Through the years, Henry’s philosophy toward working with students and staff evolved. He said that when he first started working at Squires, he was a toe-the-line kind of guy. He expected students to follow the rules or pay the consequences. As he learned and grew as a person, his philosophy changed, too. He said he learned that people could change, and he could help them grow. He credits many with his philosophical evolution, including President Tom Clifford and several of his professors, including Dr. Russell Peterson.

“I learned so much,” he said.

On February 1, 1984, Henry was named vice president for Student Affairs, a position he held until his retirement in 1998. Among his first acts was to put in place a crisis program he’d developed after a personal tragedy. In 1976, his niece had been murdered on the Stanford University campus. Henry went to Stanford with his brother and was appalled by how the situation was handled and how the university dealt with his family. On the airplane home, he developed a program for UND, making it the first university in the nation to have crisis program. It would become a model for others.

Henry also continued his own education, taking classes in career development. His door was always open to anyone who wanted help or advice, regardless of whether they were students or faculty or staff from other departments. Henry always believed in the team approach. And if, for example, faculty sought guidance to do a better job in the classroom, Henry’s job was to serve students, and the faculty member would do just that.

He also helped in more formal ways. For instance, he was an advisor off and on for more than 20 student organizations.

But by 1979, Henry knew he needed a break.

“I was burned out,” he said. “I was becoming a sourpuss.”

Henry went to President Tom Clifford with a proposal for year’s developmental leave, which had never been done for an administrator in North Dakota prior to that time. Clifford recognized Henry’s needs and agreed to the leave. Henry spent the year in Arizona with his family and went to Arizona State.

“It was the greatest thing that ever happened to me,” Henry said.

Perhaps the greatest thing Clifford did for Henry was to order him to take one week and spend it with his family. Henry did as he was told and spent every Friday with his family, which by then included his wife and their three children. Henry’s mother also lived in the area, which was an added bonus to the time in Arizona.

“It was a wonderful year,” Henry said.

Yet, he still planned to resign when he returned to UND. Henry felt UND had to be the reason why he was burned out. But through that year, he realized that wasn’t the case. The turning point in his life came when he was working in the Adult Higher Education Office at Arizona State.

A friend on campus talked him into going to lunch and told Henry he’d been chosen by the faculty to be a keynote speaker at an international conference on adult education. A naturally shy person, Henry balked at the thought of getting in front of 5,000 people from around the world and talking about the impact of adult education on life development as people grow older. But the die had been set. His friend informed him that the program, including Henry’s name as a keynote speaker, had already been mailed out. He said the faculty hadn’t seen a person make more changes in attitude and life in a month and a half than Henry had done, and they wanted him to tell the conference crowd what had happened.
Henry fretted over what he was going to say, doing research in the library. Then, one day he decided to go golfing. Because it was a weekday, he had to leave the office—and for the first time in his life, he was able to leave the office without feeling guilty. Henry said it was a personal breakthrough. He realized then that President Clifford had known he needed permission to be free, even if Henry couldn’t recognize it yet himself. Henry said that instant changed his life. Even his wife, Pat, couldn’t help but remark on the wonderful change in him. As friends from church sat around the Henry’s Arizona pool, Pat told everyone that after 17 years of marriage, she was finally seeing her husband as a relaxed man and not a rubber band.

And she wasn’t the only one who noticed. He said he was getting feedback that he was different. The night before the conference, Henry woke up and tore up his speech. Instead, he spoke from the heart about the changes he’d experienced in his life.

“I got a standing ovation and people coming up to me crying and saying, ‘How did you know what I feel?’” he said.

Through the rest of his career and into retirement, people still ask Henry about these changes in his life. He went on KFJM, the campus radio station, to talk about how he’d changed because people couldn’t believe the difference in him after he returned to UND to finish out his career.

These days, Henry continues to give talks. However, he has switched topics from “change” to “caring.” But it all boils down to one thing.

“I need to be needed,” he said.

Trailblazer Got a View of UND from Many Angles

The fact that UND’s roads are paved may be something most people take for granted, but Virginia Kalouppek remembers the days when they weren’t. And she remembers the circumstances that made that change happen.

Kalouppek was working for Jim Wilkerson in the Business Office at the time. President John C. West was getting ready to meet with three members of the state budget committee, the entity responsible for most of UND’s funding, and the timing couldn’t have been better.

“This particular spring, the budget committee made an appointment to come at a certain time, and it was right in the middle of the worst pothole season in history,” Kalouppek said. “President West borrowed Jim Wilkerson’s old Plymouth without any shock absorbers and went downtown to pick the committee up at the hotel.” West brought the men to UND and “hit every pothole he could hit,” Kalouppek said with a smile. “The president drove a business coupe, they used to call them. You could get four people in it nicely, but the people in the back were tight. Of course Wilkerson’s car was a sedan, but it was a broken down affair. (West) really jolted those legislators.”

Then the president took the legislators to a fountain next to the coulee to enjoy the beautiful spring view. “The coulee was the edge of the campus,” Kalouppek explained. Just beyond campus, there were some shanties where children were playing. Just as West and the legislators started viewing that area, a little boy went behind one of the shanties and relieved himself. West asked the legislators if they thought college students should be subjected to such a spectacle. His answer came in the next legislative session. According to Kalouppek, UND garnered money for paving campus roads and to purchase the land west of campus to 42nd Street that session.

Kalouppek came to UND in 1941 with her husband, Walter, who had taken a job as an assistant professor of political science.

“It was rather momentous because WWII started in December of that year,” she said. “Things changed all over. We rode the bus instead of driving a car. We had a Victory Garden every summer.”

And they both worked. When her husband joined the faculty, Kalouppek started a career with UND, too. At first she was a stenographer in the Business Office. In time, she became the secretary for Business Manager Wilkerson.

“I assumed many of his lesser duties at different times and worked closely with the president, who was John C. West,” Kalouppek said. “I worked until Starcher came.”

Kalouppek said she didn’t have a very good relationship with President George Starcher and chose to go to school instead of working for him. In 1960, at the age of 50,
Kaloupek graduated from UNO with a degree in accounting. While being an older-than-average student isn’t unusual today, in 1960, it was a different story.

“There were three or four of us,” Kaloupek said. “We sort of opened the doors, so to speak.”

And it wasn’t always easy, particularly when you were married to a faculty member. Kaloupek remembers one instance when she was waiting with other students in the hallway for the classroom doors to open.

“I usually stood around all alone,” she said. “I was the odd man out—or the odd woman out. There weren’t too many women in accounting at the time.”

That particular day, a student did come stand by her. “There was no place to stand but beside me,” she said. “‘Oh!’ he said, ‘I just came from your husband’s class, poli. sci. 101.’ I said, ‘Oh! What all did you learn? Anything?’”

Obviously hoping to rile Kaloupek, the student said the campus beauty, wearing a short, tight skirt of the type popular at the time, sat in the front row of class and proved to be a distraction for the professor. Virginia Kaloupek didn’t miss a beat before making her reply.

“I said, ‘Oh, that’s great. When he quits looking at women’s legs, he’s no good for me.’” Kaloupek recalls with a laugh. Stunned at Kaloupek’s response, the other student didn’t have anything to add.

After earning her accounting degree, Kaloupek stayed at UNO, working in Continuing Education. She basically ran the office whenever her boss, Ben Gustafson, was out.

“He was the PR man, and I stayed home and ran the office,” she said. She’d work there until the late 1960s before retiring.

But her retirement wasn’t to last. Soon after her husband, Walter, died, Kaloupek was approached by UND President Tom Clifford and Vice President Jerry Skogley. They wanted to know if she was interested in coming back to work for the university.

“They had several things in mind, all of which were 9 to 5 and 24-7,” she said. “I was averse to that. I said, ‘I just don’t want to get that tied down.’ So we compromised, and they called me a consultant, and I was given the duties (of) internal auditor for the student accounts—student government, student organizations.”

At that time there were about 200 accounts, Kaloupek said.

“At least half of them were in trouble,” she said. “There was no control over it really. The students would make promises and buy things (without the ability to pay).”

The first thing Kaloupek did was check out the legalities of how student government fit into the framework of UND and how student organizations fit into student government. She discovered the student fees at that time were about $30, which included everything from lab fees to the fee for Dakota Student. That money had been handled by the Student Activities Committee, which didn’t dole out the funds based on merit, she said.

“It was a sad situation,” she recalled.

Adding to the problem was the fact student groups would overspend and expect the university to cover the bills.

Patiently, Kaloupek went over meeting minutes and decided the fee money should be handled by student government. She worked through the Dean of Students Office and got it all straightened out. Her experience working with the university budget years before gave her an idea how to approach a budget for students, who really had no idea how to handle their first budget. Kaloupek remembers budget meetings that lasted well into the night the first year.

“It was really eye-opening for the kids,” she said.

Kaloupek started with this project in 1978. Soon things were running smoothly. After the 1983-84 school year, the students showed their appreciation for all she had done for them during the years. Kaloupek was honored with the Outstanding Service to UND Student Government award. Not bad, considering this was her first experience with students; she’d previously always been with administration.

“It was difficult to change gears, but apparently I did it,” she said.

That first year, Kaloupek had to learn what an internal auditor did. Right from the beginning, though, the students were open to her help. And they included her in “some of their shenanigans,” she said. After a hard day’s work, they’d ask her to join them at Bonzer’s—and often she did.

Kaloupek stayed with the university until 1989, continuing with the student audit each year.

“It was a challenge,” she said. “It was different.”
Whether in Politics or
In The Classroom, Omdahl has
Lived a Life of Service

While it’s not unusual for a person to have two jobs to make ends meet, that wasn’t the reason Lloyd Omdahl took on that much responsibility. Omdahl was teaching in the University of North Dakota’s Political Science Department when North Dakota Lieutenant Governor Ruth Meiers died of cancer in 1987. Omdahl’s longtime friend Governor George Sinner asked him to fill the vacancy, and Omdahl agreed. He’d serve as lieutenant governor until 1992 but continued to teach at UND one day a week.

“I kept my foot in the university because I knew I’d want to come back,” Omdahl said.

Omdahl’s association with UND goes back a long way. He first came to the university in 1949 as a student. A native of North Dakota, he said he hadn’t even considered going anywhere else.

“This was a great campus when I was going to school,” he said. “The fraternities and sororities were the big things.”

As one of about 3,000 students on campus at the time, Omdahl remained an “independent,” living with family for the first couple of years of school and then moving into Sayre Hall, a men’s dorm, for a year and a half. Though the dorms didn’t offer anything in the way of social activities, the Greeks did. And they were a big part of the Flickertail Follies, a three-day, all-campus variety show run by the journalism fraternity. Being part of the journalism fraternity, Omdahl managed the Follies one year. The event was held at the Central High School auditorium.

Competition to participate in the Follies was hot. Often fraternities and sororities would pair up to put on performances of Oklahoma, South Pacific, or other plays. There even were can-can lines—pretty scandalous for those days, Omdahl said with a chuckle. Prizes were given out to the best performances in a variety of categories.

“Life Magazine even ran a page on the Flickertail Follies one year,” Omdahl said. “Though the students and the community loved the Follies, the UND administration at the time didn’t. Omdahl said administrators tried to reduce its importance because they didn’t want students to spend so much time preparing for it. They didn’t consider the Follies educational. Eventually, administrators killed the event with rules, Omdahl said. A mass rally of 600 people gathered in the union ballroom to protest the rules, but the administrators won out.

Omdahl went on to earn a bachelor’s degree in journalism and served as an editor for the Dakota Student. He’d also earn a master’s degree in political science.

“My aspiration was to become a political journalist, which I never became,” he said. “Even though I had a major in journalism, I never worked for public media.”

In the meantime, Governor Guy struggled to find anyone to fill Omdahl’s shoes as an assistant. Eventually he convinced Omdahl to return to the governor’s office, this time as director of administration. Omdahl would serve on the governor’s staff for another 18 months.

In July 1967, a unique opportunity arose that Omdahl just couldn’t ignore. He received a call from Henry Tomasek, one of his former UND professors, asking him if he wanted to teach at the university. The Political Science Department had an unexpected opening, and they needed to fill it before the fall semester. Omdahl jumped at the opportunity. He’d teach state and local government in America.

Omdahl remembers the first year being difficult. He’d never taught before, and he quickly realized it takes a great deal of learning and research to teach, even if you think you really know the subject. However, Tomasek made the transition as smooth as possible, easing Omdahl into a full-time teaching position.

However, that doesn’t mean he didn’t put his education to good use. In time, he’d write a lot of press releases for political and government people.

“It helps when you’re in the government to understand the press, where they’re coming from,” he said. It also served him well to know what the press would consider newsworthy and what it would not, he added.

While working on his master’s thesis, Omdahl moved to the Bismarck. He figured the state capitol would be the ideal place to do research on his thesis, which was on the political structure of North Dakota. Ironically, he’d discover he would have been better off staying in Grand Forks because of the wealth of information found at UND. But he made the best of the move and became involved in many things in Bismarck that ended up in master’s thesis, he said.

When he moved to Bismarck, Omdahl worked in the Division of Public Safety—a government agency that lasted one biannual session. When his work there ended, he took a couple of other jobs before going to the Civil Defense Survival Project for 18 months. The project’s aim was to plan for a Russian attack, Omdahl said. At some time, in 1957, he started an advertising agency in downtown Bismarck and ran it full time until 1960, when he tossed his hat in the ring for the position of secretary of state, the first office for which he ever ran. Though he didn’t win the election, he continued to work in his ad agency off and on until the early 1970s. At one time, the agency had a staff of six people.

But Omdahl never lost his connection with North Dakota politics. During his run for secretary of state, Omdahl traveled with Senator Quentin Burdick and wrote his press releases. He also did press work for Bill Guy. When Omdahl lost his bid at public office, he wasn’t without offers for other positions, Burdick wanted him to come to Washington, D.C., and work for him, but Omdahl didn’t like the Washington atmosphere. Instead, he accepted an offer from Guy to become the governor’s administrative assistant. In the position, Omdahl did everything from processing mail and answering letters to serving as secretary to the state Parole Board.

“That was really interesting,” he said.

Then the North Dakota tax commissioner died. By that time, Omdahl had accumulated numerous contacts around the state who called the governor and asked that Omdahl be appointed to the vacant position. Though he hated to see his valuable assistant leave, Guy bowed to their wishes and appointed Omdahl tax commissioner, a position he held for three years.

In the meantime, Governor Guy struggled to find anyone to fill Omdahl’s shoes as an assistant. Eventually he convinced Omdahl to return to the governor’s office, this time as director of administration. Omdahl would serve on the governor’s staff for another 18 months.

In July 1967, a unique opportunity arose that Omdahl just couldn’t ignore. He received a call from Henry Tomasek, one of his former UND professors, asking him if he wanted to teach at the university. The Political Science Department had an unexpected opening, and they needed to fill it before the fall semester. Omdahl jumped at the opportunity. He’d teach state and local government in America.

Omdahl remembers the first year being difficult. He’d never taught before, and he quickly realized it takes a great deal of learning and research to teach, even if you think you really know the subject. However, Tomasek made the transition as smooth as possible, easing Omdahl into a full-time teaching position.
Omdahl came to enjoy the work and loved being around the students. And though he officially retired in 1995, he continued to teach one class a semester for 10 more years. "The classroom was really great," he said. "I still miss it."

Omdahl also really enjoyed being part of the Bureau of Governmental Affairs (BGA). Walter Kaloupek of the Political Science Department asked Omdahl to get involved in the bureau around 1970 as a side activity to teaching. Again, Omdahl didn't let an opportunity pass him by. Being part of the BGA enabled him to stay in the swing of North Dakota public affairs.

The bureau operated directly under UND President Tom Clifford. Among the organization's responsibilities was sponsoring a biannual meeting of state officials open to all district judges, the state Supreme Court, legislators, and executive agencies. Omdahl organized the event for about 20 years. The group also funded student research on related subjects and collected and distributed useful information for policymakers in the state.

Unfortunately, Omdahl said, the next president didn't understand the history of the bureau and thought it should be under the auspices of the Political Science Department. Omdahl, who had served the bureau on a volunteer basis, left the organization because he felt uncomfortable with the changes that occurred when it went through restructuring.

But he continued to be fulfilled in his teaching. In fact, Omdahl even created some new classes during his tenure—one on federalism and another on public relations and the administrator.

Around 1980, he also started writing a weekly column that was published in many newspapers. He took a five-year hiatus from writing the column when he served as lieutenant governor but resumed the column when his term of service was up.

But even as lieutenant governor, Omdahl taught graduate classes. He said he worked as lieutenant governor four days a week and at UND one day a week. His salary reflected this as well. The government paid him four-fifths of the lieutenant governor's salary and UND paid him for his teaching time.

Omdahl recognized that not all of the material he taught was exciting to all of his students. He tried to make even the driest material a little more lively, though. Sometimes he'd start classes with an opening monologue—a collection of five or six jokes to amuse the students. Other times he'd have door prizes. Students would put their names in a hat and there'd be drawings for candy, books, or other prizes during class. He also tried to share his experiences in government and make what the students were learning from books seem more real.

But behind everything was a deep caring for students and their education. Omdahl regularly broke down large lectures into smaller discussion groups to ensure a valuable learning experience.

And students and other faculty recognized his efforts. He was named an outstanding faculty member after only three or four years of teaching. In May of 2002, he also was given an honorary doctorate at UND's Spring commencement.

But perhaps the greatest honor he's had is to see his students succeed. Many have gone on to lives in politics or become judges. And he's proud of all who have gone on to do well.

"It's been a very satisfying kind of a life," he said.

When people visit Grand Forks, particularly in the summer months, the University of North Dakota is often on their list of places to see. With its beautiful buildings, gorgeous landscaping, and interesting artwork, the university truly is a destination place. But that wasn't always the case, according to LeRoy Sondrol.

"People didn't bring people to campus to show it off (before the 1970s)," Sondrol said. "That was a goal we had under (Vice President of Operations) Loren (Swanson) and (President) Tom (Clifford). (They) wanted a nicer looking campus."

Sondrol retired as director of Plant Services in 1998 after 42 years of service to the university. Perhaps there is no one more responsible for making UND a real showplace than he is. One of the things he did during his tenure was to create sculptured landscaping, such as mounds covered with flowers to break up the flat landscape.

"When I started mounding it, it was pretty controversial," he said. Before the mounds, the campus had paths everywhere. The mounding created a diversion to keep people on sidewalks. Shrubs and other greenery on a mound kept people from walking there.

"There was a method to our madness," Sondrol said with a smile. He said the ultimate goal of the new landscaping was to make the university a showplace. He wanted to make walking across campus an adventure rather than just a walk. He took advantage of spaces and potentially beautiful places on campus by enhancing them little by little. Paths were kept to well-lit areas. Light poles were removed and lighting was placed on buildings instead, which served the dual purpose of ridding the campus of the ugly poles and eliminating underground wiring that would break in winter.

The dorms weren't forgotten either. During the summer months, Stan Johnson, who was chairman of the Art Department, worked for Sondrol. Johnson served as the interior decorator for several of the dorms, Sondrol said. Johnson also created the sphere by Twamley.

"He did a lot of artwork on that campus," Sondrol said.

Johnson even designed the gazebo near Wilkerson. The budget for the project was tight, so they had to be creative. Sondrol said they got big timbers from the railroad to build it.

"We didn't have the money to do it, so that's how we got that built," he said. "(Johnson) was a great artist. I learned a lot from him."

Sondrol, who grew up on a farm near Reynolds, has been in building business since he was 15. His older brother would come to work at UND, moving tin huts for GI
bill students. In 1956, the elder Sondrol let his younger brother know there were openings on UND's grounds crew. LeRoy jumped at the opportunity.

"A summer job, that's what I was looking for," Sondrol said. He worked for the grounds crew most of the summer earning $1.20 an hour with no benefits. But soon other opportunities would arise, and a summer job turned into a more long-term situation.

Enrollment at the university was increasing and more housing was needed. Plumbers worked on the tin huts as they were moved on campus, but the plumbing foreman found it difficult keeping people on staff. So Sondrol was moved to the Plumbing Department, where his welding skills could be put to good use. He welded galvanized pipe back together in tin huts as they were placed. But the change in jobs nearly killed him. No one told him that he needed ventilation while he was working.

"There were no safety rules whatsoever back then," Sondrol said. Welding in a closed space, he unknowingly was suffering from galvanic poisoning. He said he suffered some side effects for a while but eventually recovered.

"I didn't lose any time on the job anyway," he said with a smile. Despite nearly dying from galvanic poisoning, Sondrol said he liked the work, and he learned a lot. He continued with the Plumbing Department for about a year and a half before working for Loren Swanson building dorms.

In 1961, Sondrol went into the Army Reserve. The following year, he was back to work at UND, again working on the housing issue. Enrollment was still growing and so was the need for housing.

"We were building a new dormitory every year," he said. By then, UND had two different maintenance crews on campus: Buildings and Grounds took care of academic buildings, Auxiliary Services, which became Residence Services, took care of the rest.

Auxiliary Services Maintenance (ASM) was created to offer more services to students. Because they were paying for room and board, students were expecting to be treated as customers, and this helped the university move more in that direction, Sondrol explained.

Sondrol served as general foreman in charge of ASM, which included about 25 employees in the early 1970s. In 1971, when Tom Clifford became UND's president, Sondrol's boss, Loren Swanson, was named vice president for Operations, which included Housing, Food Service, and Building and Grounds. Swanson was forming a new department called Plant Services and wanted Sondrol to serve as director. Sondrol didn't think he was ready for the position.

"I turned him down three times," Sondrol said. But Swanson knew he had the right man for the job and wouldn't take no for an answer.

"He sat down and he said, 'Now let me explain this to you. You either take this job or you don't have a job,'" Sondrol said. So he took it. However, Sondrol attached his own conditions. He asked that he get one year to operate freely, with no holds barred. If at end of year, Swanson didn't like what Sondrol was doing, Sondrol would step down. He held the position for 27 years.

Sondrol developed a mission statement and philosophy for Plant Services that it still goes by today. The university changed the way it looked at providing service to students, faculty, employees, and community, Sondrol said. He set up goals for every department within the plant. He also followed up on how well they did.

"I always thought it was better for people to set more goals than they could accomplish," he said.

He tried to hire supervisors with a bit of dreaming ability. He wanted free thinkers who wanted to do their jobs better—to work smarter rather than harder.

"We changed the way people started doing their jobs," he said.

One example was how the janitorial staff was divided up. At first, each building had at least one janitor. Sondrol said that was a poor use of personnel. He changed the system so that janitors were assigned according to square footage and the type of service needed in each facility. For example, laboratory space needs more sophisticated maintenance than classroom space.

Sondrol also made sure maintenance and custodial staff realized they were part of the university and a part of the educational process. Clean, well-maintained classrooms and lab areas are vital to the students' education.

"They really kinda liked it," Sondrol said of the new philosophy. "It gave them a whole different concept of who they were."

He also started meeting with faculty. Some of the buildings on campus hadn't been painted on the inside for 60 years. As general foreman for Auxiliary Services, Sondrol made sure each dorm entrance was painted annually.

"We wanted the students and the parents coming in looking like something was done in that dormitory," he said. "And we never failed to do that. And it made a big difference. It's that whole thing about first impressions."

As director of Plant Services, he started doing the same thing with the academic buildings. Soon faculty started getting their offices painted.

Sondrol also tackled issues at the steam plant. At the time, he said, the steam plant had its own identity and own crew.

"Nobody saw what they went through over there," he said. "It was dirty, hot, hard, miserable work."

The staff at the steam plant didn't have all the facilities they should have had. Sondrol said. There was no good place for the workers to clean up at the end of their shifts, and there was nowhere for them to eat.

"It was terrible," Sondrol said with a shake of his head.

The steam plant crew unloaded coal rain or shine and provided their own uniforms. One of the first things Sondrol did was furnish uniforms. He also provided showers for them, as well as a laundry service.

Still, Sondrol knew more needed to be done to improve conditions, especially when rain made a quagmire out of the area behind the plant. Workers laid down pallets on which to walk, but it was no real long-term solution. Because the sale of steam was making the plant money, Sondrol knew there was funding to improve the situation.

"That was what turned the plant around. We finally got an income source," he said.

Sondrol knew if he could get President Clifford to walk on the pallets at the steam plant, a solution would be found. And that's exactly what happened. Clifford told them if they could get permission from the railroad, the steam plant could build an enclosure to unload coal inside rather than walking through the muck outside. Sondrol said it took...
about six months, but they got the railroad’s OK and paid for the enclosure through steam sales. “It was a long, hard battle,” he said.

In 1976, the oil embargo changed everything.

“Until that day, energy was not a question. Run everything wide open. The state would fund the utilities,” Sondrol said. “All of a sudden, the price of everything went off the map, and (we) started looking at fuel budgets.”

And the university decided to automate its buildings. “Clifford bought into having buildings automated in the early technologies of it, but nobody knew how to put it into the buildings,” Sondrol said.

Sondrol met with folks from Honeywell, and after some tough negotiations and issues along the way, he got them to become a good ally for the university. “It really was the beginning of computerized building maintenance,” Sondrol said. “Nobody in the state was doing it. Very few people in the country were doing it.”

After about three years, UND’s buildings were automated. The cost savings were so significant, the system virtually paid for itself within that time, Sondrol said. In addition, the relationship with Honeywell continued paying dividends. They came to UND with new products to try as they were being developed. Sondrol arranged for the university to be like a lab for Honeywell. They could test new products at the university and gain experience, while UND could keep those products at no charge.

“It was a win-win situation all the way around,” Sondrol said.

One of the toughest challenges in his career came in 1997, the year of the flood. “That was a whole new ballgame,” he said.

But because of preparations made in the past, the flood wasn’t as devastating to UND as it could have been. Because the steam plant was automated and all the utilities had been mapped, UND was in as good a position as possible to deal with the flooding.

“When the flood hit, we were in a position to handle whatever came at us,” Sondrol said. “And we had the staff that knew what to do. We had the technology behind us. We had all of the information that we needed and had documented everything as far as what maintenance we had done in each building and everything else, so when FEMA came in and tried to wonder why if we’d really maintained our steam line,” the university had the answers and evidence of what damage was caused by flood. Everything was documented. “It was a lot of people’s hard work, but we needed it for our own benefit,” Sondrol said.

While working around the clock during the flood was an unusual circumstance, Sondrol had never shied away from long days. Sondrol says he knew his job wouldn’t make him rich, but he worked in a rich environment. He was part of a team that provided education for the youth of tomorrow. He earned respect by showing respect to everyone else. Part of that was creating special annual awards, the Golden Hammer Awards, to recognize leaders who were doing something new and innovative and were recognized outside their department for their work. The winner also had to display a positive attitude.

“There were so many people who did things right, and it’s catchy. It really is,” Sondrol said. One of the annual awards also recognizes someone from an outside department who made a special effort during the year. “It got to be a coveted award and it still is to this day to give an outsider, somebody that had helped us,” Sondrol said.

Though he loved the university and the people with whom he worked, Sondrol retired in 1998, meeting his goal of retiring at age 62. “It was time,” he said. “There wasn’t a day I didn’t like going to work. There was maybe some days better than others. There was tough times. There was good times.”
Tomasek Wasn’t Beyond a Little Breaking and Entering to Help UND Grow

Though both were experienced military men, political science professor Henry Tomasek and future UND president Tom Clifford weren’t quite prepared for their next mission.

The day started like most other Saturdays. Tomasek was working on his dissertation in his office in the law building. Clifford knocked on his door and asked him to join him for coffee.

“He says, ‘We got a problem. I just got a phone call from President Starcher saying that he was in Bismarck and he needed some papers that he left on his desk,’” Tomasek remembers. Adding to the urgency was the fact George Starcher needed them by the next day. So the duo went to Starcher’s office.

“We looked at the doors. (Clifford) thought they’d be open. They always were,” Tomasek said. But this time they were locked.

“I told him to take a walk to the end of the hallway, look out the window a while and then walk back slowly,” Tomasek said. “And when he got back the door was open.”

To Clifford’s surprise, Tomasek was sitting with his feet up on Starcher’s desk. When Clifford asked him how he did it, all Tomasek would say was that he went to school in Illinois and lived in same neighborhood as Al Capone’s brother. Clifford let it go at that.

The men found the papers Starcher needed. Now they had to figure out how to get them to Bismarck. As a way to thank Clifford for his help on some personal matters, neighbors of Clifford’s had donated three Piper Cubs to the university. John Odegard was in charge of them, Tomasek said, and was just a phone call away.

“We gathered up the papers and called the ‘Odegard Airlines’ people—it was getting to be called that—and they flew the papers to Bismarck,” Tomasek said.

The next week, Starcher needed help again. The federal government was offering large grants through a program designed to make police more sympathetic with the average man on street.

“They had more money than they knew what to do with after the war, the feds did,” Tomasek explained.

The wrinkle was that the grant papers had been on Starcher’s desk for a while and the deadline was quickly approaching. The grant application had to be in Washington, D.C., in just a few days—but before that it had to go to Bismarck too.

So Clifford and Tomasek were called upon again to get the papers from Starcher’s office. But there was a problem. After their first “break-in,” Tomasek told Clifford to make sure Starcher knew he needed to change the lock on his office. It was too easy to break in.

“And by gosh they did it,” Tomasek said with a chuckle. “And we couldn’t get in.”

The duo surveyed the hallway and saw a sturdy oak chair.

“We looked at it, and we looked up,” Tomasek said with a smile.

They moved the chair to the door, which had a transom above it. At the time, no buildings at UND had air conditioning, so transoms were used sometimes to let the cool evening air in. As luck would have it, the transom above Starcher’s door was open a little. So, Tomasek climbed on the chair, and Clifford got on his shoulders to go through transom.

“I don’t know what Tom did after he cleared (the transom),” Tomasek said. “He had to have gone head first. I heard the thud on the floor… Is he dead? But he came out smiling.”

And he came out with the grant forms. But that wasn’t the end of this adventure.

The forms needed to be filled out. Oh, and there was one more small matter. A criminal justice program had to be designed and detailed on the forms.

Tomasek knew they needed help, so he got on the phone. First he put in a call to Jerry Hamerlik, dean of students, who knew all the statistics that were necessary for form. Hamerlik was happy to help, though he was shocked he only had until 6 a.m. the following day to get the information compiled.

“He spent all night doing it,” Tomasek said.

Then Tomasek went to Pat Larson, the president’s secretary, and told her about the dilemma, and she helped devise a criminal justice program. They went through the UND course catalog all night, picking out law school classes, sociology classes, psychology classes, political science classes—anything that could be related to criminal justice.

A man from the geology department who was also involved in law enforcement agreed to chair the new department.

“We got him to head the department because he had a Ph.D. We didn’t say in what,” Tomasek said with a chuckle.

When all the information was gathered, Larson called in six of her best typists to get the grant application ready. It was then passed off to “Odegard Airlines” and flown to Starcher, who was at a board meeting in Bismarck. Starcher flew from Bismarck to Fargo, where he boarded a plane to Washington, D.C. There he caught a cab and rushed to the office where the grant application had to be turned in. Tomasek said he got it on the proper desk with an hour to spare.

But Tomasek realized they weren’t home-free. When Starcher got back to UND, Tomasek told him that all new programs had to be OK’d by the University Senate. Advocating that sharing the truth was the way to go, Tomasek was charged with meeting the Senate and explaining the situation. Luckily, Tomasek said, the Senate and the faculty OK’d the program retroactively.

“As quickly as possible we made a legitimate program,” Tomasek said. And it turned out to be worth the extraordinary efforts of all those involved, he added. “We got thousands of dollars under that program.”

It also became a popular major, first under political science, and then under sociology.
Not every day of the 50 years Tomasek spent at UND was quite so exciting, but it’s clear to see that he really enjoyed his time here.

A veteran who was wounded in the last battle of Okinawa during World War II, Tomasek arrived back in the United States to news that Japan had surrendered. After his discharge from the Army, he went back to school at the University of Chicago, from where he'd earned a bachelor’s degree, to work on a master’s degree in social science.

When the time came to search for a job, he didn’t have to look long. He got a phone call from UND’s political science department asking him if he’d like to come to North Dakota to teach. Because he didn’t yet have his doctorate degree, Tomasek figured he’d have to start a teaching career at the junior college level. However, there was a teacher shortage after the war, mainly due to the fact that there was a huge influx of students because of the GI Bill. Officials at UNO said he didn’t have to have his doctorate to start teaching here, but he would need to keep working on it, which was agreeable to Tomasek. He taught during the fall and winter at UND and traveled back to Chicago during the summer months to finish up his doctorate.

“I had a very good boss, Dr. Walter Kaloupek, who took it easy with me,” Tomasek said. “The first semester I had one subject, but I taught four courses. That was American government. The second semester I had to teach American government again, but he gave me a new second one to teach—international relations.”

Throughout the years, Tomasek took on bigger and bigger roles in the political science department, teaching everything from the original classes he was slated to lead to comparative governments, political parties, and public opinion propaganda. He also was involved in setting up a polling area in North Dakota. About every three months he went out to interview people based on polling questions he was tasked to get answered. Along with gathering information for polling organizations and sometimes for local congressmen, Tomasek was also able to use this experience to aid students in his classroom, teaching them the ins and outs of how polling is done and how to read results.

During the second half of Tomasek’s career at UND, he served as a dean of the newly formed College for Human Resources Development. This college was formed by a group of departments that weren’t happy with colleges they were in. When it was decided they’d form this new college, Tomasek, who was chair of the political science department at the time, was asked to head it.

Tomasek said he was worried he didn’t have enough experience to take on such a task, but he had taken lots of administrative classes. After thinking about the offer for a day, he agreed to give the position of dean a try. He’d serve as dean for the college for about 25 years. It was then he decided to retire, about two months shy of 50 years of service to the university.

But Tomasek remembers his first days at UND as if they were yesterday. He recalls being one of 42 new faculty members being introduced to the old faculty members at President John West’s home. He also remembers West’s first speech to that group of faculty members. In it, West acknowledged that UND would grow, but it would likely never expand enough to cross University Avenue or the coulee, both of which hemmed the university in at that time.

“Our course there were no buildings there,” Tomasek said. “Farmers were still mowing hay on the other side of the coulee when I came.”

Not long after that speech, UND did the impossible—expanding across University Avenue and eventually to the other side of the coulee as well, Tomasek said with a grin.

Tomasek also proved vital in helping UND grow through the years. One example is the Chester Fritz Library. Tomasek remembers when Chester Fritz came to UND for the dedication of the library he’d given the money to build. Since donors usually give such large gifts to the university in their wills, it was a particular honor to get such a gift while Fritz was still living and able to see the fruits of his generosity. But as wonderful as that gift was, the university quickly discovered it needed more.

“The trouble with that library was it was too small,” Tomasek said, explaining that the original library was about half the size of the one on campus today. “We ran out of space in that library almost immediately.”

So Starcher sent Tomasek to the mostly Democratic legislature to try to secure funding to expand the library.

“We had a good selling point. We could now finish the library,” Tomasek said, explaining he was known as “President Starcher’s token Democrat,” the reason he was sent to meet with the legislature.

But while it seemed as if the issue was a simple one, things didn’t go quite as planned. Tomasek said he got a frosty reception from some legislators, including one North Dakota State University graduate who told him he should go to Fritz for additional money, not the state legislature.

“Boy, I was shocked,” he said.

Tomasek quickly recovered, however, and pointed out that if that was the attitude the legislature had toward education, no school in the state would ever get any money for anything. He went to work, talking to legislators personally to secure their votes—including those legislators who were former students.

“We were a little over the edge in victory, but that’s not enough,” Tomasek said, describing his concern at the time. “They could change their minds. ... And not all schools liked us.

“It was a close vote.”

But obviously Tomasek came through, and the library was nearly doubled in size. One of the many things for which today’s UND students have Tomasek to thank.