

40 Years of UMass Dartmouth: what was then, what's ahead?

By Donna Scaglione

Donald C. Howard, retired dean of students, recalls a phone conversation he had 38 years ago with Joseph L. Driscoll, then president of Southeastern Massachusetts Technological Institute.

Howard, in between jobs and enjoying a lengthy cross-country vacation, and Driscoll were discussing the opening for the school's dean of men, but the pair had never met. "He said, 'If you take us sight unseen, we'll take you sight unseen,'" recounted Howard, associate vice chancellor of alumni relations (retired) and dean of students emeritus.

Howard was a bit skeptical and told Driscoll so. He had visited the New Bedford-Fall River area in the past and knew that its economy was far from robust. He wondered how a school would survive there.

"And he said, 'This institution is going to make a difference in how this area revives itself,'" Howard recalled. "You know, that's what convinced me. I thought, wouldn't it be great to be part of an institution that reshapes an area?"

Now, 40 years into the process of re-shaping itself and its region, UMass Dartmouth is celebrating under the banner "Breaking New Ground, A Tradition of Innovation" a four decade roller-coaster ride that has sent UMD around the nerve-wracking curves of budget crises, up the hills of new building construction and program development, and through the thrilling loops of ground-breaking research.

The University's highly praised research enterprise, including the marine science laboratory in New Bedford, the Advanced Technology Manufacturing Center in Fall River, the new Botulinum Research Center on the main campus, and the Engineering College's collaboration with the National Textile Center, now defines the University has a hotbed of groundbreaking discovery that is poised to drive southeastern Massachusetts into the innovation economy.

"We are at a turning point for this particular region of Massachusetts," Chancellor Jean F. MacCormack told a crowd of 400 business, cultural and education leaders who gathered in the recently renovated resident dining hall Oct. 1 for the Leadership Weekend dinner. "Over the next decade, our region will have the opportunity to become a full player in the Massachusetts innovation economy, but we must marshal the will to persevere, the courage to innovate, and the selflessness to collaborate in unprecedented ways."

In the 40 years since the creation of the Dartmouth campus, student enrollment has risen from 2500 to 8300 students; the square footage of the entire campus, Fall River and New Bedford satellites included has skyrocketed from 900,000 square feet to over 2 million; library holdings have grown from 36,000 to 460,000; and the number of graduate programs has grown from 5 to 25.

The University has also firmly established itself as a major research institution, with \$15 million in external funding flowing to campus to study marine life, cranberries, water quality, education, manufacturing processes, business development, nursing care, and more.

The Earle P. Charlton College of Business' stunning building opened in October, just in time to welcome its new dean, Dr. Eileen Peacock, from Oakland University. In 2000, the Charlton College received the Association to Advance Collegiate Schools of Business' highest level of accreditation. Fewer than one-quarter of business colleges have successfully passed this test..

Over the past three years nearly one-third of the 350-member faculty corps has turned over due largely to early retirement programs. Chancellor MacCormack, at this year's freshman convocation, noted the new intellectual voices mixing with those with valuable institutional memory. "This has given us a wonderful mix of experience and idealism, deep understanding of this university and curiosity about the place, maturity and perhaps a little impatience, tradition and innovation," she told several hundred first-year students this fall.

"It just continues to be transformed," Professor David Rock, new chairman of the Education Department, said of the University. "You know this place isn't what it was 10 years ago and you know that in 10 years from now it will be different."

Even in tough budget times it's still going that way," who came to UMass from the University of Mississippi where he created a White House math web site for K-12 students. "That's impressive. I can show you a lot of places that aren't."

Joseph C. Deck, interim chancellor from 1992 to 1993, and current deputy director for the School for Marine Science and Technology, credits the faculty and staff with much of the University's success and resilience. When he stepped in as chancellor, Deck inherited a budget that had decreased by about one-third between 1989 and 1992.

"That was a crisis," said Deck, who joined past campus leaders Peter Cressy, John Brazil and Donald Walker for a campus-wide panel discussion on managing complex organizations on Oct. 1. "That sounds somewhat negative. At the same time you have faculty and staff committed to the University. There was not rampant discouragement. There was a lot of support and commitment to maintaining the quality of services."

The transition to the University of Massachusetts system, championed by Dr. Brazil, began during Deck's tenure. He created a 135-member Academic Planning Task Force to help develop a new vision and mission for the campus as it became a partner in the University system. "The involvement of over 135 faculty in the effort had the effect of giving ownership to the faculty of the new vision for this campus, including special emphasis on enrollment increases and growth of graduate programs," he said.

Many of the group's objectives have been reached, including increasing the ratio of graduate students by nearly 20 percent and establishing three Ph.D. programs (chemistry, marine sciences and technology, and electrical engineering). The goal of a 10,000-person student body is on target for 2006, as residence halls with 1,200 more beds are completed by next fall.

Even as the University has grown, it has held onto its early roots in textiles. Southeastern Massachusetts Technological Institute was created by the 1962 merger between the New Bedford Technical Institute and the Bradford Durfee Technical Institute. Today, the University offers masters programs in textile chemistry and textile technology, and it is one of eight members of the aforementioned National Textile Center, which works to strengthen the textile industry across the nation. Major Massachusetts companies such as Quaker Fabrics of Fall River have benefitted from the innovations born at the UMD textile engineering department and the National Textile Center.

The university's ties to its neighboring communities have strengthened in various ways over recent years. The opening of a second arts campus at the refurbished Star Store in downtown New Bedford is a vital component of that city's emerging arts scene. At the Advanced Technology and Manufacturing Center in Fall River, faculty and students partner with technology-based ventures on initiatives that aim at bolstering the region's economy.

The area's Portuguese influence and roots are also entrenched in the University thanks to the Center for Portuguese Studies and Culture and the Portuguese Department. The Center and Department are dedicated to the culture, literature and language of the Portuguese-speaking world; and promote outreach efforts in the arts, education, health and economic development in Portuguese-speaking communities across the United States. UMD's national reputation in this field helped draw former president of Brazil, Fernando Henrique Cardoso, to the campus on Oct. 19 to receive an honorary degree and discuss his nation's relationship with the United States.

The School for Marine Science and Technology, which opened in 1997 on Clark's Cove in New Bedford, is also part of the local fabric and economy. It works to sustain and revitalize the area's fishing industry by conducting research on fish populations, water pollution and more. SMAST scientists and local fishermen

consider these efforts vital to keeping New Bedford in its seat as the nation's number one fishing port in terms of catch value.

"Think of the merger of Durfee and the New Bedford Technical Institute and look at where you are now," said Dr. Brazil, president/chancellor from 1984 to 1992, and now the president of Trinity University in Texas. "This is an extraordinary jewel. In 40 years...it may still have a regional mission, but you'll be a national example."

Reaching out to serve the community is a way of "marrying opportunity with the needs of the area," said Cressy, who served as chancellor from 1993 to 1999. "We really have to keep reminding ourselves what the [university] community needs and what the region needs and keep that interplay going," he said.

While such work has been a vital part of the university's identity, the successful interplay between students and teachers has always been UMD's primary goal. And that hasn't gone unnoticed by new faculty members such as Shannon Jenkins, who joined the political science department in September as an assistant professor with her husband, Doug Roscoe, also assistant professor. Both had been teaching at Central Michigan University. She appreciates the opportunity to offer small classes, which will "allow for really good interaction with students," she said.

"We like the fact that we have the opportunity to get to know our students pretty well and have some quality interaction with them," she said. "We used to teach really large classes and it was difficult to develop relationships with our students."

For Matthew Moseley, a senior political science major and student representative on the UMass Board of Trustees, it is exactly that kind of atmosphere in his classes that instilled in him a love of politics and prompted his decision to pursue law school after graduation.

"Professor Manning made me want to go to law school," Moseley said of Kenneth Manning, associate professor of political science. "In class, he asked why, why, why. I liked that. I liked being drilled. He made me want to learn.

"This has been the best four years of my life, bar none," he continued. "This school has taught me who I am. That's better than any degree I can receive."

Moseley is clearly a beneficiary of the University of Massachusetts Dartmouth, which was born from two independent textile schools, entered adolescence with SMU's merger with UMass in 1991, and has now entered new phase of intellectual and physical growth at age 40.

Chancellor MacCormack, in her remarks to freshmen this fall, summed up the campus' mission and aspiration in a challenge.: "Forty years ago, we came from Fall River and New Bedford to settle in Dartmouth," she said. "Today, from this home base we are reaching back out to those cities and many other communities, indeed other countries. The question for you today, is, how are you going to use the opportunities you have, beginning today, to help others on this campus and beyond? Isn't that ultimately what this is all about – using the knowledge you gain here to improve the lives of other people on this earth? What are you going to do to break new ground?"

Donna Scaglione is a graduate student in the UMD Professional Writing Program and a freelance writer based on Cape Cod.