

Dateline: RIT – The Podcast (June 28, 2007) (Episode 19)

ANNCR: Welcome to Dateline: RIT with Mike Saffran.

HOST: This is a special edition of Dateline: RIT (June 28, 2007)—The Changing of the Guard.

RIT bids farewell on June 30th to 15-year RIT president, Dr. Albert Simone, and welcomes its ninth president, Dr. William Destler.

Stepping down from the office he's held since 1992, Dr. Simone leaves behind a legacy of a larger, more prominent university—one that's still growing in both size and stature. Most recently, the official groundbreaking for RIT's college town project—now known as Park Point at RIT—was held on June 22nd. The \$72 million, 636,000-square-foot mixed-use retail and residential development, under construction at the corner of Jefferson and John roads, is slated to open in 2008. Dr. Simone, what's your vision for college town?

ACTUALITY [ALBERT SIMONE]: College town is a dream that's been long in the making. We have been talking for years about how to make the campus at RIT more of a community—an opportunity for students to really let down their hair and relax after a tough day in the labs, or in exams, or in the classroom, or writing papers, without having to get a taxi, or get a bus, or go on a long ride into the city, but just within walking distance, if you will, to just go to a town, as you might in a campus setting in rural America where there's a town and it's really a college town, it caters to the students, the students "own" the town, in effect, [with] the kind of foods that the students like to eat, the kind of entertainment they wish to enjoy. Also, you have the university in the city environment—and they just go walking around the corner, and again the eateries, the entertainment, the opportunity to just get a change of breeze are there. And college town is that dream. The students can walk from a campus setting to a connected but completely different setting. It would be their town. There would be a square, like every town has a square, and around that square would be places to eat. There'd be a sports bar (for those students that are of age). There'd be an opportunity for students, faculty and staff to mix and to get to know one another in a social setting. There'd be people from the Greater Rochester community driving by, stopping in at their favorite eatery, which would be located there, or their favorite entertainment, and they'd be mixing with the students. It would just be a fun place for students just to relax and get a change of pace. In addition to the entertainment, there'll be living. There'll be some apartments over some of the retail outlets, and students—and faculty and staff—could be living there. So these are some of the thoughts that we've had for a long time. We've already identified a number of outstanding retail outlets from around the country, and around the world really, to come in and open up shop. We expect there to be in excess of 80,000 square feet of retail space for students, faculty and staff, and people from the community, to enjoy. The lead anchor tenant would be a Barnes & Noble, which would have 40,000 square feet of retail space. So we see this as really an exciting opportunity for the campus as a whole.

HOST: Also at the June 22nd groundbreaking ceremony came the announcement that the center of Park Point will feature Simone Square, along with a statue in your likeness, Dr. Simone. Did that come as a surprise, and how do you feel about the honors?

ACTUALITY [SIMONE]: That was a total and complete surprise. I had no idea that it was coming. It came at the end of Paul Wilmot's remarks. So I was listening—it was entertaining, it was good, he was thanking everybody, and then at the end he said, "Oh, by the way, we're going to have this square right in the middle, and it's going to be called Simone Square." He did it in a causal way to catch me off guard, and he totally did. I wasn't quite—I said, "Did I hear that right?" And then he said, "And there's going to be a statue there, too, you know." And I said, "Well, he must be kidding." I talked to him later about the statue. I said, "What's this statue you're talking about?" He said, "Well, something like you gesturing, conveying wisdom to the students." And I said, "Well, if you want to capture me giving wisdom to the students, it's going to be a very tiny statue," I said. But other than that, it was a total and complete surprise, and I'm overwhelmed. It's quite an honor, and the people that deserve it are all the people that have helped make college town come into being and have helped RIT to prosper over these years—so many people that have helped make these wonderful things occur.

HOST: Well, speaking of the myriad wonderful things that have occurred on your watch, Dr. Simone, the list is a long one, to be sure. It includes the Gordon Field House and Activities Center, the new Golisano College building, certainly The Sentinel is on the list, and now the Park Point college town, to name just a few. Among the many projects, does any one stand out in your mind as your most cherished?

ACTUALITY [SIMONE]: I'd have to pick all four because they all represent different things. Golisano College of Computing and Information Sciences represents the academic arm of the university in an area in which we lead the country, and it's one of the major programs in the country offering a bachelor's, master's and Ph.D.-level programs with over 3,000 students. It's just a fantastic academic accomplishment and achievement. But then on the campus spirit side, you have the field house, where faculty, staff and students work out every day. It opens up at 6 in the morning, goes 'til 11 o'clock at night, seven days a week. And you have faculty, staff and students and alumni just there working out—they're on the track, they're in the weight room, they're in the swimming pool, they're talking to one another. In terms of campus spirit, the field house is unmatched. Now you want to talk about art and culture—I mean, RIT is really the blend of art and technology—and you look at the Paley sculpture—70 feet tall, 130 tons of just bronze and steel—and you see the straight lines representing technology, you see the curved lines and sort of something that looks like a music staff that represents art and culture, and the entire edifice, the statue, is in the center of the campus, it protects the campus. I look out every day and see it from my window. And now you come to college town, and that's community building. It's helping to bridge the Rochester community with the RIT campus community. It helps to bridge the faculty, staff and students at RIT in a social setting. They're not lifting weights, and they're not

admiring a statue, and they're not taking courses, they're breaking bread together, or they're laughing together at some entertainment, or they're shopping, shoulder-to-shoulder. So each of these four items—the four constructions that you mentioned—are number one, each in their own realm.

HOST: And finally, Dr. Simone, tell us again about your post-presidency plans. I've purposefully avoided using the word "retirement" because I know you've already got some new endeavors lined up. For example, most recently it was announced that you'll be active with Greater Rochester Enterprise.

ACTUALITY [SIMONE]: Well, you mentioned the Greater Rochester Enterprise, and I'll be chairman of the board there. It's a way to tie the university—RIT—to the community as a whole. If business in this community blossoms, if there's economic development, if we create jobs, this is going to create wealth and is going to help to create a vibrant society, and RIT will benefit from that. So to the extent that I can serve as a bridge between economic growth and development—help GRE serve as a magnet to attract new businesses here and help existing businesses to grow—that's going to benefit RIT and the entire community. So I look forward to working in that role. I will be writing a couple of books. I'll be serving on another half a dozen boards one way or another. So I'll be doing all the same things I've been doing, it's just that, number one, the balance will be different, and I will be more or less in control of my calendar for the first time in 25 years.

HOST: Well, all the best to you, Dr. Simone, and enjoy your modestly lightened calendar. And, by the way, in addition to media coverage of the Park Point college town groundbreaking ceremony, Dr. Simone has been prominently featured elsewhere in the news—including a 32-page tribute, titled "The Simone Years," in the June 8th issue of the Rochester Business Journal.

On the RIT campus . . . RIT Chief Communications Officer Bob Finnerty re-introduces us to RIT's ninth president, effective July 1st, Dr. William Destler . . . and News & Events managing editor Vienna Carvalho has highlights from the latest issue.

SEGMENT [BOB FINNERTY]: This is Bob Finnerty. RIT welcomes Bill Destler to campus on July 2nd. Dr. Destler is RIT's new president. Destler, RIT's ninth president, spent more than 30 years at the University of Maryland. He was most recently senior vice president of academic affairs and provost. Destler already has begun discussing RIT's future. He's written two conversation starters: One, Creativity and Innovation at RIT; and two, Corporate Research and Development at RIT. Destler sees great promise in RIT to further enhance its national image. . . . Let's just say the champions on the ice are champions in the classroom, too. The RIT men's hockey team is the defending Atlantic Hockey Association champions, and they placed 16 players on the league's academic all-conference team. To qualify for the Atlantic Hockey All-Academic Team, a player must post a 3.0 grade point average or higher in all of the academic periods during which his team was actively competing. Congratulations Tigers! . . . This is Bob Finnerty on the RIT campus.

SEGMENT [VIENNA CARVALHO]: This is News & Events Managing Editor Vienna Carvalho. In the current issue of News & Events . . . Two RIT students are making life a little easier for the blind and visually impaired. The students are advocating for an interactive, talking Web site that will help users gauge their personal style and offer clothing recommendations. They are also hoping for standardized, Braille-embossed tags to be sewn onto all garments that will allow people to reach into their closets and quickly identify clothing. . . . Also in the current issue of News & Events, RIT scientists have made another groundbreaking discovery in the study of black holes. Current research has produced computer simulations and formulas that follow the merger of two spinning black holes, Their calculations have determined that black holes can be ejected from a galaxy at the speed of 4,000 kilometers per second. . . . And, Sue Provenzano, guest author for our Viewpoints column, reflects upon another successful RIT Commencement celebration. . . . Read more about these stories and other RIT news in the June 21st issue of News & Events. This is Vienna Carvalho on the RIT campus.

HOST: This has been a special edition of Dateline: RIT (June 28, 2007). I'm Mike Saffran on the RIT campus.

ANNCR: For more on these stories and other RIT news, visit www.rit.edu/news.
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