



## Michael Henthorne Oral History Interview, August 29, 2014

### **Title**

“The Memorial Union: Past, Present and Future”

### **Date**

August 29, 2014

### **Location**

Memorial Union, Oregon State University.

### **Summary**

In the interview, Henthorne discusses his upbringing in Kansas, his education at Kansas State Teachers College, and the roots of his interest in working in student unions. From there he recounts his first professional work at Boise State University and his decision to move to Oregon State in 1987.

The bulk of the session is devoted to Henthorne's years as an administrator at OSU's Memorial Union (MU). In this, Henthorne notes the relatively lackluster status of the Memorial Union building and programs at the time of his arrival, and the steps that were taken to improve, in particular, the building's physical infrastructure. Henthorne also describes the many ways in which MU programming interacts with the student body on a daily basis and reflects on the ways in which the MU continues to serve as a working memorial to those members of the Oregon State community who have been lost at war.

An additional major point of discussion is the back story behind the conceptualization, funding and construction of the Student Experience Center (SEC), located just east of the Memorial Union. The interview concludes with Henthorne's thoughts on the future impact of the SEC, the potential for expansion of MU programming, and the magnitude of change that he has seen over nearly three decades at OSU.

### **Interviewee**

Michael Henthorne

### **Interviewer**

Mike Dicianna

### **Website**

<http://scarc.library.oregonstate.edu/oh150/henthorne/>

## Transcript

**Mike Dicianna:** Okay, today is August 29th, 2014, and we're at the OSU Memorial Union in Corvallis, Oregon, to interview Michael Henthorne, Executive Director of the Memorial Union and Educational Services. My name is Mike Dicianna, oral historian with the Special Collections and Archive Research Center. We're visiting today with Michael for the OSU Sesquicentennial Oral History Project, the OH 150. Mike, you've had an important role as the keeper of the Memorial Union's rich history, leading and overseeing its operations presently, and shepherding it into the future as OSU grows and expands. You are the MU. Your story of almost 30 years of service to this institution is very important to this project. Anyway, one of the things that I always like to start with is kind of a short biographical sketch of folks.

**Michael Henthorne:** Mm-hm.

**MD:** Like, where were you born, your early years, early education?

**MH:** Well, I'm a Kansas kid. I was born in mostly a German-speaking farming community right on the Nebraska border. I went to a one-room school house. I was one of two people in my grade, and about a third of the people who went to that school were my brothers and sisters. So, that's about how big the school was. My parents leased an 80-acre wheat, and corn, and milo operation, and ran a few head of cattle. And we lived on that farm until I was in the 6th grade, and then we moved into a small community of about 5,000 people. My family left farming at that point. So, my parents were very big on education, encouraged all of their children to go to college, and I think there are about twelve degrees spread among the seven of us.

**MD:** Yeah, I see that your alma mater is Emporia State University in Kansas?

**MH:** Yeah.

**MD:** Fill us a little bit in on your educational background. I understand you're the class of 1975?

**MH:** Mm-hm. So, it was not Emporia State University when I was there; it was called Kansas State Teachers College. And it has a profile, although it's a little bit larger, similar to Western Oregon University, in that it really was the normal school when it was founded. It's a very sort of industrial community, Emporia, Kansas. And it was a great place to go to school. It's mostly known for William Allan White, who was a famous journalist. And it's also number one in library science.

**MD:** Yes, it is.

**MH:** For teaching degrees in library science fields. It has a number of high quality academic programs, and at that time the College Student Services program was the one that caught my interest, because I came through student leadership roles. I was elected as a class representative my freshman and sophomore years, on the activities counsel, and then my junior year I served as vice president, and my senior year as president, of the Union Activities Counsel. And it really sort of locked me in on wanting to do college unions as a profession, so I entered the master's program there and served as an advisor to the Union Activities Board while a graduate student.

The graduate program had a practice of sending out a list of all of their graduates on a national list, and my name got picked up, and my background and profile, by Boise State University. And so I got an invitation to apply for an opening there, and I did. My wife had originally lived in Salt Lake City, and grew up there until she was in high school, and she badly wanted to return to a mountainous region of the country. Kansas was not at all her cup of tea.

**MD:** [Laughs]

**MH:** In the years when we were dating we spent most of our time in Colorado, skiing and backpacking [0:05:00], and enjoying Colorado, so Colorado was a possibility, but Boise was the one who offered me a job. So I spent my first eleven years as a professional at Boise State University, as assistant director of the union there.

**MD:** Yeah, I also see that Emporia State's Student Union has got the distinction of being the first student union west of the Mississippi.

**MH:** Yeah.

**MD:** I mean, of course we're the first one on the West Coast, here at OSU.

**MH:** Right, right, yeah.

**MD:** But were you aware of this history, and how as that affected—

**MH:** Yeah.

**MD:** —this whole idea of these iconic institutions?

**MH:** Well, yes, I was aware of it. I was very close to several of the union directors, and had a chance to work on the International Association of College Unions Conference when it came to Kansas City, as an undergraduate. So I had a lot of exposure to the history and the importance, and the role of the college union, and I dearly love the older parts of that building. Essentially, the oldest part, the original core of the Union, is a tower of offices and lounges, and right behind that is the Colonial Ballroom, and that ballroom is very ornate, has recently been completely restored. And it was one of my favorite parts of the building. Even though it had been added onto several times and new parts of the building were also very highly used, I had an affinity for the old part of the building, and always wanted to see it fully restored.

**MD:** That's great that they've done that, because it was built in 1924, so that is very early for a memorial union.

**MH:** Yeah.

**MD:** So, let's talk a little bit about your career at Boise State. I mean, that student union appears to be fairly modern-looking on the website, when I was doing some research on you.

**MH:** Yeah.

**MD:** What's the history of that facility, and what were your functions there?

**MH:** Well, Boise State was originally a junior college, and gained four-year status only in the early '60s. And it was about that time that the Student Union was built. It did not have a campus dining operation as part of its residence halls, and so the campus dining occurred in the Student Union.

**MD:** Oh, wow.

**MH:** Which really became its major source of traffic, because it's a commuter institution, and attracting the students there for their dining hall really gave it that sort of sense of campus center that sometimes I think urban institutions struggle for. So as I was getting ready to leave that institution, it was getting ready to expand for the first of what is now four additions to that building. We managed a special events center, which is a theatrical and lecture hall facility next door, that has now been joined with the Union as part of the physical facility. They built between the two, and added them onto each other.

But it was a great place to learn, because we got involved in a lot of stuff. We did all of the fundraising for the Morrison Center for the Performing Arts. My supervisor at the time chaired the Morrison Center Committee for Velma Morrison, and so I was deeply involved for about five years for raising money for the Morrison Center. It's a premier facility in the arts world, much like the Hult Center in Eugene.

**MD:** Well, that's a great way to prepare for such a position here at the Memorial Union. You came here to OSU in 1987 as the director of operations for the MU. Basically, what brought you to Oregon, and how was the transition from Bronco to Beaver?

**MH:** Yeah. Well, my children joked that they were so in love with Boise that all the way here from Boise in the car, all they talked about was when they graduated high school, they were going back to be Broncos. Well, all of them turned out to be Beavers, so they quickly forgot. [0:10:00] But we had a great affinity for Boise State. We watched Boise State win the national championship in football while we were there, and we had great experiences, and we learned to love the back country.

But my wife and I took our two sons, of three that we have now, who were born in Idaho, on vacation to the Oregon coast. And we vacationed in Newport, and on the drive back I told my wife that I wanted to stop and check out Oregon State, that I had heard a lot of good things about it, and had met several people here. So we came and walked through the campus and looked at the union, and when we got back in the van to go back to Boise, I said to her, "If they ever have a job open, I'm going to apply." So we went back to Boise, and shortly after our return there, my best friend and my running partner dropped dead of a heart attack. And I was so staggered awake by his early death—he died at 34—it sort of convinced me that you have to take opportunities as they come along. You never know how long you're going to live.

And so just a few weeks after this, the announcement of the director of operations at Oregon State was circulated. I saw it; I remembered what I had told my wife, and even though we had just built a custom home and thought of it as the place where we would raise our family, she said, "The house can't keep us here. If you're ready to go, let's go." And so I applied, and fortunately I got that job. And I moved here first and lived in Hawley Hall. It was at that point closed down as a residence hall, and so the resident director's apartment was empty, and the university allowed me to live there while my family was still in Boise. And I started my job literally living just a block away from the Union.

**MD:** So what was life like on the OSU campus during the late 1980s when you first started, and how did you see the MU as part of that?

**MH:** Well, frankly, the MU was quite dated, and not much had happened since the early '70s when some major structural change had occurred here. But for the remainder of the building, other than what had been done in the '70s, the building was stuck in about 1959–60. It really, economically speaking, was living on a shoestring. There were not a lot of reserve funds to do major projects. The system of allocating major improvement funding was limited to one shared fund that all the state institution facilities operated out of, including recreation facilities, and student health facilities, and union facilities. So the chances of getting much improvement money was somewhat limited.

So I knew that what really was going to be needed was a strategy to self-fund, and time well the requests going into the combined fund, in order to start improving and updating this building. When I first came here, there literally were no personal computers on any desks. The secretaries in the organization were all typing on IBM Selectric typewriters. The very first computer actually landed on my desk because I was directing the business operation and I needed to see the accounting. That was the only thing being kept on the one computer system that we had brought into the building.

**MD:** Probably filled it up, yeah.

**MH:** If those of you who are listening to this recognize the phrase IBM System 36, it is an early version of what would later be called a server. This was a master computer where all of the data was kept, and then all of the PCs were daisy-chained together. And if anyone bumped their desk or the plug wiggled loose, it would knock everyone else in the daisy chain off. So loss of productivity was frequent in those days. [0:15:00] Our only source of programming was a graduate student who was getting a degree in computer science, and he was the mastermind behind our early computing power.

**MD:** [Laughs] So like I say, you were involved with many of these changes that happened during the '90s and up to today.

**MH:** Right.

**MD:** What was kind of the progression of reclaiming this building for use in the current times?

**MH:** Yeah. Well, I have always been highly committed to inclusion, and equity, and social justice issues. Those have always been very important to me. And the one thing I really felt strongly was that the building did not represent all students, either in its art collection, or in the ways in which the building was furnished, or photographs, or just the whole history of OSU that was showing on the walls here. The ways in which people perceived the building was not an inclusive experience, other than the hall of flags which hangs in the concourse, which is an international expression.

So one of the very first things that I did about four years into the job was I began a series of meeting room renovations that were themed around the four major identity groups on campus, who are US identities that are underrepresented. Those would be African American, Native American, Chicano-Latino, and Asian-Pacific Islander. And so we began a series of taking the four large corner rooms and redoing them in the expression of the art and design principles associated with those cultures. Those were really some of the very earliest efforts to renovate.

**MD:** Yeah, I didn't realize that all of that—because I have been in those rooms so many times—had that much of a history, that it went back that far. That's really fascinating. So, in 1997, you actually became the executive director—

**MH:** Yeah.

**MD:** —of the Memorial Union. So, how did this change your daily life, and what were your new duties as far as being the grand poobah?

**MH:** Well, I actually became interim director in 1994, and so I had served for a number of years in a sort of place-holding capacity between a director who departed the institution, and a plan for how the organization would restructure itself. And so during those interim years the—at that time, the newly arrived vice provost of student affairs gave the organization the ability to really consider its future, and how leadership would occur. I came here working for an assistant vice president. That was the title that was in place for George Stevens, and George operated then with three assistants—I'm sorry, three directors and one assistant director. And so really, the director of operations title just became the executive director of the Union, and the assistant vice president position was abolished. That was the formal change.

And of course, what it really meant was that I had an opportunity to really exact a much larger frame of renovation plans, and so in 1994 we undertook the renovation of the commons. We really reinvented the entire food system that was in place here. Prior to 1994, the commons was a traditional cafeteria-style food outlet where you walked past lines of sneeze guard, and had a dip of this and a dip of that put on a plate for you.

**MD:** By lunch ladies.

**MH:** Yes. And there were some high quality items served in there, but overall it really was quite dated. It was really a 1950s and '60s model of food service. It had no warmth to it whatsoever. It was quite dated and very inflexible. Everything was built on concrete curbs poured about four inches off the floor [0:20:02], so you could not reconfigure anything. And so all of that had to come out. And what we really envisioned at that point was a transition to a student-based food system, and using students as our labor force.

And through some negotiations with housing and dining, and the university Human Relations, we developed a plan of a management-only and student workforce retail organization. So every unit, or every two units, would have a manager, and all of the employees, all of the cooks, all of the servers, all of the baristas, would be student employees. Our commitment was to students, because we are student-funded, and what we wanted to do with our enterprise and our facility is generate student employment. And we grew the number of student employees that were in our food system from about 20 to over 250.

**MD:** Now, the infrastructure of the building—this is an iconic building. On college campuses all up and down the west coast it was highly touted in 1928–29. The guts, the bones of the Memorial Union—have they remained largely unchanged, other than the wings that were put on in the late '60s and early '70s?

**MH:** Yeah, I'm not sure that the bones are the best, because to me bones are what you don't see. And actually what we're in love with is what you do see.

**MD:** Yes.

**MH:** And so what we're in love with are the finishes, and the architectural attention to detail, the fireplaces, the plasterwork, the wood moldings, the light fixtures, the flooring, the arches and the details that were put in. The actual bones of the building are quite bad, and by that I mean what you don't see in the walls, the wiring, the plumbing, the HVAC systems, how the air moves through the building—those were really incredibly bad and quite out of compliance with code. So we really were trying to accomplish a number of things: improve the infrastructure and systems in the building, and modernize them, without altering the visible surfaces that we're in love with. So preserving the surface, and the skin, and the architectural elements was very important.

**MD:** Yeah, because one of the things I noticed that the college, the Memorial Union has changed with the times. An example that I became personally involved with was the Nontraditional Students Lounge.

**MH:** Right.

**MD:** When I came here as a student as, just the past couple of years, I spent many, many hours up in that lounge, and that's kind of a new thing.

**MH:** Yeah.

**MD:** And other functions like that seem to kind of fit in with the original.

**MH:** Well, there are a number of ways in which the building needed to respect its history, but begin to function in the modern world. Examples of that would be the exterior lighting of the face of the building. We took that on in 1996 and redid it. The original incandescent lighting was very energy inefficient. It pushed a lot of foot-candles up against the face of the building, but it really was what I would call monument lighting, where you're just flooding the face of this structure with light at night, so it calls you from a great distance, but at a great cost of operation. And so we actually moved to backlighting, and so backlighting creates a subtle glow of the surfaces of the building with a much more energy efficient style of lamp, and we still accomplish the same thing. The building calls to you at night when it's lit, but we were probably spending a fourth the amount of electricity—[0:25:02]

**MD:** To do it.

**MH:** —when we were pushing all those foot candles from dated fixtures. Other examples were we've added wireless internet all throughout the building, and we tried to do those things without disturbing the architectural and historic features. We've added fiber optics to our meeting rooms, so we have high-speed data services, and the ability to import and export signal to the telecommunications networks around campus. All of those things had to be done, but not in such a way that we disturb the historic character.

**MD:** Yeah, because we are on the National Historic Register.

**MH:** We are. That only affects the exterior of the building, but we personally carry it to the interior of the building, and we make all of our choices, fabric choices, flooring choices, lighting choices, based on trying to keep the building in its character, while still representing a 21st century student body.

**MD:** Yeah. So now as a high level, distinguished decision-maker with the MU, do you still have a chance to get involved with the day-to-day life of this building in its place on campus?

**MH:** Oh, yeah. The degree to which I've been able to build relationships with my department heads allows me to offer ideas without them maybe expecting that they need to adopt it lock, stock, and barrel. We can just speculate about what it might be like, what might the possibilities be if we only did X or Y or Z? And they know that they can show me information, or offer altering perspectives, and not feel that I'm forcing a solution on them. So, yeah, I can talk about food product, or menu choice, or pricing, or custodial cleaning techniques, or program activities with any of my staff, and engage in what is basically our daily operation.

**MD:** Well, and how about interaction with just the students today? I mean, Major Allworth would basically just be here, and so many of the students and alumni that I've spoken with have spoken highly of him, and his relationship to them. Do you still have a relationship with the general students?

**MH:** Oh, yeah. The ways in which we engage with general students these days are a multitude. I do a lot of workshops. I teach graduate courses, or have taught in the CSSA program. I work with a student-only board of directors. I engage with student leaders in all sorts of committees and projects, and get to know quite a number of the student employees, which we now have 750 student employees in our organization. So, doing orientation work with them, and checking in on them, and I've traveled with some of them to help them present papers and workshops at regional and national conferences. Yeah, I have great student relationships.

**MD:** Some things never change. That's one of the things that I was interested in is, the overall scope of the Memorial Union is more than just food and a place for students to come.

**MH:** Right.

**MD:** I mean, the *Barometer*.

**MH:** Yeah.

**MD:** And Student Government, and actually we'll talk later about the new building next door, but.

**MH:** Right.

**MD:** So there's much more to the Memorial Union than just building.

**MH:** Yeah, we try to be very clear that the Memorial Union Organization is different than the Memorial Union Building. The Memorial Union Building is a facility in the inventory of buildings that we manage or support. The Memorial Union Organization is much, much larger, and actually next year I think we will be up to fourteen buildings that we are supporting or operating. [0:30:00]

**MD:** Really?

**MH:** And we probably have close to 28 program areas.

**MD:** And that's all under your bailiwick, in one form or another?

**MH:** Yeah, through myself or through subsequent levels of leadership, all of that happens.

**MD:** Yeah, because many of the alumni that I've talked to have talked about their relationship to the MU, in that, be it the *Barometer*, or Andy Landforce having an office where the meeting room is on the west end now. Well, let's actually talk a little bit about—let's explore the Memorial Union. We talked a little bit about yesterday, about today, and also tomorrow. One of the things I've always wondered about is the original dedication of this structure was a memorial to the Oregon Agricultural College men who gave their lives in both the Spanish-American War and World War I.

**MH:** Right.

**MD:** And then later it became a continuing memorial to the losses in World War II.

**MH:** Yeah.

**MD:** How do you feel that the term Memorial in the MU name resonates today, and how has that changed over the past 50 years?

**MH:** Well, I think actually students resonate with it quite a lot. We have rededicated the building within the last ten years. We've added additional recognition of students lost in Iraq and Afghanistan. We also rededicated the building to all those who have served, not just those who have lost their life. We have established a veterans' lounge here in the building, and will continue to have that as a facility even after all of the renovations are done.

**MD:** I spent many hours studying in there.

**MH:** Yeah. And so we have a number of events and activities that still keep us engaged with the active ROTC elements on campus. The Pass and Review occurs on the Quad every year. There are still ROTC dances and balls that occur down in the ballroom, much as they have for the last 80-plus years. We hold recognition events at Veterans Day out on the steps, and we have now a new program that we have established in the last couple of years of offering carnations to the public to come place in front of the war memorial, and have a moment of recognition or remembrance.

**MD:** Yeah, so the tradition, the original tradition of this building being a memorial has lived on, which means so very much to this college and its original, the original intent of the building.

**MH:** Yeah. Yeah.

**MD:** Because there's so much history within the walls of this building, and you are the steward now of this story. But now, does that affect your decisions and your leadership, with the legacy of Major Allworth as an example, your feelings about this part of your position, and how important is the history?

**MH:** Mm-hm. Well, I certainly want people to know the history. I don't think we have to be totally encumbered by it, or limit our future as a result of our history, but we have to acknowledge it, and know that when you're nearly a 90-year-old facility and you represent well over 100 years of program presence on campus, history has got to be part of who you are. And we'll never, I think, turn our back on that. It will always be part of the conversation, and part of the considerations as we make programmatic and facility changes. Having history is actually a blessing. Knowing where you came from, why you were founded, how you came about, that students raised the money, along with alumni and friends of the university, to pay this building off in cash, and it had no bond indebtedness—those are amazing legacy pieces.

**MD:** Yeah, because the Major Allworth room upstairs and to the west here is a prime example of that.

**MH:** Right.

**MD:** Of recognizing one of the fixtures of this institution for so many years.

**MH:** Absolutely, yeah. [0:35:00] I was blessed to know his wife Peggy. When I first came here, Peggy was, of course, still alive, and George Stevens, who was the assistant vice president I came here to work for always wanted to make sure that she got an invitation to come to receptions and dinners. He would assign me to go pick her up and bring her to the MU and be her escort, and then get her home. And so I was able to pick up a lot of stories from Peggy. In fact, one of my favorite books is the book that her sister wrote, called *The Farm: Treasures Remembered*, and it's about the Allworth farm which was just outside of town, and really showed the private life of the major, and Peggy, and their family. I mean, it's a lovely book.

**MD:** I'll have to definitely spend some time with that. Well, now, today's MU is really a living part of OSU. Now, how do you feel today's students utilize the services here in comparison to when you started, and also in comparison with what this facility was in the '30s and the '50s? I've got stories after stories from these oral history interviews of how integral the Memorial Union was to their lives on campus. Do you feel that's still the same?

**MH:** I do, however, it's not the only place that offers some of these comforts. A number of years ago I approached the architect of the university, who was here at that time, and they had just built the Ag Life Science Building. And I said to him, "Shame on you. This is a building that has no core; it has no sense of welcome." You literally walk in the front door, and immediately are met with stairs. And I understand that the inventory of space was crucial at the time, but every building needs a sense of community. It needs a central lobby, it needs an atrium; it needs some place where people see each other interact and connect.

And so we built our food system to be distributed, so we are operating in seven or eight buildings around campus. We're building up in the Austin College of Business Building; we're opening up in the new classroom building; we're in Kelley Engineering; we're in the library; we're in Dixon Recreation. We know that these little micro-community places are essentially very important to making that building come alive. And so there are many places where community can be performed and enacted. We think we're the master place where that happens on campus, and we'll always be. Our daily occupancy count of people entering and exiting the building is about 13,000 people a day. And there's no facility on campus that will ever touch that high of a level of use. And we're blessed because we sit in the dead center of the institution. We are the crossroads north, south, east and west, and all ways diagonal of all of the foot traffic on campus.

**MD:** Which was its original plan.

**MH:** Yes.

**MD:** And it made it what it is today.

**MH:** Yeah.



**MD:** There's a lot of changes going around campus this summer here of 2014. The MU has been a major part of this transformation—new meeting facilities and the Student Experience Center next door. How about some updates and your reflections on all of this change?

**MH:** Well, it took us almost ten years to bring these changes about. We began looking towards the future with a group of student leaders who were here in 2004-2005. President Risser was the president at the time. He was really asking questions about the university's future. And it got the student leaders to thinking, "What about our future? What about our facility's future? Where do those facilities need to go down the road?"

And we knew at that time that Snell Hall, MU East, really was a re-adapted residence hall building, and it had served its purpose in the time from the 1970s, when we acquired it from housing and renovated it [0:40:00], and it was not going to be successful being adapted to the future. So we began looking at what are the options. One of the options was, what if everybody crowded back into the Union? Well, it's probably not realistic. We had outgrown it in the '70s, and the number of programs, and the amount of office space that we require, and the amount of meeting and event space would never have allowed the building to occupy everyone. Well, what about expanding it? Well, the footprint here is protected as a National Historic Contributing Building, and expanding outside of that footprint is highly protected. There's really no direction you could grow the building.

So we looked at, well, if there's another building that we could reoccupy, what would it be? We looked at the Plageman Student Health Center. It really wasn't going to be much better than what Snell Hall was; it was going to give us a long corridor of closed doors. So it wasn't much better than Snell, so it wasn't worth spending our money on that. So, the concept of a new building really became the only solution. And we had known that at least two other departments had looked at the pay parking lot outside of the bookstore as a potential building site. Both of those buildings were too large for the footprint of the parking lot, and would not fit.

But the size of facility that we needed to build really was perfectly suited for the land mass that was sitting there. It also triggered the relocation of the bookstore. The bookstore had outgrown its space, and we originally looked at moving the bookstore from the east wing into the new building. But giving up the first two floors to the bookstore, really then took the building out of its primary purpose, and students would be relegated to the third, fourth, and fifth floors then. So the bookstore really decided, we need to go do our own thing elsewhere on campus, so they began the plan to build a new store, and found a location in front of the parking garage that I think has worked out rather well. So that left us then with the east wing of the MU, the space in between the new building, and the new building as our project.

And so we initially surveyed students and showed them how much money it would cost to do all of that work, and it was at that time about \$110 per student. And the students said in the survey, "That's too much money." And so we came back and reformed our work group, and worked with the architects. We said, "What can we do for half that amount of money?" And the architects and planners then began working with us with a \$48 figure. And we developed a plan of what we could do for \$48 a student, and we went back to the students with a referendum that asked them if they would support this amount of construction at \$48, versus the original \$110. And they overwhelmingly supported it, 70 percent approval, which is a landslide win.

And we were off to the races at that point. At one point we did suffer a nine-month delay when the legislature did not approve any capital funding requests in the state for one session, and so we had to suspend our planning and take a nine-month break. But we won approval as one of the only projects approved by the legislature in the winter session. And I believe that we won that approval because of a Student Body president named Tonga Hopoi, who went before the committee, the Joint Finance Committee that was doing appropriations for capital construction, and she talked about students understanding the issue of legacy. She used the Memorial Building as her example.

Students raised money for nearly eleven years to fund this. Almost all of those students were graduated and well into their careers by the time the building was actually opened, but nonetheless, they understood that they were leaving a legacy for future students. [0:45:00] And she convinced the committee that that's what the students would be doing in funding the Student Experience Center, is that they would be committing to a legacy for future students' benefit. And the legislature committee approved the project. It was the only thing that came through the session at that time, and we were back on. We finished our planning process, and then the following year closed the parking lot and began the construction.

**MD:** That's due for completion here shortly?

**MH:** It's due for completion in December of 2014. We'll move in over Christmas Break, and occupy the building from that point on.

**MD:** Yeah, so some of the features I noticed, there's going to be KOAC studios and things related to the long history of KOAC on campus.

**MH:** It's not actually KOAC, it's KBVR.

**MD:** Well, yeah.

**MH:** Both TV and FM are on the fourth floor. The media occupies a very important piece of real estate on the fourth floor, tremendous views out the fourth floor, but more than anything else it's state-of-the-art production facilities for our students. When you come off the elevator, you're immediately greeted with two large viewing windows, one into the control room, and the other into the major studio, which is two stories tall, and really will showcase the work that the students are doing on various productions. There's a huge bullpen area for our journalists and writers to work out of. It's phenomenal. The students will be working on a platform of equipment and facility that really is state-of-the-art. We believe that people will be coming here from around the country to see what has been built for our media and our technology that's in the hands of students.

**MD:** Yeah, and all student government, which is kind of spread all over Snell, will be part of the new building.

**MH:** Yeah. We were actually at a dinner with students hosted at President Ray's home, and the subject of the Student Experience Center, which at that point was early in concept, came up. And students said literally to the President, "We want to be in each other's space. We want to be in each other's kitchens, where the thinking, where the planning, where the work is still in its early stages and incomplete. That's how we can influence each other and collaborate, is we have to see each other's activity at the early stages." It gave us, then, the concept that students want low-wall or no-wall work environments.

**MD:** Hm.

**MH:** So the entire SEC is pretty boundary-less. Areas sort of just meld from one to another. Students move through each other's space. Every floor has a kitchen where students can run into each other, start up conversations over perking a cup of coffee, or warming up a leftover in the microwave, or sit on a café table and have a conversation with someone who works in a program other than the one they're a part of. I think that probably is becoming sort of the mixing bowl, if you will, of student programming.

**MD:** I'm really looking forward to the opening of this building. It's going to be just something really special.

**MH:** Yeah. Yeah.

**MD:** One of the things that I have been thinking about over the past couple of days is, in your view, what's the future of the Memorial Union over the, like, the next ten years, and further, what will be the MU when it reaches its centennial on June 1st, 2029?

**MH:** Well, I won't be here for that other than as a guest.

**MD:** You will be back, yeah.

**MH:** But I think the future of the Memorial Union is program growth. The new vice provost of student affairs, Susie Brubaker-Cole, is talking about the scaling-up phase. And a scaling-up phase really is about: we're done building facility. [0:50:00] We accomplished our ten-year dream. We grew 33 percent in event space. All of our program areas received about a fifteen percent average increase in real estate allocation to them. And now it's time to scale up the program, and get deeper into the student body in terms of who's affected, and who's served, and who's participating and engaged with what we offer to the institution. So the next five to ten years is all program growth.

**MD:** Hm.

**MH:** It is all focused on expanding and growing the reach of our student engagement. And we know that student engagement leads to retention, higher degrees of satisfaction with your alma mater, and therefore it translates into loyal alumni. So affinity for alma mater is our goal.

**MD:** Well, that's my goal. I mean, that's what I'm all about. Any more personal reflections about your time here? Any special memories, things that you would like to—little nuggets of the MU?

**MH:** Yeah. Well, I'll tell you one quick story, and it sort of shows the naiveté that I began here with in 1987. I was oriented to my job by Walt Reeder, who was the prior director of operations. And Walt had a CPA degree, and he was most of all an accountant. And when I came into this office, which I have kept all the way through; I did not move to George Stevens' office. When I became the director I stayed where I was at. I was sitting in a desk that Walt had placed right here in front of this window, and during the period he was orienting me to the job, there were just stacks and stacks of paper, and some of them almost two feet high. And he had the ability to literally just reach into the stack and pull out the one sheet that he wanted.

**MD:** [Laughs]

**MH:** He wasn't using file drawers or anything else. They were just stacks. And he literally went through the stacks with me, one by one by one, sheet by sheet by sheet, explained what it was, put it back in the stack. And after about three weeks of orientation, when he was going to be leaving and I would be having the office to myself thereafter, there was one stack left that we had not touched. And he hadn't gotten to it, and I asked him, "So, Walt, what about this stack right here?" And he looked at me with dead earnest, and said, "Don't touch it."

**MD:** [Laughs]

**MH:** So I didn't. For the first year that I was here, I thought there must be something in there that I'm not supposed to see, [laughs] so I left this six-inch stack of paper for a full year before I got brave enough to go through it. And all it was was old copies of communication, and old reports that really had no meaning whatsoever. But I think he hadn't in his own mind decided what it needed to be, what had to happen with it, so don't touch it. It was almost as if he was going to come back someday and decide. [Laughs]

**MD:** [Laughs] You know, really, it's, oh, I'll get to that; I'll get to that!

**MH:** Yeah. But such is the naiveté of a new arrival in 1987. Today I'm proud of the way in which our organization has evolved. I think we have tremendous impact and reach. I think we operate with a great set of principles. We value relationship both with students, with each other, and with the rest of the institution. I think we serve the campus incredibly well. I think we have a premier food operation. It's the envy of a lot of retail-only operations in the country that lose money, and we don't. I think the mix of space that we have serves a wide variety of interests. I think it reflects the diversity of the student body. I'll leave this job proud of the work that has been done here the last 28, 29 years, and I hope people will enjoy it for many years to come.

**MD:** And you'll never really be gone.

**MH:** [Laughs] [0:55:00]

**MD:** Because you're just such a part of this campus, and part of this institution here, that you'll always have a place to come back and have a cup of coffee.

**MH:** Well, from that visit while we were on vacation, almost 30 years ago till now, I could have never imagined this three decade stop-off at Oregon State. It afforded me tremendous opportunity. I've served as the International President of College Unions while here. I've had the opportunity to develop myself in many other ways, and it's been a great ride.

**MD:** Well, you're truly a legacy. It's wonderful to get this view into the MU with you, and so your memories and reflections, and your history here, will be a permanent part of Oregon State University, and soon to be a permanent part of

our oral history project. And so on behalf of the Special Collections and Archives Research Center, we're deeply grateful for your time today.

**MH:** Well, thank you, Mike. [0:56:15]