

TULSA TIME

BY RANDY KREHBIEL



Courtesy OU-Tulsa

Acquisition of the Schusterman Center gives OU-Tulsa high visibility in keeping with its mission in the community.



Leeland Alexander has lived in Tulsa more than 30 years. For most of that time he has been a University of Oklahoma administrator—a fact that puzzles many first-time acquaintances.

“They say, ‘Oh, you drive to Norman every day?’ ”

No, Alexander patiently explains, he works in Tulsa. And so do hundreds of other OU faculty and staff—not to mention hundreds more OU students.

This information, Alexander has learned, is likely to be greeted with an uncomprehending stare.

Or was, until quite recently.

Despite a continuous presence that dates to at least the late 1950s, a \$70 million payroll and programs that enrolled more than 1,000 students and treated tens of thousands of poor and indigent patients in its Tulsa teaching clinics, OU flew almost entirely beneath the radar. Its activities were scattered, often operated independently of each other and attracted little attention from the press or the public.

“We had no identity,” says Alexander, the University’s associate vice president for administrative affairs in Tulsa.

That began to change in fall 1999. By fall 2002, the transformation was almost complete. The University of Oklahoma at Tulsa, first suggested by President Frank Horton in 1987, had become a reality.

It could not have happened, however, without the University of Oklahoma Foundation and two of the University’s most generous benefactors, Charles and Lynn Schusterman. Through the Schusterman Family Foundation, the Tulsa couple contributed \$10 million to the University, while the University of Oklahoma Foundation advanced another \$17 million, to be repaid over time, for the purchase and renovation of the 60-acre former BP Amoco research facility, now named to honor the Schusterman gift.

continued



Courtesy OU-Tulsa

Tulsans driving past the intersection of 41st and Yale are in no doubt these days that the University of Oklahoma is in full operation in their city. The 60 acres surrounding the former BP Amoco research facility, now the Schusterman Center, provide a beautiful setting for this non-resident campus. “The Seed Sower” sculpture is identical to those on the Norman and Oklahoma City campuses.

Leeland Alexander, OU-Tulsa's associate vice president for administrative affairs, has watched for nearly three decades as the University's Tulsa enterprise has grown from a few small adjunct programs to full academic maturity with the acquisition of the Schusterman Center.

OU-Tulsa photos by Robert Taylor

The sweeping lawns, stately trees and distinctive 370,000-square-foot complex of offices, laboratories and classrooms gave the University immediate recognition. A 12-foot tall Seed Sower, the University's symbol of commitment to the spreading of knowledge, was installed at OU-Tulsa's 41st Street and Yale Avenue entrance, one of the city's busiest intersections. A giant crimson and cream OU flag snaps in the breeze overhead.

"We had no institutional identity in Tulsa, and the community had no real sense of who we were until we secured the Schusterman Center," OU President David Boren said last year.

Over the past three years, the Schusterman Center at the University of Oklahoma-Tulsa has been transformed into an innovative and perhaps unique academic setting. This fall, for the first time, all 20 of the OU academic programs offered in Tulsa, plus its recruiting offices and the National Resource Center for Youth Services, were gathered in one place. Boren called it "a historic moment for OU and for Tulsa. . . . Whether the arena is social services, engineering or architecture, the ability to integrate the health sciences with these disciplines is an invitation for much-needed innovation. The possibilities for interdisciplinary education—the wave of the future—are tremendously exciting."

Officials believe the Schusterman Center presents an exceptional opportunity to propel OU-Tulsa into the forefront of interdisciplinary education and research. Currently two undergraduate programs, liberal studies and nursing, are offered, although others are planned in the future. The result is a rare concentration of top faculty and graduate students.

"This is a dream come true," says Alexander. "For the first time we have space—good space—to expand our programs. We'll be able to recruit outstanding students and outstanding faculty."

"Raising the OU flag has moved us in a way few people could have anticipated," says OU-Tulsa President Ken Levit, who spent his first year on the job expanding and consolidating academic programs at the Schusterman Center and strengthening ties to the community and the Norman and Oklahoma City campuses. "I'm not sure anybody could have known how huge a difference the acquisition of the Schusterman Center would make to OU and Tulsa."

Tulsans have long thought universities make a difference. In 1907, when the town still numbered only a few thousand, a group of businessmen bought a failing Presbyterian school called Henry Kendall College and moved it from Muskogee to Tulsa.



In 1921, after a succession of winning football teams, the businessmen prevailed upon Kendall College to change its name to the University of Tulsa.

But TU remained private, and in time demand grew for public higher education in Tulsa, which by the 1960s claimed to be the largest city in America without a state college or university. The situation changed somewhat in 1970 with the opening of Tulsa Junior College (now Tulsa Community College), but people still clamored for university-level instruction. Jobs demanded more education than ever before, and Tulsa business leaders feared their city would be left behind without access to affordable higher education.

At the same time, the Tulsa County Medical Association lobbied for a medical school. The city and the state suffered from a shortage of doctors, and the lack of a public hospital meant Tulsa's private facilities were handling a growing poor and indigent caseload with little or no compensation. A 1970 Carnegie Foundation report included Tulsa among nine cities recommended for new medical schools within the decade.

A free-standing "Tulsa State University" was discussed, as was the creation of new campuses of existing universities. In the late 1970s the Oklahoma State Regents for Higher Education created what came to be known as the University Center at Tulsa and later Rogers State University.

UCT was a consortium of four institutions—OU, Oklahoma State University, Langston University and Northeastern State University. With Tulsa Junior College offering freshman and sophomore level courses, Langston and NSU were to provide most of the junior and senior level courses while OU and



Dr. Gerard P. Clancy, an accomplished psychiatrist and medical educator who came to OU from the University of Iowa College of Medicine, is in his second year as dean of the College of Medicine, Tulsa. In the background are research assistants Rhonda Masengale and Stephen S. Vo.

OSU were responsible primarily for graduate education. Classes originally were taught at state office buildings, but in the early 1980s UCT moved into a new campus on Greenwood Avenue just north of downtown.

The Legislature had authorized third- and fourth-year medical training for Tulsa in 1972, with the first class of 17 in 1974. Many legislators and some OU regents expressed grave reservations about the venture. OU's medical school and the University Hospitals in Oklahoma City were chronically underfunded. Extending the program to Tulsa, it was feared, would spread already scarce resources even thinner. In the end, the Tulsa

Medical College was approved only on the condition that the program would not ask for its own building.

The unexpected growth and popularity of the Tulsa medical college soon proved that the original vision was too constrained. The college leased an office building on 21st Street. In 1980, with the help of the Tulsa Industrial Authority, Alexander and a young associate vice president named David Walters—later Governor David Walters—negotiated the purchase of the defunct American Christian College on South Sheridan Road. Soon additional space was rented in the nearby City Plaza building.

Today OU's nine Tulsa clinics train 60 medical students and 160 residents while logging 200,000 patient visits per year. Ninety percent of those patients are either on Medicaid or Medicare or have no insurance. Over the years, programs in nursing, occupational and physical therapy and public health were added to the curriculum. This year the first doctor of pharmacy class was admitted.

By the late 1990s the clinic on South Sheridan was handling almost twice its intended patients. Meanwhile, a reshuffling of academic responsibilities at the Greenwood campus had left OU's programs there in need of a new home.

Boren decided the time had come to consolidate the University's Tulsa presence. Hardly anyone seemed to notice that OU not only trained many of Tulsa's physicians, but also provided health care for thousands of the area's poor and uninsured as well. Fewer still seemed to know about its gradu-



Tulsa Graduate College Dean William Ray, left, Vice President Nancy Lewis and President Ken Levit pause at the entrance to the Schusterman Center, OU-Tulsa's sprawling, tree-shaded new complex of offices, laboratories and classrooms that has delivered a long-sought geographic identity to the University's presence in Tulsa.



The refurbishing theme of comfort and class that started with OU's buildings in Norman also can be found at the Schusterman Center in Tulsa, most noticeably in the mission look of the David L. Boren Student Lounge, which gets heavy use by the students on this non-resident campus.

“David Boren likes to say this was the only gift he didn't solicit.”

ate programs in such fields as social work, library and information services, telecommunications and public administration. The National Resource Center for Youth Services, a division of the College of Continuing Education providing social service training and leadership throughout the United States, quietly operated as yet another important but largely unrecognized Tulsa asset.

Plans were made for a major renovation of the Sheridan Road campus. The University had acquired about 30 acres there over the years, but building the facility OU envisioned would require \$100 million or more. The University had no room in its budget for that sort of undertaking.

A glimmer of hope appeared when it became known that the BP Amoco property might be had cheaply. Even at a bargain basement price, however, the University could not afford it. Fortunately, as has happened so often in OU's history, someone came forward to help shoulder the load.

The Schustermans had stepped up many times before. They had endowed a chair of Judaic studies and supported energy-related activities on the Norman campus and funded a center to study learning styles. The people of Tulsa knew them as generous benefactors of such causes as the Parent Child Center, needy school children and interfaith activities, their philanthropies totaling more than \$55 million over the past 15 years. In 1999, though, Charles was looking for something special to give his alma mater and his hometown.

“We were in British Columbia,” recalls Lynn Schusterman. “I opened *The Tulsa World* one morning and read about what was going on. I thought it would be a perfect fit, and so I took the paper up to Charlie, and Charlie called David Boren. David Boren likes to say this was the only gift he didn't solicit.”

OU was playing a short hand. The replacement value conservatively appraised at more than \$54 million, the BP Amoco facility occupied some of the most valuable real estate in Tulsa. The University could not hope to compete if the energy giant decided to sell to private developers.

BP Amoco officials did not want to be “greedy,” but they were on a very abbreviated timetable. The company indicated a desire to dispose of the property in a way that benefited the commu-



Bill Westmoreland lectures to graduate students in social work, including Stacy Price, center in brown shirt, a wife and mother of two small children, who is able to return to school and change career direction through OU-Tulsa's scheduling and a format friendly to working adults.

nity. Boren argued the facility's best use was as a public university—and few people can be as persuasive as David Boren. BP Amoco agreed to take as little as \$24 million—a gift, with other considerations, of at least \$30 million. The company agreed to pay rent of up to \$1 million a year for portions of the building it continued to occupy while phasing out its Tulsa operations, and to leave behind \$5 million worth of furnishings and fixtures. Even these concessions, however, might not have been enough without the Schustermans.

"This," says Lynn Schusterman, "was an opportunity to do something that would benefit OU and Tulsa. . . . When you think of all the things that are going to be accomplished there, it is mind-boggling.

"Charlie wrote hundreds of notes to himself. Things he thought of and jotted down. One of them was, 'Death ends a life but not a relationship. A relationship is never resolved, but continues on in the survivors' minds.'"

Charles Schusterman's relationship with the University of Oklahoma and the city of Tulsa continues on in the lives of people such as Olivia Ochoa and Stacy Price. Without OU-Tulsa and the Schusterman Center, Ochoa and Price—like many others in northeastern Oklahoma—would not have been able to pursue their dreams of a better and more fulfilling life.

For Ochoa, it has meant the opportunity to become a neighborhood pharmacist. A graduate of Tulsa's Webster High School, Ochoa began working for an independent pharmacist while still a teenager. She earned an associate degree from Tulsa Community College and became a pharmacist's assistant. But after 10 years in the business and with a small boy to care for and other family considerations to take into account, Ochoa had gone as far professionally as she could go.

"I became interested in pharmacy the first day I went to work in one," says Ochoa. "I always wanted to go to pharmacy school, but it wasn't really an option. I had a child in school and other family ties to the community."

Ochoa was not alone. Tulsa pharmacies and others throughout northeastern Oklahoma long have suffered from a chronic



Courtesy OU-Tulsa

Utilizing distance learning technology, students in this Schusterman Center classroom in Tulsa participate fully with their counterparts at the Health Sciences Center in Oklahoma City. With the press of a button, students in either classroom can activate a microphone and a remote-controlled camera to ask questions or join in the discussion.

shortage of pharmacists. They believed there were enough Olivia Ochoas to alleviate their problem and justify a pharmacy program in Tulsa. Boren and Levit worked with the State Regents and government officials to secure funding in 2001, and in 2002 Ochoa became a member of the program's first class.

"It was a little overwhelming," Ochoa says. "The first week I felt like I was drowning. The second week was better because I realized everyone else felt like I did."

Oklahoma City and Tulsa classes are taught together via satellite; some originate in Tulsa, others in Oklahoma City. To ask questions, students press a button that activates a microphone and a remote controlled camera. Everyone in both classrooms can see and hear the questioner.

"The presentations are remarkable," says Ochoa. "I find it works a lot better for me than a traditional classroom. I'm surprised by the amount of information I absorb."

Price is a 31-year-old wife and mother of two young children. She had earned a related bachelor's degree from the University of Memphis in Tennessee, but the entry-level jobs she found after the family moved to Tulsa were not as rewarding or challenging as she wanted. Price's supervisor recommended she check out OU-Tulsa.

"I did not have any idea of the kinds of things you could do with a degree in social work," Price says. "The fact that it was based in Tulsa instead of Norman made it possible for me. With two small children, I would not have been able to do it otherwise."

Most of Price's classes are taught as weekend seminars, an innovation developed by the College of Continuing Education for programs delivered under military contract. Many of OU-Tulsa's courses are taught using this format, which tends to fit

“The whole idea is to be tightly linked with the community.”

working adults’ schedules better than the traditional shorter, more frequent sessions.

“I was initially skeptical,” says William Ray, Tulsa Graduate School dean. “In some ways, though, it is more successful than the other way. A professor can actually immerse the class in the material.”

This flexibility is crucial to OU-Tulsa’s success. With state budgets tight, the University must find ways to get the most for its money while meeting the needs of the community.

“We need to do things that make sense for Tulsa,” says Ray. “We have a student body that’s place-bound. . . . We’re probably not going to offer something like medieval French literature.”

Levit sees the support from academic administration and leadership in Norman and Oklahoma City as absolutely critical for the Tulsa campus. “Without the constant help of Norman Provost Nancy Mergler and OUHSC Provost Joseph Ferretti,” he says, “we could not have come this far.”

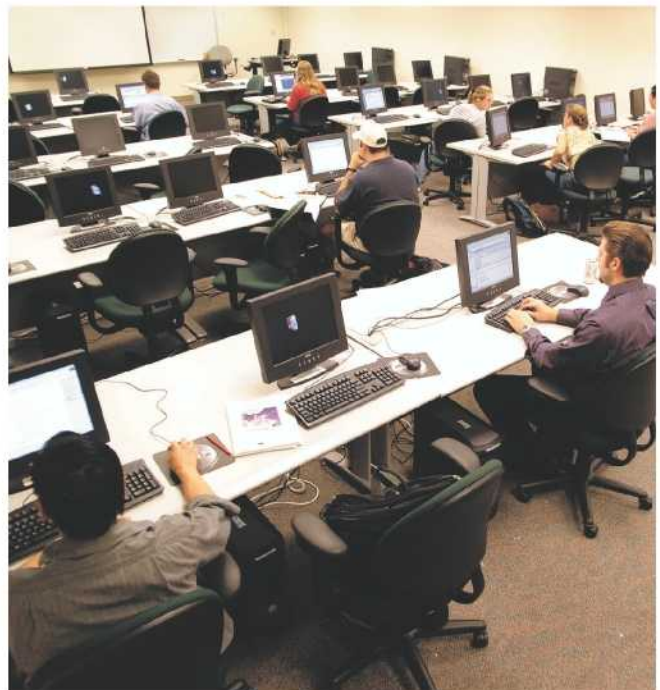
Because the campus is relatively small yet includes a broad range of disciplines, officials believe OU-Tulsa is ripe for innovative research. Last year, for instance, a \$900,000 “interoperability” laboratory was opened to create compatibility



ABOVE: The physical therapy program has proven a popular choice for Tulsa area residents. Here assistant professor Vince Lepak works with students in the Rehabilitation Class Laboratory. **BELOW:** When reopened in fall 2002, the Schusterman Center Computer Laboratory had doubled in size, available to all OU-Tulsa students but also used for library science classes.



ABOVE: OU-Tulsa graduate students approaching statistics courses with near-universal dread have an ally in their personable dean, William Ray, whose lively lectures are a sure antidote for the fear factor.





OU-Tulsa President Ken Levit's favorite time of the week is spent with his class on "Terrorism and Civil Liberties," where he brings to human relations graduate students his experience as an attorney and former special counsel to the director of the CIA in Washington, D.C.

between different types and makes of telecommunications equipment and software.

Multi-faceted faculty members also are becoming more common.

"One of our new hires in social work is also an occupational therapist," says Ray. "An electrical engineering professor is collaborating with someone in obstetrics."

Similarly, its new dean, Dr. Gerard Clancy, sees great potential in the OU-Tulsa College of Medicine.

"After 30 years of building a foundation, this medical school is moving to the next level," Clancy says.

Clancy foresees opportunities in genetics, bio-ethics and the new field of bio-informatics—the sorting and analyzing of biological and health-related data.

At its heart, however, the OU-Tulsa College of Medicine remains one of the nation's premier community-based medical schools. Formed from necessity 30 years ago, the college is now in the vanguard of medical education. In fact, it recently started "mini med school," seminars to help lay citizens understand medicine. Each session is limited to 150, and all have had waiting lists of 70 or more.

"Community-based medicine is gaining ground," says Clancy. "Two new medical schools were started this year, and both are community-based."

Community-based might describe OU-Tulsa as a whole. All universities try to maintain cordial relations with their neighbors, but for OU-Tulsa, that is essential. Most of its students live and work in the immediate area. Research and academic programming rely heavily on relationships with business and industry.

"The whole idea is to be tightly linked with the community," says Levit. "We want to develop programs that are both excellent and relevant to Tulsa. That is a tremendous opportunity for OU."

Charles Schusterman would be pleased. When he died on December 30, 2000, *The Tulsa World* said, "Literally every life in the Tulsa community has been somehow touched by the Charles and Lynn Schusterman Family Foundation's gifts."

Charles Schusterman's final major gift undoubtedly will touch the most of all.



OU-Tulsa President

KENNETH J. LEVIT

President of the University of Oklahoma-Tulsa since September 1, 2001, native Tulsan Kenneth J. Levit also serves OU as senior vice president. Levit is a graduate of Brown University and Yale Law School and was the special counsel to the director of the CIA before returning to Tulsa to practice law. Levit served as press secretary and foreign policy advisor to OU President David Boren during the latter's tenure in the U.S. Senate. Currently Levit is a term member of the Council on Foreign Relations and is chair of the Homeland Security Task Force for the state of Oklahoma.