

# OU-Tulsa campus takes shape during Boren years

BY GINNIE GRAHAM

**B**efore David L. Boren became president of the University of Oklahoma, OU had a fairly low profile in Tulsa.

Though OU first put down stakes in the city with its library science program in 1957, few residents knew what the school offered or where it was located. Part of the problem came from classes strewn across Tulsa in different buildings. Programs appeared disconnected and received little to no media attention.

Associate Vice President Leeland Alexander joined OU in 1972 when the Tulsa Medical College was established. He jokes that Tulsans were puzzled about his job.

“They would ask if I drove to Norman every day. I’d say ‘no’ and explain OU had programs in Tulsa,” Alexander says.

“Even though we were here, the only people who knew were the hospitals we worked with. If you asked the average person on the street, they would say OU is in Norman, and the University of Tulsa is here.”

During Boren’s nearly 24-year university presidency, OU’s presence in Tulsa transformed, starting most notably with acquiring 60 acres of valuable midtown real estate to consolidate its programs. Today, what is known as OU-Tulsa boasts of major community contributions with graduate and research programs in the medical field, social work, public administration, urban design, telecommunications engineering, early childhood education and administrative leadership.

OU Physicians’ multi-specialty clinics collaborate with local agencies to address social issues including health disparities and child abuse. The university has

collaborations nationally and with institutions such as Harvard and Georgetown universities.

“David Boren had the vision and ability in his leadership position to make it happen,” Alexander says. “He had the vision for what Tulsa and northeastern Oklahoma meant for the future of the University of Oklahoma.”

## ‘TRULY A BLESSING’

When Boren arrived as university president, Tulsa had a smattering of higher education possibilities.

The most recognizable were private schools — the University of Tulsa, which has been operating since 1907, and faith-based Oral Roberts University, founded in 1963 by its famed namesake televangelist.

In public offerings, residents had the two-year Tulsa Community College and a consortium called the University Center at Tulsa, or UCAT, made up of OU, Oklahoma State University, Langston University and Northeastern State University. UCAT changed its name to Rogers State University, then Oklahoma State University-Tulsa.

In 1972, the Legislature created the Tulsa Medical College, a branch of the OU College of Medicine, for third- and fourth-year students. In 1980, Leeland Alexander and an associate vice president, David Walters, who later became governor, secured the purchase of the former American Christian College at 28th Street and Sheridan Road. By the late ’90s, the medical school was handling twice the amount of intended patients, and UCAT had rearranged academic priorities, leaving OU programs without a home.

President Boren decided the time had come to consolidate

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OU-Tulsa's Tandy Education Center, headquarters of the Social Simulation Program.



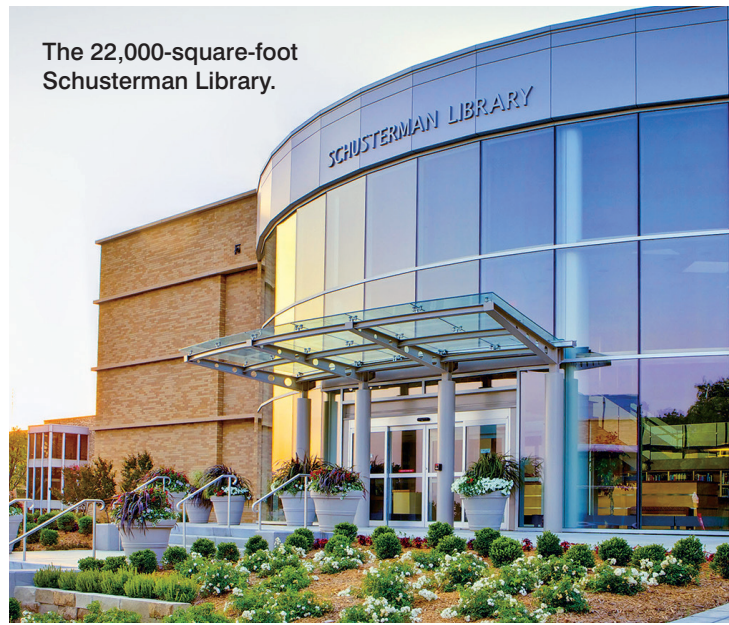
The Wayman Tisdale Specialty Health Center in north Tulsa.



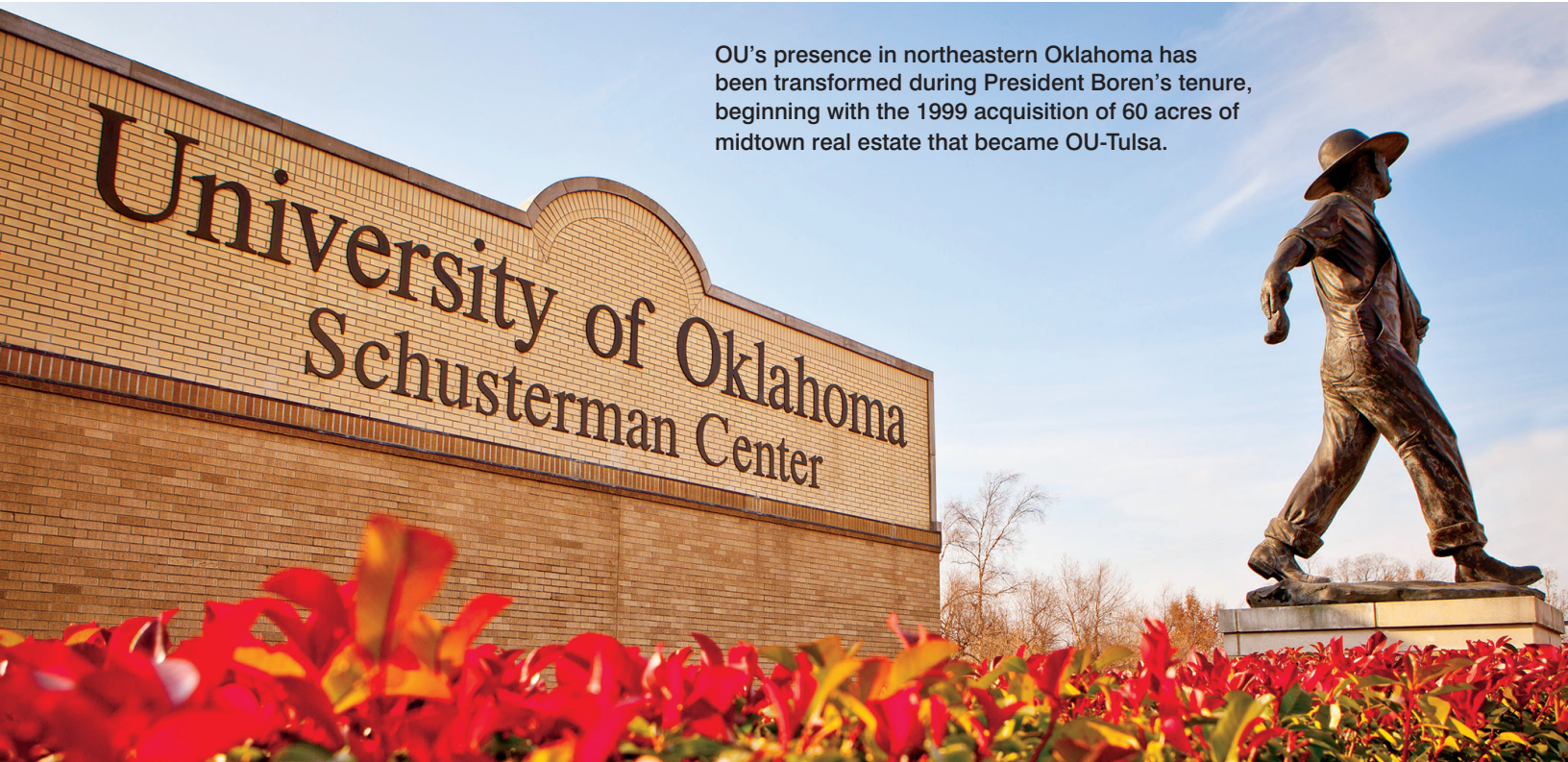
The Schusterman Clinic, established in 2007.



The 22,000-square-foot Schusterman Library.



OU's presence in northeastern Oklahoma has been transformed during President Boren's tenure, beginning with the 1999 acquisition of 60 acres of midtown real estate that became OU-Tulsa.



## *“David Boren is a legend and his impact in Tulsa is immeasurable.”*

OU-Tulsa programs. During the two previous decades, OU had slowly acquired 40 acres around the medical school, but it would cost about \$100 million to turn it into a functioning university. Then the unexpected happened.

Land owned by BP Amoco Oil Co. near 41st Street and Yale Avenue was put up for sale. The value was at \$54 million, but the company was working on a short deadline.

Though initially a few dozen institutions were interested, BP Amoco wanted the property to benefit the community. Boren argued that OU was poised as the best bet due to its standing as a public university. Within a 70-day window, OU negotiated a \$24 million purchase. Still, funding wasn't readily available. Without time for a capital campaign or the passage of bonds, Boren worked out an arrangement with the OU Foundation to borrow the money.

“President Boren saw what this would mean for the future of the university,” Alexander says.

Once OU announced it was buying the property, Charles and Lynn Schusterman wanted to lend a hand. The couple was known as generous philanthropists in areas of interfaith, Jewish, education and poverty causes.

As an OU graduate and founder of Tulsa's Samson Investment Co., Charles was looking for a way to give back to his alma mater and hometown. He called Boren with an offer of \$10 million.

Boren refers to that call as “the only gift he didn't solicit.”

After the closing, BP Amoco donated all its furnishings, computers and equipment — a value of \$9 million, which included an electron microscope.

“The secret to the transaction was David Boren,” Alexander says. “He made the decision to buy the campus, he made the decision to pay \$24 million and he had the relationship with Charles and Lynn Schusterman. He made sure everything happened quickly.”

The campus was named the OU-Tulsa Schusterman Center, and the first occupants — the College of Medicine-Tulsa, College of Pharmacy and College of Education — started classes in 2000. In 2002, all OU programs were moved to the Schusterman Center, marking the first time every Tulsa class was under one roof.

### **COMMUNITY SERVICE ‘UNIFYING THEME’**

With the campus secured, focus turned to bolstering academic and community investment.

In response to swelling numbers of medically uninsured, Tulsa's first Bedlam clinic opened in 2003 with 100 people waiting in line. The clinics are staffed by volunteer physicians and medical students. When the physician assistant program was added in 2008, those students were

incorporated into clinic operations.

Also in 2003, Tulsa voters approved a citywide tax package called Vision 2025 that included a \$35 million OU-Tulsa medical clinic to increase outpatient visits by 25 percent. The Schustersmans made another \$10 million gift to build a library and learning center to complement the clinic, which now bears their name.

When the Schusterman Clinic opened in 2007, OU-Tulsa announced plans for the Wayman Tisdale Specialty Health Center in north Tulsa. The Tisdale clinic, named for Tulsa native and star of OU and NBA basketball, was founded as a specialty-care clinic to increase access to specialists in north Tulsa and improve health disparities among residents.

In 2008, the George Kaiser Family Foundation announced a \$50 million gift — then the largest single donation given to OU — to improve the health of Oklahomans through community-based medicine. With it, the school changed its focus and name to the School of Community Medicine.

The following year, a partnership with the University of Tulsa was formalized, creating a four-year medical school at OU-Tulsa, which is a joint effort between OU and TU.

Also with support from Tulsa philanthropist George Kaiser, early childhood education programs grew to include a nationally recognized research component and administrative leadership degrees that attract public educators.


OU's social work program trains front-line workers for direct-service agencies, a master's in public administration degree is filled with public and nonprofit workers, and urban design students tackle community issues such as neighborhood walkability and downtown revitalization.

“The unifying theme of this campus is community service,” says OU-Tulsa President Dr. John Schumann.

Schumann is the fourth president of OU-Tulsa, starting in 2015 as interim for a year. The first was Ken Lackey in 1999, followed by Ken Levit in 2001, then Dr. Gerard Clancy in 2006.

The future at OU-Tulsa includes goals of expanding master's degrees, locating a community social service provider on campus and beautifying and expanding the campus with wellness in mind.

“David Boren is a legend and his impact in Tulsa is immeasurable,” Schumann says. “He has been a visionary in terms of academic excellence, service excellence, citizenship, speaking from the heart in creating a family atmosphere and celebrating the highest values in diversity and inclusion.

“He has turned OU into the flagship university it is and created a legacy of excellence in always reaching for the top.” 

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*Ginnie Graham is a reporter for the Tulsa World.*