

THE NEW MAN IN EVANS HALL



Richard and Betty Van Horn

By CAROL J. BURR

The vital statistics have been widely disseminated by now, ever since the May 2, 1989, selection of Richard L. Van Horn as the 12th president of the University of Oklahoma:

Born November 2, 1932, in Chicago, Illinois; raised in Fort Wayne, Indiana.

Bachelor of science degree in industrial administration with highest honors from Yale University, master of science in industrial management from the Massachusetts Institute of Technology, doctoral degree in system sciences from Carnegie-Mellon University.

Ten years with the Rand Corporation, where he worked on the application of computers to management, still his area of academic interest.

Sixteen years at Carnegie-Mellon as faculty member, associate dean of the Graduate School of Industrial Administration, vice president for business affairs, vice president for management, provost.

Two years while on leave of absence as director and professor of management systems at the European Institute for Advanced Studies in Management in Brussels, Belgium.

Six years as president of the University of Houston.

Married to Dr. Betty Jane Pfeffebaum, a child psychiatrist, professor of psychiatry at the University of Texas School of Medicine and vice president of the University of Texas Medical Center at Houston; father of three daughters, Beth Rodriguez of Houston, Patty Florin of Paris, France, and Lynda Graziano of Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania.

Those are the facts, none of which answer the questions on the minds of faculty, students, alumni and friends of the University: Have you met the new president? What is he like? How do you think he will do? Are we going to like him?

To answer these and other questions, Sooner Magazine dropped by for a visit.

Continued

The new president does not stand on ceremony. A pleasant, confidently quiet individual, he is quick to offer his hand, introducing himself simply as "Dick Van Horn," turning to his attractive wife with ". . . and this is Betty." He remembers if you have met before and, unlike some tightly scheduled executives, gives you his undivided and unhurried attention. Although he handles himself well in large groups, the impression is unmistakable: here is a one-on-one person.

Since moving into his office in Evans Hall in mid-July, Van Horn has adopted a number of priorities in his orientation to the new job.

"I want to become very familiar with the state and with the alumni," he says, "get to every major city, visit each of the legislators in his or her home area. I want to move ahead with the two strategic plans just prepared for the Norman campus and the Health Sciences Center. Both have a number of good ideas in them; both stress the importance of research, and that will be a high priority of mine.

"I have a particular interest in admissions and recruiting," he adds, acknowledging the University's success in recruiting honor students. But he also is studying other factors impacting the institution's funding—public appropriations, private giving and sponsored research. "That should keep me busy for a few weeks," he concludes.

But even as he is settling in and becoming familiar with the complexities of his new job, Van Horn has his eye on long-range goals, not just forecasting where the University will be in five to ten years but where the institution would like to be. He sees the impact of strategic planning very clearly in the area of research.

"What size research program do you want to have five years down the road?" he asks. "What areas should the research be in? It is very difficult to direct faculty research; faculty members are going to work on the problems they find interesting. But you can have some influence by emphasizing areas that are relevant to the future of the state."

He cites the Energy Center concept as illustrative of such emphasis.

"There are easily another 10 or 15 areas where the University could undertake research of significant interest to the state, where we can make a contribution. We can expect the largest volume of research dollars—say 70 percent—in the areas of science, engineering and medicine. But there will be research in every area—education, law, fine arts, the humanities."

Van Horn cautions, however, that an institution should never be so restricted to a strategic plan as to be unable to take advantage of unanticipated opportunities. The University of Houston's entry into super-conductivity research, based on an unexpected scientific breakthrough by one of its faculty researchers, was such an op-

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portunity, he says, making possible a major institutional investment with great returns.

"You can do the same thing in student areas," he claims. "It's very important to the state of Oklahoma to bring good students in from outside the state and to provide good opportunities for the best students in the state. The honors program does that; it's part of the strategic plan."

Van Horn is aware that some concern has been voiced that undergraduate education might suffer in OU's pursuit of comprehensive research university status. He is determined that that will not happen.

"Undergraduate students generally turn out to be the most visible alumni of the institution," he says. "They become the leaders in the state and in the nation, and they identify most fondly with the institution.

"So how do you overcome the disad-

vantages in being a big university and provide a special kind of undergraduate experience?" Van Horn asks. "You have a diversity of areas, so you provide a wider range of choice. If you are a research university, you can do a second thing; you provide students the exposure to faculty members who are really outstanding role models, who are making significant contributions.

"Then," he continues, "you make sure that faculty members are seriously interested in and are rewarded for excellence in teaching, for being innovative, for creating new courses, for being concerned about undergraduates, for involving them in laboratory activity — undergraduates make great research assistants."

Not everyone can be a superior, intuitive, natural teacher, Van Horn admits, but he insists that every faculty member can provide a comprehensive class outline, make clear assignments, keep regular office hours, be available to students and take time to help. He also feels that students in a large university must be made aware that they have a greater responsibility to ask for that help, to seek out needed information.

"I always try to stress to students that the faculty and administration would like to solve their problems," he says, "but frequently they don't understand that there is a problem."

Van Horn intends to demonstrate accessibility to students by his own example, although he admits that time is always a problem.

"Obviously you can't do everything, but I try to participate in as many student activities as I can. I meet on a regular basis with student organization leaders, and I like to do 'random student lunches,' just pick out 20 students, invite them to lunch, ask them how things are going and talk about what they think the problems and issues are. You get totally different comments back than you do from the student leaders. They're not worried about power battles between the administration and students. They are concerned about very simple things—the book store doesn't open when they need it, library hours are not convenient.

"At the University of Houston, I always had open office hours once a

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month for students,” Van Horn says. “Then faculty and staff showed up and wanted to sign up. I’d start about 2 p.m. and go all through the afternoon, spend about 10 minutes with each person and in the process see maybe 20 or 30 people. Some just come by to say hello. They just wondered who the president was, what he looked like, but others have problems.”

The president also likes to have random lunches with faculty and to meet once or twice a year with each department head. By these contacts he feels much better informed and better able to talk intelligently about University programs.

“The problem with administrations is that they tend to be cut off from what is going on,” he insists. “A lot of filtering goes on, so you have to find a way of getting information. Of course presidents have to be careful when they have lunch with a group of faculty that they don’t start making commitments. Commitments are made by deans and department heads; presidents should not make commitments.”

Already Van Horn has demonstrated his ability to handle himself before a variety of groups. In his first press conference, on the day his appointment was announced, he encountered the media preoccupation with things athletic, most of the reporters’ questions centering on NCAA football probation, then-coach Barry Switzer and last spring’s criminal incidents involving players. As the audience of University people bristled, Van Horn refused to be drawn into the kind of quotable retorts his questioners sought.

When one reporter suggested that at OU the coach has more to say about what goes on than the president, Van

Horn replied simply, “That says more about the president than it does the coach.”

At the same time, the president, who experienced similar NCAA problems at Houston, insists that his media policy is openness with the press. “Sometimes to my detriment, I suppose,” he says. “You should try to provide as much information as you can, answer any question that is asked, discuss your problems. If at some point those problems become so dominant that people don’t want to discuss anything else — and a great deal else goes on at a university — then it’s better at those times to try to be very ‘nonquotable.’

“The only thing we can say on athletics at the University of Oklahoma is that we’re going to run a high-integrity program; we’re going to have athletes who behave well and are models to the rest of the student population; and we’re going to try to continue the winning tradition. We will take steps that are appropriate to go with those broad goals.

“I’m not going to get involved in answering a lot of detailed questions,” he says flatly. “We have an athletic director, and he is the person who has to take broad policy directions from the University and carry those out. It is not, I suppose, very newsworthy, but I don’t make decisions about coaches.”

While the public may be preoccupied with peripheral issues, Van Horn himself is going straight to the heart of the problems involved in building the reputation of the University as a major force in higher education. “First we need to be good,” he says emphatically, “then we need to communicate that quality.”

In Tulsa for his first major address, the president declared his intention to focus on faculty salaries. “It is important to direct most of the new money coming into the University into higher salaries so we can retain the best of the current faculty and attract new faculty members.”

Van Horn cites a need to add \$10,000 to average full professor stipends within the next three years to meet the competition, but he is careful when using statistical “averages.” A strong proponent of rewarding merit, he insists that judgment must be made

on an individual basis, taking into account differences between disciplines and the maturity of the faculty.

“You don’t hire faculty locally; you have to be competitive with other states and other institutions,” he says. He knows he will have to sell that premise continually to the legislature and the tax-paying public.

In addition to securing new funds by public and private means, Van Horn is willing to reallocate existing resources. “It is a very painful thing to do,” he admits, “but you must build and preserve quality. You don’t go out and fire people or anything like that. I don’t believe in sudden dramatic change in the organization; that’s just disruptive. It’s a matter of going through, over a period of years, and looking carefully at the issues and allowing slow adjustment to take place.”

The new chief executive will opt for a relatively lean administrative staff but one that “still does a very good job. Everybody has to work hard, but most people would prefer to be in a job where they’re busy from the time they arrive in the morning to the time they go home at night.” He does see the need for expansion in certain departments, however, particularly in such revenue-producing areas as development and student recruitment.

When vacancies do occur, Van Horn says he has no immediate plans to bring in colleagues from the University of Houston or Carnegie-Mellon. “Of course I would keep them in mind,” he admits, “but I plan to get to know the people who are here and work with them. If positions become available, you think about anyone who would be a good candidate, looking very broadly to make sure you are really getting the best person. None of us know enough people to fill positions

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Once he has people in place, Van Horn gives them a large degree of operating freedom. “In a large, complex organization—with locations in Norman, Oklahoma City and Tulsa—it would be very foolish to believe that you could make all the decisions.

“I want people continually to ask how they can make the institution run better. I like organizations that make progress, that change, that develop over time, where there is a real sense of excitement about each day. Find something new. Expand a research program. Do a better teaching job. I like managers who are innovative, creative.”

As president, Van Horn does not expect to be constantly involved in day-to-day operations. “When it is important to make a decision to keep everything moving along, a manager should go ahead and make that decision. There isn’t always a chance to talk it over with the president, and presidents must be willing to accept the fact that certain decisions will be made that they don’t really like. You don’t want people worrying about making a mistake, just as long as they look at the issues and make the decisions for the right reasons.”

Van Horn anticipates being allowed to perform his duties in much the same manner, maintaining a cooperative, open relationship with the OU Board of Regents based on mutual respect and understanding.

“Regents feel very strongly about the institution,” he insists. “They want the institution to work well. The administration has to build confidence that it is not necessary for them to micro-manage. You tell the regents everything that’s going on. You make sure they know all the significant issues, that they aren’t surprised. A good rule is that regents should hear about things a week before anyone else does. You can’t always do that—some things break too fast—but where the university has control, you should give the regents adequate notice.”

Such a harmonious working arrangement should give Van Horn an opportunity to provide the University with much-needed stability in top administration. “You stay in a job as long as you have support and people think

you’re doing a good job,” he says simply. “I don’t think that a president should ever stay longer than the people around him want him to stay. And I’d never want to be in the situation where being president was more important to me than doing what I thought was right.”

Van Horn believes, however, that the value of a president to the institution goes up every year he stays if he continues to work diligently and does his job effectively. In spite of recent national and local trends to the contrary, he does not think 10 or 12 years an unreasonable term. He cites his record of 10 years with Rand, 16 with Carnegie-Mellon and six at Houston.

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determined a group, I might still be at the University of Houston,” he laughs. “But I’m very glad they were so determined.”

The new president expects to give the regents their money’s worth. He finds that university concerns dominate not only his professional life, but also his social and private life.

“Just about everything that goes on in my life from early morning to late at night and weekends has some connection to the university. In that sense, I suppose I am a workaholic,” he admits.

The Van Horns’ social companions are usually members of the university community, potential donors or legislators. “I just don’t think there is enough time otherwise. I enjoy plays, the symphony and other musical events, and those are nice occasions to invite a donor. I get to enjoy the event and at the same time

strengthen the relationship. I find that a perfectly acceptable way to relax or socialize.”

Fortunately for their domestic harmony, the president’s wife shares his work ethic. A widower, Van Horn met Betty through mutual friends at a University of Texas function in Houston. They have just celebrated their first anniversary.

“Betty understands that she spends 20 hours a week as wife of the president, then 50 hours on her own professional job; she’s been doing that in Houston,” Van Horn explains. “She puts in a lot of hours, but again, those are things she likes to do.

“She brings with her a very high visibility in child psychiatry,” the president says proudly. “Betty is probably a better scholar than I am. She has a really outstanding publications record, and in addition to being a faculty member and administrator, she has continued to have an extensive clinical practice. She will be very happy here, and she is looking forward to being able to continue her professional career and professional development.”

Pfeffebaum will wind up her duties at the UT medical center in mid-September and become a tenured professor in child psychiatry at the OU Health Sciences Center. Her employment at HSC presented something of a dilemma for OU regents, who have a nepotism rule that technically would prohibit her employment. However, the way was cleared by a legal ruling that the president’s wife would be employed by the regents, not her husband, and therefore not in violation of the state nepotism law.

The Van Horns are accustomed to being on public view all the time, even experiencing such a high profile in the crush of metropolitan Houston. “I discovered that I could never go anywhere in the city without people saying hello. I would go out to a restaurant where I had never been before in my life, and the waitress would come up to the table and say, ‘Hi, there, Dr. Van Horn. I’m one of your students.’

“You have to remember that you are continuously representing the university. You don’t make personal comments; anything you say is a public comment. I guess that if you really

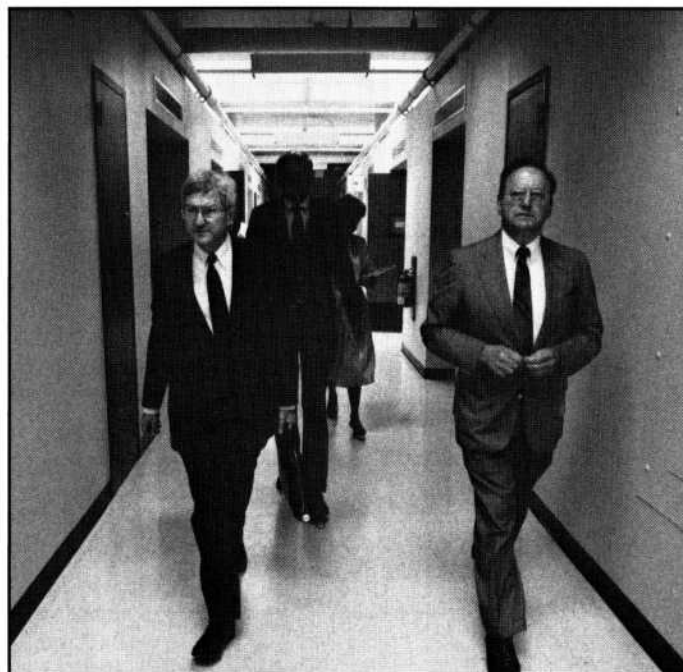
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1 DAY



7:30 A.M. *The new president opens his first day on the job with breakfast in Dining Room 1 of the Oklahoma Memorial Union with the executive committees of the Norman campus and Health Sciences Center Faculty Senates. As with most meals, the menu took second place to getting acquainted.*

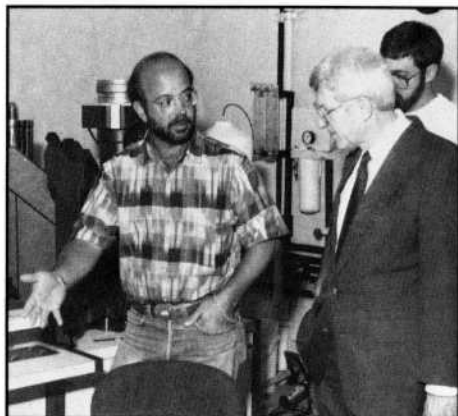
From his first day in office, Dick Van Horn gave notice that he intends to cover all the bases. Photographer Gil Jain followed the new president through a grueling eight hours of meeting, greeting, conferences and consultations.



8:30 A.M. *Leading the way down a corridor of the OU Energy Center is its executive director, Barnet Groten, right, who personally served as President Van Horn's guide on an extensive tour of the massive \$50 million structure nearing completion on the northeast corner of the campus.*

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8:30 A.M. Van Horn meets researchers in one of the many Energy Center laboratories, above, then confers in the atrium with OU Architect Arthur Tuttle, left, and Director Groten, below.



9:45 A.M. Above, in the Paul and Doris Travis Room of the Doris W. Neustadt Wing of the Bizzell Memorial Library, Van Horn is introduced to his deans by the Norman campus provost, Joan Wadlow (back to camera), but in the photo below, the conversation soon turns more lively as the president responds to questions on his educational and administrative style.



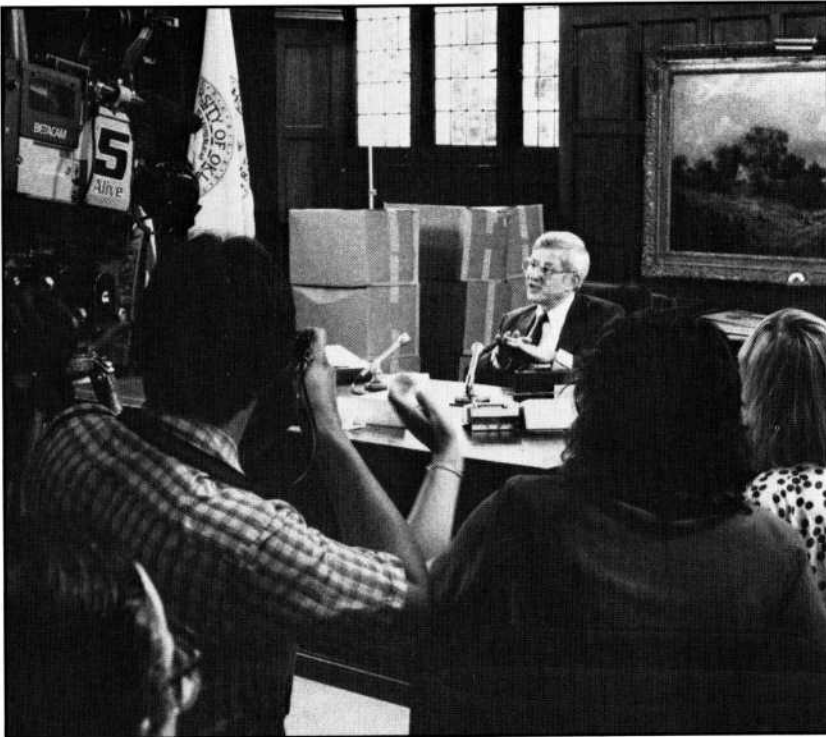
From the full professor to the landscape gardener, everyone at the University of Oklahoma wanted to meet the new president, shake his hand and welcome him aboard. So, having helped wife Betty unpack shipping crates and arrange furniture all weekend at the president's home on South Pickard, Richard L. Van Horn spent Day 1 trying to oblige.

Starting early with a businessman's breakfast, he crisscrossed the campus meeting as many of the chosen representatives of organizations as could be squeezed into his schedule. Faculty, administrators and staff

came from the Health Sciences Center to join their Norman colleagues around conference tables, all anxious to get down to business after a long and thorough national search for this new president. They found Dick Van Horn as willing to listen as to voice his own views, more interested in learning than in impressing them.

By day's end, Van Horn had filed away dozens of new names and faces, catalogued their opinions and concerns, aware that he had only just begun to meet his Sooner constituency.

DAY ONE



11:15 A.M. Packing boxes still in evidence above, Van Horn sits behind his president's office desk to face media representatives in his first official press conference as the OU chief executive.



12 NOON Above, Van Horn visits with his hosts, the officers and members of the executive committee of the OU Foundation Board of Trustees, as they wait for lunch to be served in the conference room.



11:55 A.M. With his ever-present media shadow, above, Van Horn leaves for his South Campus lunch appointment at the OU Foundation building.



1:30 P.M. Campus organization leaders gather in the Student Affairs office to meet their new president.

2:30 P.M. After meeting with executive committees of the HSC and Norman employees' councils in the Union, Van Horn, left photo, returns to his office conference room for a session with his own executive staff, rounding out his initial day and letting him get back to unpacking.



Letters

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we were at Norman together. It's been an interesting and rewarding experience, but those six years I spent in Norman have to rank right up there with the best of all.

All kinds of good wishes to Jessie. Wish we could sit down for some "Do you know whatever happened to . . . ?"

B. Abbott Sparks
'41 B.F.A., '43 M.A.
Dallas, Texas

The "Sooner Song Book" article (Spring 1989) took me back, alright! I was on the campus (in high school) when the "OU Chant" was introduced and went to many of the OU games, stage productions and pep rallies at the "corner." I didn't know until I read Margaret French's article how many songs have been composed for OU. There are probably many of your readers today with the talent to put together words and melodies. And I have a challenge for them.

My reason for writing is to tell your readers about the song contest held annually by the Oklahoma Heritage Association for songs that tell some historic, cultural or geographic characteristic of Oklahoma.

The purpose of the contest is to "enhance the on-going heritage and quality of life in Oklahoma by encouraging the composition and performance of original music which deals with the heritage of Oklahoma," and "to help aspiring composers, writers and performers of music in Oklahoma by exposing their state-oriented works to the public."

The contest has been conducted for 18 years, so there is a collection of Oklahoma songs just waiting to be used for any centennial function. In fact, Dan Faulkner's "Oklahoma Is My Home," one of the winners of 1987, has been sung at the Sooner Games of 1988, the Torch Run ceremonies at Boise City and Lawton in 1989, and we are expecting to hear it in the Opening and Closing Ceremonies for the Olympic Festival this month in Norman.

For rules of the contest, you may write to the Oklahoma Heritage Association at 201 N.W. 14, Oklahoma City, OK 73103, or phone (405) 235-4458. I work for the Association and hope I'll be hearing from many OU

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value privacy, it might be a problem, but I happen to live a relatively non-controversial life. The things I like to do society considers very acceptable. They really don't mind if you go to parties or read books."

Van Horn is having little difficulty in adjusting to the reprieve from the big city pressures of his last two posts in Pittsburgh and Houston. His hometown in Indiana was about the size of Norman, and he is very comfortable in such an environment. A dedicated hiker and outdoorsman, he finds the area's open spaces one of its most attractive features.

Oklahoma's new resident is convinced in other ways as well that his newly adopted state is the place to be. "One of the things that is really intriguing to me about this job is the timing," he explains. "The state and the University are sitting in a very good situation. The next 10 years will be a time of a tremendous amount of development. A very appealing thing about the University of Oklahoma is its ability to have an impact on the state—turning out students, providing leadership in a variety of areas through research, the host of public

grads and former students. The contest deadline is October 17.

Carol E. McWilliams
'43 B.Mus, '47 M.Mus
Oklahoma City, Oklahoma

Toothaker in the Spotlight

I just read "Sooner Spotlight: Toothaker" by Michael Waters in the Spring 1989 issue of *Sooner Magazine*.

What a fascinating and likable person Professor Toothaker seems to be. I'd love the opportunity to visit with him.

Lewis Burton, '50 B.S.
Wichita, Kansas

Flexner Tapes for Sale

Regarding your article on "Bob Flexner: Craftsman." Do you know how I can get copies of his woodworking tapes discussed in the article?

Jessie Kent, '61 B.S.
Atlanta, Georgia

Editor's Note: The tapes may be ordered directly from Fine Woodworking

service activities that go on at the University."


The new president brought his *Sooner Magazine* visit to a close 30 minutes past the allotted time, and with seeming reluctance. Although this practice may make problems for schedulers, such consideration sends his graciousness rating sky high.

The first-impression verdict? Dick Van Horn knows his business. Moreover, this is a man who intends to be in charge, but he will do so in his own way and at his own pace, with diplomacy and measured deliberation. After months of the frustration of a national search, when seemingly no one was being singled out for the job, the University of Oklahoma ultimately made an extremely good choice.

Have you met the new president? Yes, as will a host of other Sooners over the next few short months.

What is he like? Totally competent, surprisingly candid, at home with himself.

How do you think he will do? Very well.

Are we going to like him? We would not be at all surprised. 

magazine by calling toll-free 1-800-888-8286, specifying "Repairing Furniture with Bob Flexner" and/or "Refinishing Furniture with Bob Flexner." Each tape is \$29.95 with a \$2.50 handling charge per order, regardless of the number of tapes.

Keep Those Photos Coming

A treasure drove of historic photographs and alumni memories has resulted from the notice in the Spring issue of *Sooner Magazine* that such memorabilia is being accepted for the Centennial Collection of the OU Archives in the Western History Collections and for use in Centennial publicity. The invitation remains open for Sooners wishing to give or loan their favorite campus photographs and contribute brief written anecdotes about their University days. Send to Carol J. Burr, Editor, *Sooner Magazine*, 100 Timberdell Road, Norman, Oklahoma 73019. Pack carefully and indicate whether the photographs are to be returned. 