

10-24-1991

## A Blast from GSU's Past (Part 1)

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### Recommended Citation

Thomas, Marilyn, "A Blast from GSU's Past (Part 1)" (1991). *University Anniversaries & Historical Documents*. Paper 10.  
<http://opus.govst.edu/anniv/10>

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# A Blast From GSU's Past

Who was Bill Engbretson? How did GSU come to Will County? What's changed at GSU the last two decades?

In 1988, as Governors State University's 20th anniversary was approaching, Marilyn Thomas, coordinator of public information in the Office of University Relations, began looking for answers to those questions and dozens of others in an effort to publicize the university's founding.

"I'd heard stories about how progressive GSU's early days were, how we originally were in a warehouse and this building was designed without walls, and how courses had strange names, but what I found from those days were

formal documents and meeting transcripts."

Pursuing a master's degree in media communications at the time, Thomas decided to do an audio documentary on 20 years of GSU history as her master's thesis. "I want to give special thanks to my advisor, Professor Eli Segal, who backed me 100 percent, calmed me when I panicked and was always there when I had questions and concerns.

"My only regret is that I didn't collect stories from everyone on campus who has been instrumental in the organization of the institution. I collected interviews over a seven-month period, and even at that I simply ran out of

time," she said.

"I didn't have the project finished for the 20th anniversary. In July of 1989, I'd barely scratched the surface. But I did get to interview Bill Engbretson, GSU's first president, and Robert Hauweiler, GSU's first registrar, who returned to campus for the anniversary celebration," she added.

Thomas has transcribed her audio script for the written word and has agreed to share GSU memories with students through *The Innovator*. The 13-part series begins with this edition.

She plans to donate her interview tapes and finished product to the GSU Library.

By Marilyn Thomas

(1st in a Series)

The turbulent '60s.

In 10 short years, America mourned the slaying of its president, gave its people the guarantee of civil rights, won the space race and found itself dragged into a war in Southeast Asia.

In the '60s the buzz word was change, bringing new directions, dreams and possibilities to the nation.

Governors State University was born of change. It was to be an innovative university that would allow students and staff to experiment and create.

Governors State was to prove that change in higher education was possible. Its grading system, curriculum and structure would bring all the best ideas of the 1960s together to create a new environment for learning.

In retrospect, the visionaries and free thinkers who organized Governors State University say change wasn't always easy to implement.

But, they do recall the excitement and challenges. Professor Paul Schranz in the College of Arts and Sciences remembers, "We had some good ideas and it was fun. There's a lot of fun involved."

In the early 1960s, the Illinois Legislature recognized the need for more college classrooms to meet the demands of the World War II baby boom. It agreed to fund two new state university campuses, but the opposition for these schools became a political football.

Retired Illinois legislator Tony Scariano Sr. said Cook County Democrats met resistance not only from private colleges and universities that feared the effects of a less-expense state-supported university, but also from other areas that jumped on the bandwagon.

"Ultimately it grew into a movement — a four-year university — and it wasn't the south that was looking for it," he recalled. "It was the north side, the east and the west and everywhere else."

Location, location, location. Realtors say they are the three most important words of the business. They represent opportunity, wise investment and growth.

South suburban organizers leading the charge for a new university were told more than once they weren't in the right location. Jim Patterson, a leader in the South Cook/North Will Counties Committee for Higher Education, remembered, "We were among the people the experts said didn't have a chance of getting it where it is."

The south suburbs had been rejected as the location for the new University of Illinois Circle campus, but residents weren't about to give up, Patterson added. "There was no college within ... that whole south suburban area, and there were many, many people in many, many colleges, so we had a very persuasive case. We formed a committee and we did a study and we presented persuasive facts of the number of junior colleges around there."

There also was a new city in the works — Park Forest South — with a projected population of 110,000 that would lead to other exciting community developments.

The battle for Governors State in the south suburbs was won not only by these persuasive facts and figures, but also by the ability of Rep. Scariano who served on the House Education Committee. In an effort to win the south suburban location, Scariano lobbied fellow Democrats from Chicago and neighboring suburbs to agree to a package that gave his constituents Governors State and downstaters a university in Springfield.

"The downstate boys said what's in it for us, everything for Chicago. And the compromise was Sangamon State and Governors State," he conceded. "That wasn't expressed in that many words, but you give us one and we'll give you one..."

The efforts paid off. The south suburbs would officially become home to a new university: Governors State.

South suburbanites began celebrating. Then Gov. Richard Ogilvie and the university's new president, William Engbretson, were the honored guests at a dinner July 20, 1969 at Olympia Fields Country Club.

Organizer Patterson remembers the event. "We had Governor Ogilvie sign the bill that enabled the university ... right in front of everybody ... and that was the moment the university was born. It wasn't a fake. It was the real bill."

President Engbretson immediately brought word of this new university to the community. Alice Hanes of the Registrar's Office who was one of GSU's first students, learned about the university at church.

"Bill Engbretson came to the Unitarian Church and he spoke one Sunday morning about what he envisioned as GSU and how it was to take shape and what it was to have, and he was extremely dynamic," she said. "And, I remember just feeling so thrilled about the fact that there would be a university close by ... I thought my golly, just one mile from my house. This is just like a gift. It really was a gift."

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