



## With all the new neighbors, life is no longer lonely in Gunning Park

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**M**y first visit on August 25, 1978, to the newly named Gunning Park was underwhelming. Not being a person of great vision, I was secretly a bit disappointed in the way the University had chosen to honor my mentor, R. Boyd Gunning, on his retirement after more than 30 years as the founding executive director of the University of Oklahoma Foundation, doubling for 20 of those years as executive director of the University of Oklahoma Alumni Association.

After a VIP luncheon in the Union Ballroom, Gunning's friends and colleagues had piled onto a trolley for the short trip to the South Campus, once known as the South Base, acreage acquired by the University when the U.S. Navy left Norman following World War II. To bear Gunning's name was part of that land, a five hundred-acre plot bounded by Timberdell Road on the north, Jenkins Avenue on the east, State Highway 9 on the south and Chautauqua Avenue on the west. This space, we were told, would figure prominently in OU's future. And I had to admit that the choice was apt, since acquisition of the South Campus was due in large part to Gunning's vision and ingenuity.

On that day, however, there was not much to see or plans to contemplate. We disembarked at the corner of Timberdell Road and Wadsack Drive and, looking south and east, saw some tennis courts and the low-lying Kraettli Apartments, built in 1965 for married students. The two-year-old Lloyd Noble Center was just out of sight south of Imhoff Street, and to the west was the Law Center where in 1976 the gregarious law faculty had gone into

forced isolation far from the University's main campus and their beloved coffee klatches in the Union cafeteria.

But like extra closets in a new house, unoccupied land has a way of filling up. Although an earlier suggestion for a new stadium adjacent to Lloyd Noble had failed to find a following, the logic of locating athletic facilities near that abundant parking was compelling. L. Dale Mitchell Baseball Park opened in 1981 and the Vierson Gymnastics Center a year later. Interestingly, a new University of Oklahoma Foundation Building, which has *Sooner Magazine* as one of its occupants, came next in 1983, located on the very corner where Gunning Park had been dedicated.

The Pride of Oklahoma carved out a practice field east of our offices and treated us to seasonal serenades, but that was about all the collegiate ambience we experienced for more than a decade. The lawyers had been right; it was a little lonely down south.

Then in the mid-'90s, in rapid succession, the David Boren Express hit Norman, ground was broken for the Sam Noble Oklahoma Museum of Natural History, and Joe Castiglione arrived as athletics director with facility upgrades on his mind. The long-awaited building boom was under way, and our neighborhood offered some inviting construction sites.

Of the completed and ongoing projects listed in this issue's cover story, starting on page 2, several have South Campus addresses. Major expansions and renovations have transformed the Law Center, now named Andrew M. Coats Hall, and Lloyd Noble Center, as well as significant improvements to the baseball park. The women's softball

team has a gem of a new stadium, complete with team locker rooms, east of the band practice field on Jenkins Avenue. West of Lloyd Noble along Chautauqua Avenue, the field phase of the new John Crain Soccer Facility is complete with a stadium yet to come, alongside the new 12-court Headington Family Tennis Center. Even the Rugby Club acquired a spiffy new field when its old location near the Duck Pond gave way to a parking lot.

The golf course on the far eastern side of the former Navy land underwent a substantial renovation as did the clubhouse. Just down the road the men's and women's golf teams moved into the new Charlie Coe Golf Learning Center.

But perhaps the most exciting additions to the South Campus will be constructed just beyond Gunning Park's eastern edge at Highway 9 and Jenkins, the intersection former President William S. Banowsky once envisioned as a new main entrance to the campus. Boren has dubbed the area Research Campus-South, and here will stand the mammoth National Weather Center and the Multi-Purpose Research and Technology Facility, featured on page 7. This is just the beginning, we are told, for this educationally and economically valuable enterprise, which will play an important role in the development of the University and the state of Oklahoma.

Drive through the old Navy base today and only a few reminders remain of its original purpose. We were promised in 1978 that this land would figure prominently in the University's future—and it is all coming true.

—CJB