



# postscript. Opening the Front Door

The University of Oklahoma prides itself on being a welcoming place, not just for college-shopping high schoolers and their parents, but also for groups ranging from elementary children to senior citizens, garden clubs to returning alumni. Trailblazer signs encourage the interested or merely curious to exit off I-35, drive east on Main, and hang a right on University Boulevard to Boyd Street. There, on the southeast corner of Parrington Oval, just beyond the Class of 1915 Arch sits Jacobson Hall—the Visitor Center.

Year after year well over 100,000 campus guests check in with the accommodating center greeters, chief among them Leslie Baumert, who became the Jacobson Hall facility's first director in 1996, during the building's renovation.

Jacobson's OU life began in 1920 as the New Library, a gleaming little jewel of a building, Gothic styled with a curved stairway, carved railings and solid oak woodwork. As a library, it was inadequate from the beginning, replaced in 1929 by Bizzell Memorial Library. The New Library became the art museum, later named for its director, Oscar B. Jacobson; then as its luster dimmed, the facility served a number of class and office functions.

When David Boren came as president in late 1994, he and the first lady, Molly Shi Boren, first reclaimed University House, the historic presidential home, at Boyd and University, which they rechristened Boyd House. Then they turned their renovator's eye across the intersection to Jacobson. The Borens wanted this classic structure to be the University's front door, a full-service Visitor Center

that could meet tourism needs for OU, the city and even the state.

High School and College Relations, which had operated an information center in University House for many years,

campus map, a children's tour guide. OU was one of the first universities in the country to offer a self-guided audio tour on CD players checked out from the Visitor Center. Also available were informational publications from the City of Norman and the State Department of Tourism.

Molly Boren's campus beautification project soon made the University even more of a destination point for tourists. Garden clubbers came to gaze at the landscaping and flowers; grade school kids wanted to see the stadium, Lloyd Noble Center and the natural history museum, while their parents could visit the art museum; alumni yearned to visit old haunts and marvel at additions to the campus.

Baumert always made use of OU students, developing a core of knowledgeable tour guides. Today the historic campus guide has been replaced by a magazine-format Visitor Guide, entirely produced by students, containing features on academics, athletics, student organizations and campus personalities, maps and lists of venues, their hours and any costs involved. The ever-changing University, its new facilities and programs coming on-line at a rapid pace over the past decade, presents the center with its principal problem—keeping its information current—but that is a good problem to have.

Change will affect the Visitor Center in another way in fall 2008. Baumert, who has been the presence at the University's front door since it first opened, retired June 30. Little wonder that the process is underway to hire the two people who will be necessary to replace her.

—CJB



Gill Jain

A new presence will greet OU visitors this fall as Leslie Baumert, above, ends more than a decade at the University's "front door."

moved to Jacobson, and Baumert, its director at the time, began the research and organization necessary to offer historic tours of the campus. Within a year, the Visitor Center required her services full-time.

As the center went into specialized tours, specialized publications were required—a historic campus guide, a new