

William Slater Banowsky, tenth president of the University of Oklahoma, now returned to California from whence he came, is an extraordinary personality. Even before he arrived in Norman, Banowsky was a subject of controversy. His fundamentalist ministerial background, his political activism, his youthful good looks, his dynamic style – all combined to make him easily the most talked-about man in Oklahoma for most of his four years at the University.

Insiders became accustomed to the invariable questions that surround a celebrity. Everyone wanted to know what Bill Banowsky was really like. In the wake of his surprise resignation to become president of the Los Angeles Area Chamber of Commerce, on the heels of spectacular success at OU, the speculation went on. Why would he leave now? Why, indeed, would he leave at all? Is there more to the story? Was he in trouble here? Is he going into politics there? Doesn't he love us any more?

In the reams of copy written about the departing president, one commentary stands out, authored by a bona fide insider, the president of the OU Board of Regents, Charles Engleman. A publisher by trade and a devoted Sooner by avocation, Engleman worked closely with Banowsky, liked him, wanted him to stay, but he could view Banowsky's departure with a good newsman's objectivity.

This column appeared originally in Engleman's own newspaper, The Clinton Daily News, on July 25. What is Bill Banowsky really like? This is as close as we can come. – The Editor



By CHARLES ENGLEMAN

"He is unparalleled in ability to plan and build houses, but it is yet to be proven that he has the vision to live in them."

A California newspaperman wrote that four years ago when Dr. William S. Banowsky decided to leave the new \$100 million campus he had just finished on the Pacific coast at Malibu, California, to accept the presidency of the University of Oklahoma.

Now, after furnishing the leadership for the most remarkably progressive four years in the history of OU, including the building of some extraordinary impressive "houses" on the campus, Bill Banowsky has resigned and is going back to California to be a spokesman for the five-county, 12-million population Los Angeles area.

No doubt he is attracted by the opportunity for exposure through the spotlight of one of the world's leading media centers.

He loves that spotlight and that exposure, for it enables him to accomplish great things for the causes he espouses.

That's why so many people believe that when he became bored with his routine job as a public university president, he decided to use this new job as a stepping stone to becoming president of a large corporation, or — more likely — use it as a base for running for high political office.

His close friends know that one of his life-long ambitions is to be a member of the U.S. Senate. Actually, his visions probably include aspirations to become President of the United States of America.

Having had a role in attracting Banowsky to Oklahoma and working with him as an OU Regent, I was shocked and puzzled at his sudden rejection of the University, of Oklahoma and as a higher education administrator.

I probably should not have been, because I have been continually amazed at his complex personality — his hangups, his quirks, his charm in communicating with women, his bril-

"So long, Dr. Bill"

You can evaluate his record in dollars and cents or bricks and mortar, but how do you measure the excitement he generated? To evaluate the Banowsky administration takes a practiced observer.

liance and charisma in communicating with actual and electronic audiences.

He is a motivator, a spellbinder, a preacher, a politician, an actor, a board member of several large corporations, a visionary, an idealist — and a fund-raiser deluxe.

But he must continually have new and extraordinary challenges to stay inspired and interested in his job.

He inspires the people who work with him. It is easy for him to convince people to part with their money for worthwhile causes.

He loves to envision, plan and work for great accomplishments. But once he sees them started or feels that they are assured, he tends to lose interest — to become bored and restless — and to seek new, inspiring goals to accomplish, new fields to conquer.

There is so much he wants to accomplish before he grows old.

So we must conclude that in spite of his spectacular and productive leadership at OU, Bill Banowsky became bored with the routine of academic life — especially with the inside desk work and pettiness of some of the campus and Norman community elements.

So when the executive search firm of Korn-Ferry International contacted him six weeks ago about being president and chief operating officer of the Los Angeles Area Chamber of Commerce, the offer was challenging enough that he couldn't turn it down, leading up to his "wrenching" decision "at 11:15 a.m." Wednesday to return to California.

About an hour before that — at about 10:30 a.m. Wednesday, he told me by telephone that he had decided to stay in Oklahoma and that he already had called the California people and had "turned down" their offer. So apparently it was a difficult decision for him.

The night before, he had told me that he was strongly considering the California offer.

I haven't learned what precipitated the sudden decision between 10:30 a.m. and 11:15 a.m. Wednesday.

Apparently it wasn't because of an offer for more remuneration, because Banowsky said at his Thursday morning press conference that he wouldn't be making much more money in his new job than as president of the University.

(Incidentally, he currently is being

paid, in salary and expenses, identically the same as the governor of Oklahoma, a ceiling set by the state legislature.)

A political conservative who likes to speak out on issues — especially for the free enterprise system — he has been quoted as feeling constrained from speaking out at the University.

As far as I know Dr. Banowsky wasn't constrained from speaking out on any issue, unless such constraint was self-imposed. He knows that when somebody "speaks out" on any issue, some will agree and some will disagree — and that those who disagree will strike back.

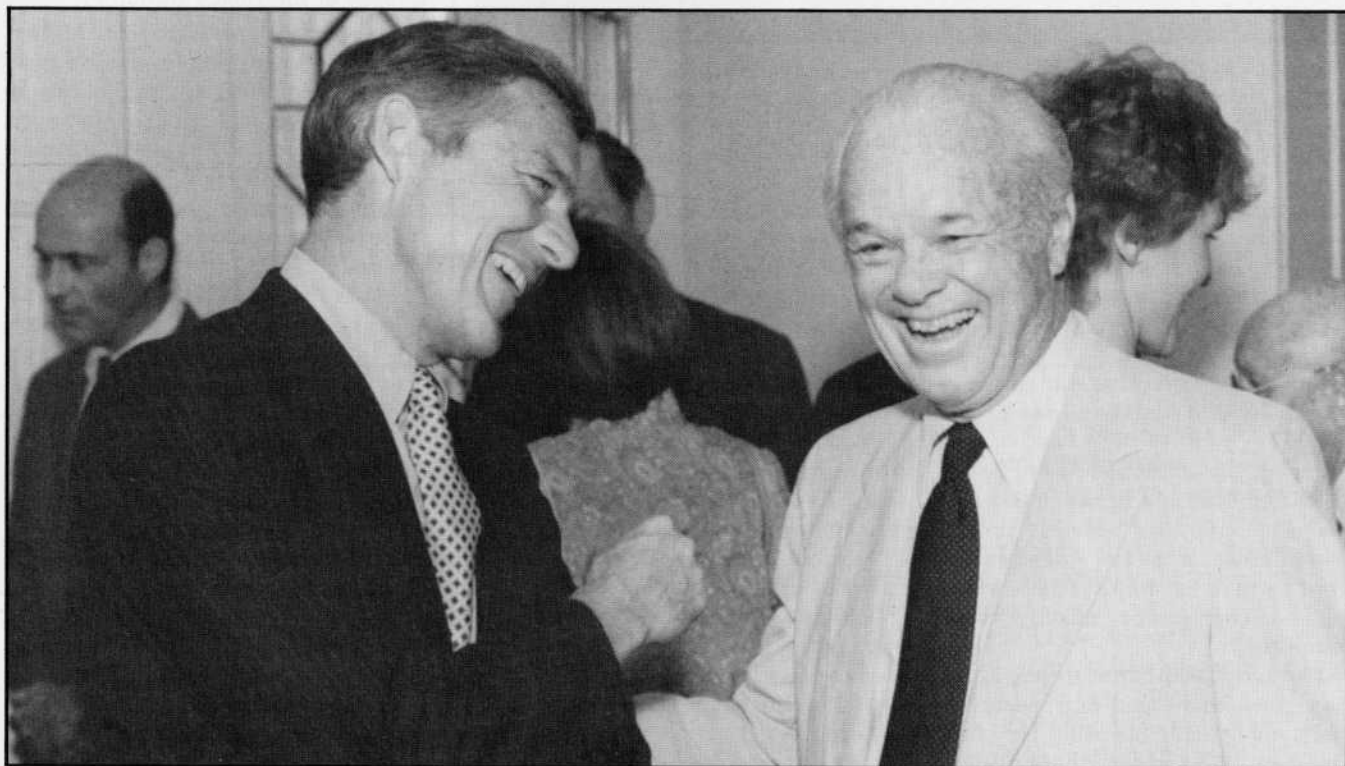
It will be the same way when he "speaks out" as a representative of the business world and the Los Angeles Chamber of Commerce.

He has been quoted as being "homesick for Southern California" and professes to love the freeways and the smog.

Could it be that he jests?

Perhaps the "homesick" quote is genuine, for the Banowskys lived in California for 15 years, and they have good friends in California.

Each individual member of the OU Board of Regents who was in the state



Regents President Charles Engleman, right, liked Bill Banowsky and tried to persuade him to remain at the University.



Banowsky didn't want to harm OU's reputation as a football power, but he sought comparable prestige in academic areas. Here the OU president, left, shares the elation of Governor George Nigh and Sooner Coach Barry Switzer in the recovery of the Governor's Trophy, symbolic of the 1978 gridiron victory over Texas.

urged him to stay as president of the University and told him they believed he would be making a mistake if he resigned. So did his father. So did many other Oklahoma associates with whom he talked.

But what motivates and inspires Banowsky is not always easy to discover.

Part of the attraction has to be the television spotlight he will enjoy as a spokesman for the business promotion interests of the Los Angeles area. That's where he shines. That's where he is a charismatic, effective communicator.

We didn't want him to leave, but he's gone, so we can only wish him well, along with his wife, Gay, and the boys — and be thankful and grateful for four remarkable years of

leadership to the University.

We won't attempt to chronicle a complete list of the University's accomplishments under his leadership, but these stand out in my mind:

He stressed academic improvement through the 1,700-member \$1,700,000 per year OU Associates Program, the \$13 million library expansion and in working toward a goal of OU's membership in the prestigious Association of American Universities group.

He didn't tear down OU's reputation as a ranking football and athletic university, but made great strides to improve its national ranking in academic and other fields.

He improved the statewide image of the University of Oklahoma.

He improved the morale of the faculty, administrative staff, physical

plant workers and students.

He provided the inspiration to get the new energy center under way. In spite of Bill Saxon's misfortune and not being able to pay the \$15 million pledge he made toward the construction of the energy center facilities, the plan is moving forward. Thirty million dollars has been pledged — \$15 million from the state through Governor Nigh and the legislature and \$15.4 million from 116 founders.

Under the leadership of the newly-named executive director of the energy center — General Jay Edwards, who is retiring as commander of Tinker Air Force Base — the plan is continuing to raise another \$14.3 million in private funding so that the projected \$45 million building and facilities can be completed.

While Banowsky has been president, \$125 million in capital projects either have been completed, are in the progress or are approved for immediate construction at OU, including the Huston Huffman Physical Fitness Center, the South End Zone Stadium Addition, the Doris Neustadt Wing of Bizzell Memorial Library, the Viersen Gymnastics Facility, the new L. Dale Mitchell Baseball Park and the College of Pharmacy Building.

An effective spokesman for higher education before the legislature, the State Regents for Higher Education and the governor's office, Banowsky deserves a lot of credit for an 102 percent increase in state appropriations for the University and big increases for other universities and colleges in the state.

Much of the faculty opposed his selection as president, but now they are in his corner, and why wouldn't they be? There has been a 45 percent increase in faculty and staff salaries, moving them from the bottom to the top among the Big Eight conference schools.

We could go on and on, but suffice to say that we are thankful to Bill Banowsky for those four remarkable years of leadership.

He has earned a special place of honor in the history of the University.

So Bill, as you fly away to your beloved freeways and smog, I salute you, wish happiness for you and hope to continue our friendship. 