# Oral History Transcript

## CSUN Leaders

Interviewee Rick Evans = RE
Interviewed by Jessica Kim = JK
Interview conducted on July 22, 2025
Transcribed by Emily Gomez
Total Time: 59:32

[00:00:00]

JK: This is Jessica Kim. I'm in Los Angeles, California, and on a Zoom call with Rick Evans, executive director of the University Corporation at California State University, Northridge. This interview will become part of the campus leadership Oral History Project. Mr. Evans has served as executive director of The University Corporation, or TUC, since 2009, and has worked in some capacity with TUC since 2000. TUC is a non-profit auxiliary corporation providing commercial and administrative services to CSUN. Its main operations include management of third-party operating agreements for bookstore and campus dining, post-award administration of CSUN's grants and contracts, real estate and faculty and staff housing programs, promoting and coordinating campus facilities use and film, trademark licensing, financial management of endowments, agency funds, and summer academic enrichment workshops. Rick holds a bachelor's degree in criminal justice from the University of Nevada, Las Vegas, which he earned in 1984 and a master's degree in public administration from Arizona State University, which he earned in 1986. He spent his early career working in city management, including for the cities of Escalon, San Leandro, and Barstow. He transitioned to the CSU system in 1998 where he worked in the CSU Chancellor's Office, as well as the President's Office at CSUN, before joining the staff at TUC. In his various roles at TUC, Rick has led the organization's major and minor capital projects, including developing scope for the projects, managing design and construction teams and developing financial plans and budgets. He has also managed TUC's investments and reserves, coordinated with the president's office to align TUC's projects with university goals, served on the Campus Master Plan Committee and implemented programs to create a more user-friendly campus.

[00:01:54]

It's an honor to be with you today, Rick, and to have you tell your story and share your thoughts. When and where were you born?

RE: Well, first of all, thanks, Jessica, and it's an honor to be with you. So, I was born in Lethbridge, Alberta, Canada, and so Lethbridge is a small city in southern Alberta, maybe thirty miles from the American border. So, I'm originally Canadian, but I moved to the States when my mom married an American, and I moved when I was seventeen to Las Vegas in 1980.

[00:02:32]

JK: And can you tell us a little bit more about your parents and family background?

RE: Yeah, so both my parents were Canadian from Western Canada. Their parents and grandparents, by and large, you know, it's a big mix—but by and large, the family background immigrated from Poland and the Ukraine in the late 1800s, early 1900s where agriculture, particularly grain, was similar to Western Canada. So, in Eastern Europe, the farming was somewhat similar to what the Canadian government wanted to encourage in Western Canada. And so, a lot of my family came because of that. And so, those are sort of my European to Canada roots. Just comes to mind, the Canadian government actively encouraged agricultural immigration to settle these vast prairie lands, and they offered incentives like free land to the farmers and stuff like that. So, even though I grew up in a—we moved from Lethbridge to Calgary, which is a big city, when I was like four. So, I grew up in a big city. I did see the tail end of these rural roots with some of my family members having farms, and I would even help my uncle harvest potatoes and stuff like that. But by the seventies, when I was a tween and a teen, Alberta was really now an oil Mecca, similar to Texas. Alberta was like the Texas of Canada. So, my dad was a truck driver for the oil industry, and my mom worked at a department store.

[00:04:22]

JK: What were your early experiences with education? Maybe both in Canada and then, did you finish high school in the United States?

RE: No, I finished in Canada. So, early experiences with education, grade one in Canada. They don't say first grade or seventh grade, they say "grade one, grade two". And so, that's one of the great differences between being an American and being a Canadian, these simple little things that Canadians try to say, See, we're different. But by and large, we're very similar. Anyways, same as most people I went to elementary school. I finished high school in Canada. I did fine, but it always came down to the teacher. The teacher makes all the difference, and I've always thought about that as I deal with professors, and I've gotten to know so many wonderful CSUN

professors. Just a couple of anecdotes: My fourth-grade math teacher was so boring I still remember I literally couldn't hear him at times. It was just like, you know, the Charlie Brown where the adult is "wuh wuh wuh wuh". I mean, it was all monotone and dry, no energy. He was just like a giant sleeping pill, clearly in the wrong profession. And then, in the tenth grade, my math teacher was a bully. He didn't know he was a bully, but he liked to put me in front of the classroom on the board. You know, I'm in the tenth grade, and there's girls looking at me while I'm trying to solve a problem. That was terrifying. I think my mom actually called him and told him to cut it out, and he did. And then after that, I really grew to enjoy problem solving in algebra and pre-calculus. So, it really came down to the teacher. But yeah, those are some of my early experiences with education. And again, I did fine, but if not for, I think it was like my twelfth-grade math teacher—or maybe he was eleventh grade. He was completely different, very nurturing and forgiving, for lack of a better word, and I thrived in that environment.

[0:06:35]

JK: Did you grow up expecting to go to college, and what were your professional goals as a young person?

RE: Yeah, well, I love that question, because all it takes is a little encouragement from your family. Because my brother—and I just have the one brother—we both went to college, but we were the first people in our immediate family and the first people in a very large extended family on my mother's side, to actually go to college. And it was simply because my mom would say from the earliest age—I still remember, gosh, I was four—"You're going to go to college." It was just an expectation. Now, she only had a high school education. My dad had dropped out of high school in the eleventh grade. But for whatever reason, she knew the value of higher education. And thank God she did. That made all the difference. It was just, "You're going to go to college." And I asked her, just this weekend, we had her over for dinner. I said, Mom, why did you always push the college thing? And she didn't really have a good answer. She graduated high school in 1958 and got married like right away. But at that point, you know, she's the leading edge of the baby boom. Or, I guess she isn't technically a baby boomer, but it was just beginning to be understood in that rural, quasi-rural area that getting a college degree is a smart thing, and it still is obviously, so.

[00:08:11]

JK: And then, did you go directly from high school into your bachelor program? And I imagine that was influenced by just this expectation set by your mom?

RE: Yeah, well, in the eleventh grade, my mom had married an American professor who was teaching on some sort of sabbatical thing for the University of Calgary, and then they moved back to Las Vegas, where he was actually a professor at UNLV [University of Nevada, Las Vegas]. So, I was kind of left high and drive for a couple of years, and I didn't want to move to the States when I was fifteen. I wanted to finish high school, so I actually kind of bounced around living with a friend. But I finished high school when I was seventeen and then I moved right down to the States, and I moved right into UNLV. So, yeah, it really was a new beginning too, also. Almost like a reinvention to start college, you know—new friends, a new place, a new country. And even though I'd had less than—more or less average grades in high school, I felt that college recognized my abilities more and like it was a better fit, and that was exciting. Especially once I had transitioned into my junior year, where I decided I really wanted to get my master's degree, and then I buckled down even more to get my grades up so I could get into a graduate program.

[00:09:37]

JK: Can you talk a little bit more about your experiences as an undergraduate? What kinds of things interested you? Your experiences as a first-generation college student?

RE: Well, again, I had the [thinks]—you know, I think the reason I lingered on the notion You're going to go to college sort of thing: It just takes a—I almost hate to use that word privilege, but I was privileged enough to have a mother who's like, You're going to go to college, and then she marries a professor at the university I'm going to. Clearly, there was some benefits that came with that, right? So, I saw him working. He was a highly published math professor, and I just saw him—he had to teach class, he would come home, he had to work on his papers. I didn't understand anything he was—I wasn't that interested in math. I had gone into criminal justice. But just his work ethic, just through osmosis, flopped over onto me, and then I just pursued my own interests. Again, [laughs] it kind of comes down to what people say. My uncle, as I was leaving Canada, we were just having a conversation, like a ten-minute conversation. I'm like, Boy, it'd be fun to be a detective. And he said, “Well, you know, a really good detective gets a degree.” And so, then I'm like, Well, what do they get a degree in? And he didn't know, but I found out later, it's often criminal justice. So, that ten-minute conversation: I'm going to get a degree in criminal justice. I mean, you make these lifelong decisions in a moment that are really not all that well informed. But it worked out because I really did enjoy learning about criminal justice, and all the undergraduate or the first freshman and sophomore stuff isn't even related to that. You just get the general education. And so, yeah, that was kind of my experience, but I really did enjoy it. I do recall, and this is kind of a weird comment, but some of my friends—it was cool to be nihilistic, right? Like, we're going to college in Las Vegas. Now, most of us were under twenty-one so it wasn't like we'd go to the casino. But there's a lot to do in Las Vegas.

And I would have these friends that'd be like, There's nothing to do, man, it's just so—and it was like, No, there's a lot to do! Both socially, but also academically. This stuff is really interesting, and so I'm glad I never really fell into that nihilism that often leads into dropping out in my senior year. You know, we have all known our friends that, Well, I only needed nine more credits to graduate. Well, why didn't you graduate? And again, being exposed to my stepdad, I think, really, really helped.

[00:12:38]

JK: And you said, by the time you were a junior, you already knew that you wanted to go to graduate school. So, what sparked that interest, and what did you study as a graduate student?

RE: Well, again, it was just one of those ten-minute sort of things, kind of, I mean, I'm going on memory here, but you know, in a variety of things. My stepdad was a professor, so I was just exposed to higher education, and, you know, even higher education, an advanced degree. And as I started learning more about criminal justice: Okay, I want to be a police detective. That sort of evolved into me doing an internship at a prison, the Southern Nevada Correctional Center and I can't remember the specifics, but I realized that I'd have a better chance of advancing in corrections with a master's degree in public administration. And I learned there was no bachelor's in public administration. I don't know how much that's changed, but really if you want to get a degree, you know, you can get a business degree in business administration. Those are very common, but a bachelor's degree in public administration is really not. Maybe that's changed, but you had to get your MPA. So, I went to ASU. Followed my stepdad and my mother, she went to ASU. They went a year before me, so I was always sort of chasing after my parents. So, I went to ASU for my MPA. And then again, another one of those ten-minute things, my cohort, they all wanted to be city managers. And you want to be a warden? And so, I'm like, No, I want to be a city manager. And actually, after doing my internship at the Correctional Center, I realized I did not want to do that. I knew it would be too stressful. Not so much being around the inmates but trying to make improvements. I just, oof—and I'd never even heard of a city manager before I came to ASU, and then after a couple of conversations, it's like, I want to be a city manager, and so eventually I did become a city manager.

[00:15:07]

JK: And actually, that's a great segue into my next question, which is, can you talk about your early career in the public sector and in city management? So, you make this transition and watch this career.

RE: Yeah! Well, all I remember is how hard it was to get a real professional position. So, they always ask for two years of professional experience, you know, and they still often do. "They" being the broad “they”. And it was maddening. So quick, quick sidebar about The Corporation or TUC (The University Corporation). Since Covid, we've softened our stance on stuff like that. I mean, we are literally on a university where we're educating all these great [alums], or soon to be alums, and we have student workers in the office. And if they've worked for us for a year, even if it's just part time—and it's always part time—when they graduate. We already know if they're a good worker or not. So, why do we just let them go away and not hire them? Because they don't have two years of professional experience? So, we've sort of shifted away from that, and we're retaining more of our students and pipelining them into professional positions. And I'm really pleased with that, because, frankly, it's working really well. Anyways, so this two years of experience stuff: So, I did like, four internships after I graduated. One with the community college district of Maricopa in Phoenix, one with the city of Chandler, or actually two within the city of Chandler. And then I finally landed my first professional position with the city of Barstow. So, we moved to the high desert. And so, that's one thing I didn't think about, Oh, I want to be a city manager. If you want to be a city manager, you have to move from city to city, and that's a big commitment. So, I continued to move myself. And when I moved to Barstow, at the very same time, I was getting married, and my wife, who I'd met with the city of Chandler, she moved with me to the high desert. And then we moved from Barstow to San Leandro in the Bay Area to Escalon in the Central Valley, where I became a city manager for a couple of years. And so, that's kind of what got me there.

[00:17:38]

JK: What brought you to the CSU system?

RE: Well, so again, I finally became city manager for the city of Escalon, and I realized it wasn't all that it was cracked up to be. So, when you're sitting around with your colleagues in graduate school, Oh, I want to be a city manager, it sounds fun to be over the police and the fire and the infrastructure and beautifying a city to make it seem like, you know, Main Street USA and Disneyland. It's not like that at all. It's very political, especially in the Central Valley. Most city managers back then, it probably is even worse now, only last about four years before they get fired. And I've known a lot of city managers, and the ones that I knew were excellent, so they're not getting fired for cause. They're getting fired because of politics, right? A new city council comes in and they want to bring in their own person sort of thing. And so, that was happening to me. And then, I was lucky enough to see—one, I still kind of recall, it was like one inch by one inch ad in the LA Times for a job at the Chancellor's Office. And actually, my wife found that ad, so once again, [I] stumbled into something. I was actually offered a couple of other municipal jobs: One in Vermont, one in Washington. But—and they're all kind of coming together—but

the one at the university system sounded really interesting, and I wanted to get out of the city government business. So, and I had never even heard—I had heard of the CSUs, obviously, but I didn't realize that there [were] twenty-three campuses. Was it twenty-three? It was twenty-three at the time. And I didn't know what the Chancellor's Office was. So, next thing I know, I'm working for the executive vice chancellor in Long Beach, for, let's see, it was—it was called the CSU Institute at the Chancellor's Office. And that was an auxiliary. But it was really a house of cards, the institute. I didn't know that. It was an experiment that was sort of destined to fail. In some ways, I think it was probably a political vehicle where Board of Trustees members were like, We need our own technology transfer auxiliary, and we need economic development auxiliary, and—what was the other thing that we did? I forget what the other major leg of the stool was. And I think we were just sort of glommed together, and it was destined to fail. But it gave me an—I was there for like three years, and it gave me exposure to the university system, how it works, what it does, [and] the importance of auxiliaries in the system. Less so the CSU institute, but over the couple years I was there, I was exposed to other auxiliaries, like The University Corporation and student auxiliaries and stuff. And so, it was an onboarding to the CSU system, which I've been with now for almost thirty years.

[00:21:07]

JK: And then did you go from that position to CSUN, or did you have another position within the Chancellor's Office?

RE: No, I was with the Chancellor's Office for, I think, about three years. And after three years, it was pretty clear that the institute was being disassembled one piece at a time. I think the institute still might exist on paper for a conduit for some financing or something like that. But when I was there at the height of it, I think we had like five or six employees. But I could see the writing was on the wall. And thankfully, again, luck of the draw, Blenda Wilson, the President of Northridge (California State University, Northridge), she was asking if anyone could recommend an executive assistant. And at the time, in the nineties, that was a catch-all title for a management level position. So, if you're an executive assistant, often you have people that reported to you. And so, it was basically the executive assistant overseeing the operations of the president's office. I think now that position is called [the] Director of Administrative Services, or something. So, someone told her to talk to me, and thank God she did, because I knew I wanted to be on a campus. And I met with Blenda. What was interesting is she didn't really interview me. She kind of just tried to sell me on the position, which was [laughs] it was—I love Blenda. She was great. But I don't think—she often, I think would rush into to hiring folks without actually going through [vetting], you know, the full, Is this the best I can get? Now, in my case, she lucked out, right? And so, it worked out for both of us. I was a little disappointed. I think I was on the job only eighteen months before she decided to leave. But anyways, the

difference between a campus and the Chancellor's Office I thought would be like night and day, and it really is like night and day. I mean, at the Chancellor's Office, you don't see students unless they're there to protest during a Board of Trustees meeting. You don't see faculty. It's all administration, often disconnected from the realities of day-to-day campus operations and definitely campus life. And so, it was great to have that, because I still deal with the Chancellor's Office a lot, but I'm able to see what they're missing. Unless they did work on a campus. And so, yeah, I finally found my home at CSUN, so.

[00:24:07]

JK: And so, what led from the transition from working in the president's office over to The University Corporation?

RE: Yeah, well, so again, Blenda was only—I was only working for her for about eighteen months, and then she left. And so, there was a bit of a turmoil with our interim president. And without getting into that, into too much detail—I mean, I wasn't asked to leave or anything like that. I wanted to leave. I have tremendous respect for the people in the president's office, but every day, it's like being shot out of a cannon. And I can handle a lot of plates spinning, but it's different. It's just so moment to moment there. When I thought we'd be in the back room working on strategy and long-term planning. It wasn't anything like that. It was just a fire drill every day. And so, Tom McCarron joined CSUN a year after I joined CSUN. He became Executive Director for The University Corporation in 1999. I had come to CSUN in 1998, and I was interested in getting over to The Corporation (TUC), because of my background and exposure to auxiliaries. And I had known Tom from the chancellor's office, and I knew he was a great man, and I still stay in touch with Tom. He went on to become a Senior Vice President of San Diego State. And so, he had a similar position open up in The Corporation that was similar to what I had in the president's office. [It was] similar in title and stuff, but very different in actual responsibility. So, with The Corporation, it was more project oriented, and I jumped at the chance to go over to The Corporation, especially since we were in between Presidents. I ended up working [with] Jolene [who] was the incoming president. And then a few years later, I ended up working for Jolene, and she was wonderful. And I still cherish her mentorship. And then subsequently, I reported to Diane (Harrison) [CSUN President 2012-2021]. And Erika [CSUN President 2021-] chairs both my boards. So, it's been a real honor to have worked closely with four presidents, all amazing women that each push CSUN to a higher level. I don't know—am I still on track with the questions?

JK: Absolutely, yes.

RE: So, let's see. Did you want me to talk about TUC?

[00:27:04]

JK: Yeah, actually let's move there next. So, maybe we could take this in two parts. Just kind of talking about the role generally of TUC as part of CSUN, and you know, you've been really deeply involved with TUC's work for a quarter of a century. And then, maybe we could talk about some of the specific initiatives that you think have been most impactful or that you've been most deeply involved with.

RE: Yeah, okay. Well, so again, when I joined TUC it was to help move initiatives and projects along, which I really enjoy doing, and which I got to do a lot of at The Corporation. And so, The Corporation is essentially the business arm of the university. We've got commercial services, licensing, real estate programs, and administration of grants and contracts. So, let's see. The first eight years, I worked different titles, but I worked for the executive director, who was Tom McCarron, to really help bring The Corporation into the 21st Century and get some big projects done. And then, when I became executive director in 2009, Jolene Koester immediately tasked me with taking it to the next level and instill a growth mindset in TUC. That we're not just an auxiliary that runs operations, but an important division of the university that seeks out ways to enhance campus life and student success with university-first thinking. That was something—this isn't a dig at Tom or anything like that, because I was part of his administration—but to really get our auxiliary to the next level, where we were—and I'll talk about that a little bit more, this notion of university-first thinking. You know, I'm looking at the questions. I hate to go off script here, but I was thinking—let's see—if we could ask question eleven, or no, question twelve first and then go to eleven. Because I think eleven ends on a more positive note?

[00:29:18]

JK: Sure, sure. So, we'll come back to more specific initiatives, but we could go to a more overview question, which is giving your three decades of work with the campus. Can you comment on how the campus has shifted over that period, and how that shift shapes your work?

RE: Well, actually, I was, and I'm sorry, the challenge—there was a question about, what are some of the biggest challenges you—?

JK: Yeah, what are some of the—thirteen—what are some of the biggest challenges you and the campus have faced during your tenure?

RE: Yeah, and I thought we'd talk about that, just because it gets, it gets a little sad (laughs), and I don't want to end on a sad note. So, my biggest heartbreak for me and my team is very recently,

actually. It was, I don't know if you've heard of the program, CSUN Ready? We worked on that for three years. We held over sixty meetings. Forget the internal development meetings, but sixty meetings with campus stakeholders to promote the program. But it seemed the harder we tried with faculty and then ultimately student leadership, the more resistance it generated. And we ultimately decided not to go forward with the program because I didn't want to put leadership in a contentious situation with faculty and students. But I would say, and I have said this to the entire faculty senate and student senate, that not moving forward was a mistake. So, CSUN Ready is what's called an equitable access program, and it was developed first at UC Davis about four, maybe going on, five years ago now. And that's where students get their learning materials automatically at a much-reduced fee, and then they can opt out. And it increases—like at Davis, less than twenty-five, less than thirty percent of their students had all their learning materials. Now, more than eighty percent have all their learning materials. I mean that just—and I worked with a research scientist who showed that this does help improve the equity gap and student success. But again, you know, it's—it is what it is. I believe it was a case of the vocal minority over a silent majority, and so that was a challenge. [Not] that I care about how I look, but at the end of the day, I think faculty appreciated that. Hey, The Corporation participated in shared governance to a degree. We listened and we're not moving forward with this program, even though I strongly think that was a mistake. Another heartbreaker was trying to develop—really, it's so expensive to live in Southern California and just keeps getting more and more expensive, and our faculty need lower cost housing. And so, we were trying to develop a two-hundred unit faculty/staff housing apartment complex on North Campus, and we spent a couple of years trying to make that work, but at the end of the day, it was just too expensive to pull the financing together and the ability to then rent those units below market [value]. And so, we couldn't go forward with that. That was a heartbreaker. But I guess the real lesson and kind of those two examples, and there's some other examples, but there's more examples of success and moving things forward. But the lesson is to get back in the saddle and continue to work on other programs and projects for the betterment of the university, such as some of the projects that I want to talk about in a moment.

[00:33:29]

JK: Actually, let's, let's move there, if you're comfortable. Some projects that pose real challenges, but then, other initiatives that have been so impactful. Could you talk about some of them and the ways in which you think they touch kind of this—particularly the student experience.

RE: Right, well, a lot of the way we touch the student experience is by working closely with faculty, and the more we can support faculty—obviously, they're on the front lines of student success, right? And so, let me continue with the faculty/staff housing thing. On the positive side, [if] we're able to attract and retain faculty, and not just faculty that are from the Valley, right? I

mean, we've got to attract faculty, a diverse faculty, from all over the country. And when they come to Southern California and they see these rents or the cost of housing, they don't even leave the airport, and they just go back, right? So, if we can provide, and we do, we rent below market units. So, we have forty-three townhomes and single-family homes together. I think, thirty-three town homes and ten single family homes. And those have really helped us hire and onboard many faculty and administrators that otherwise may not have come to CSUN or may have left sooner than we wanted them to. And so, that's always a real sense of accomplishment. When we've helped some administrator recruit an important faculty position and they're like, What about housing? And then we help them with that, that really motivates my staff and myself. And so right now, we're building a total of twelve houses on our vacant properties. Over the years, we've purchased three vacant parcels right on Halsted, right north of B6 parking lot. And so, we're in the process. If you drive down Halsted right now, you'll see four are almost nearing completion, and then we'll start the next eight next fiscal year. And so, I'm really excited about this project, because they're quality, custom units that are going to look great. [They'll] be a nice addition to the community. And it's fun, and it's a creative project. And it motivates me and my staff. And so again, back to my point earlier: For every failed attempt, there's more that The Corporation has accomplished that can have a lasting impact. So, on campus, I was the project manager for the Sierra Center, the Arbor Court, the Matador Food Court, and really, all our other food service projects where it's been a real pleasure to walk in and see students relaxing, enjoying the food. Both my kids are Matadors. And you know, on occasion, I'd go downstairs to the second floor of the Sierra Center and just run into them. And if you had been on campus twenty-five years ago, right after the earthquake, I mean, our food service was all in trailers. It was just in trailers. And you know, to create these—they may not be classrooms that The Corporation is creating but [we're] creating a relaxing environment where they can enjoy food and congregate together. I know it has an impact on student success and even student retention. You know, the Freudian Sip in the library, for example, was exciting because I knew if we put it in the lobby, it would be a hit. Now, I mentioned that Mark Stover, the former dean, is a dear friend, and I've told this joke in front of two-hundred people, so I can tell it in front of you. If it was up to him, he would have put the Freud (Freidian Sip café) way, way in the back, like where the boom stacking thing is. And so, it took some tactful discussions to coax him into agreeing to have it in the lobby. And I think people agree that it works well in the lobby. And so post-pandemic, the food industry was really hit hard during the pandemic. I mean, I've seen analysis of the industries that were hit the hardest, and food service was like number two. Rising wholesale prices and supply chains, drastically increasing wages within a smaller labor pool, which affected prices to the customers on our campus, and unfortunately, to our students. And so, that has been exacerbated by the fact that student enrollment, even though it stayed constant, thankfully on our campus—foot traffic, dropped by over thirty percent right after the pandemic, after we came back. And it's still about—there's various

metrics, but somewhere between sixteen to twenty percent below. And you can imagine, that's a massive drop in sales, which further hurts our ability to provide the best food service. So even with that loss of revenue, our goal is still to provide a quality food service experience. And so, a recent example would be the refresh of the marketplace. And so, I don't know if you've seen it or not, but there's a Halal Shack and Baba's Pizza, and the Asian fusion (Bamboo Terrace), so that's been a real hit. And again, those things are motivating.

[00:39:50]

Moving on to research, or sponsored research. So, you mentioned at the front end what we do, but what many people don't realize is that the administration of sponsored research and sponsored programs is the primary thing that The Corporation actually does. We run, or ran—it's going to drop now, unfortunately—but our high point was about forty million dollars in sponsored research through The Corporation, with anywhere, somewhere—it shifts—but around a thousand or more grant funded employees at any given time. And so, The Corporation is the employer of record. And then, the quality of the research that our faculty do is just, it's just astounding. It's just, like, really fills you with pride. And the prestige that it brings to CSUN is also very important. And so, to the question about student impact. When students are involved in academic research, whether they're receiving a stipend or they're actually a student employee, they are always successful as a student. And then when they move on in their careers—I mean, that's just been demonstrated—you know, the high touch, high impact thing. So, we take a lot of pride, and we worked hard over the years to improve our customer service to our faculty researchers, because they want to do research. They don't want to do administration. And so, one of the biggest shifts that I was involved in several years ago, but it's a constant thing—In fact, we just had a meeting on it yesterday. We call it the PRO-PI initiative, and that's basically how can we continue to support our PIs. Faculty researchers are called principal investigators, PIs. And so, we switched from an assembly line approach several years ago in post-award administration to assigning a liaison slash analyst to each faculty researcher. So, the analyst is always available to assist the faculty member [with] whatever their grant requirements are; whether it's budget, or expense, or payroll, or compliance, or HR. And so, currently sponsored research is challenged by the Trump administration's significant cuts in allowable indirect cost recovery. Our federal allowable F&A, which is really the indirect cost recovery, facilities/administration rate is forty-seven point five percent. And we don't get forty-seven point five percent on all our federal grants, but more and more agencies are cutting that or trying to cut it to fifteen percent. Well, that's just going to kill—you still have the same level of administration, so it's going to really affect the ability to support sponsored research at CSUN and at all American universities. So, that's going to be a real challenge. And so, it's too soon to see what the long-term effects are going to be on the Research Academy here at CSUN, and frankly, across the country. There's temporary restraining orders on these cuts, on the F&A cuts

right now, but a lot of grants are being terminated. DEI-related grants are being terminated, and future DEI grants under these federal executive orders will not be funded going forward. So, that will be an impact. We'll have to see—again, we hit forty million dollars. What do we think it's going to be in a couple of—well, next year. It's not going to be forty million dollars, but I have a lot of faith in our research academy, where they will adjust.

So, I did mention the North Campus, that's actually a separate auxiliary that we oversee. It doesn't have any employees, but The Corporation oversees the North Campus, and we recently did a deal with the Valley United Soccer club where they'll lease the top of the hill. I don't know if you've ever seen the hill up there. It's just this odd hill that's been there for a million years, and it has a fault line running through it, so you can't build anything thing on it. And plus, it's a hill. And so, we're going to be leasing that to the soccer club, the youth soccer club. That'll be about three-hundred thousand annually that goes back to the campus. And that might not sound like much, but it can really add up and help the campus fund very important initiatives. One of the things that The Corporation has done, traditionally, over the years—both corporations, the North Campus and TUC—is provide funding back to the university to help with their special projects. A quick sidebar: On April sixteenth (2025), that project, the soccer club on the hill received the LA Business Journal Valley Commercial Real Estate Award, and the specific category was the Community Impact: Deal of the Year Award. And so, it's recognized for the innovation in utilizing this odd hill in the middle of the Valley where land is at a premium for youth programs, so it checked a lot of boxes. And so, we were pretty pleased with that. I could go on, but I will mention our licensing program.

So, about twenty-three years ago, the campus asked The Corporation to take over licensing. And so, licensing sounds like, well, you're licensing our brand, which we do oversee—our insignia and our logo and all that stuff. But the bigger part of the licensing department is the facilities rentals. Now we're number one in the CSU system when it comes to TV, commercial, and film shoots. And we quickly tripled the revenue back to the campus when we took that over, because that was more of a business sort of thing. And so, a quick sidebar to the sidebar: Diane Harrison, when she was president, she was very hardworking and very serious and constantly under pressure. All our presidents are under tremendous pressure. Anyways, I used to get a kick out of—you know, Diane was always serious, but she would light up and truly enjoy any updates we gave on the latest film or TV shoot. You know, it was like a moment of, Oh, that's fun. That's just fun. And so, there's been countless film shoots on campus, but just a couple that come to mind: American Idol, NCIS, So You Think You Can Dance, S.W.A.T., Veep—I was a big fan of Veep. And even the Star Trek movie did a shoot, and we have a whole sizzle reel of all that stuff and so that's a lot of fun too, and it actually generates revenue for the campus. So, I'll stop on that.

[00:47:38]

JK: I think we touched on most things on the list except the Soraya. Did you want to comment on the Soraya and the TUCs involvement with—?

RE: Yeah, well, so the Soraya originally was called the Valley Performing Arts Center. Right? Yeah. Until the Nazarian family donated a significant amount, and we changed the name. But yeah, I—so on a couple of points. The, you know, I talk about the money that The Corporation generates, which isn't a tremendous amount, but it can really help with gap financing of projects. So, I believe the Valley Performing Arts Center cost a hundred and twenty-five million bucks. Because of the—and the funding came from a variety of different sources, including—I forget, this was like twelve years ago, three or four million dollars, it could have been even a little bit more from The Corporation Special Projects fund. And when you're trying to cobble together a hundred twenty-five million dollars, three or four million can mean a whole lot. And so, if I recall the Soraya was paid off like in five years. And so, we played our part, and that's huge to have that beautiful facility completely paid for. I know of many other similar facilities or arenas around the country or California that have this constant debt service; six million dollars a year, six million a year. We don't have that. And so, we played a role in that. And then, when it came to the startup, I was asked to lead the guest experience plan, and so that took a lot of work. And thankfully, I had a good partner who did all the heavy lifting with regard to—I would facilitate, whether it was custodial or the guest experiences as you walk in. Or we did at the time, concessions, all of that stuff; parking, facilitating, Okay, how is the guest experience going to be? Because we don't want it to be clunky. I think it wasn't perfect, but it was exciting to be part of that. And you know, the Soraya, just as a facility goes, just looking at the outside of the facility, it's the most beautiful building in the Valley, you know, it really is. And then when you go inside—I'm not even talking about the performances, just the facility itself is just a fantastic thing for the university.

[00:50:45]

JK: Absolutely. To ask you, as we get close to the end of our interview, to step back and think about, you know, the campus and then the university as a whole. Can you comment on how the organization has shifted over your tenure at CSUN, and how that shift has shaped your work.

RE: Yeah, well, let's see. Boy there—so, I guess one of the many things I could say is I, when I hire a new employee, I like to say, “Okay, you're being hired now in 2025. Whatever year this is, don't get stuck in this year.” Too often people don't like change. They like it the way it was. Well, I was hired in 1998, and back in 1998 we knew how to do it right. Back in 2008 we [asked], “Why

are we changing?" And so, you know, there's just something—I don't know, the psychology behind it—where, if you're new, you're learning your job now, and you're learning it, and you're excited because you've got this new job. But it's going to continue to change. It has to continue to change. And so, if we can just not have the mindset of the way it was. But there was change before we were here. There's change while we're here. And there's going to be change after we're gone. So, to be part of facilitating positive change should be part of everybody's growth mindset. So, every year there's new challenges and opportunities, and it almost seems like it's a different world from when I started. It's a different campus. It's a bigger and better campus. And it didn't become that without people that were open to positive changes, frustrating and as difficult as it can be. I mean, this year, what, we're looking at a twenty-eight million dollar structural deficit, the university. But I know that this leadership, and then the professional staff and faculty, that we will get through this. And so, The Corporation—bringing it back to The Corporation—we need to keep our finger on the pulse of all of that and be part of the solution. And so, I think that was sort of what Jolene tasked me with when she hired me in 2009. To raise your hand and say that we can do that. So, The Corporation's informal motto—I don't think we have it written a lot of places, but it's not like on a logo or something like that. We like to say, "service plus solutions". So, we provide a lot of services, but we also want to bring solutions too. And so, part of that is something that we also talk about, which is university-first thinking. And so, it's pretty obvious what that means, but it means if it's in the best interest of the university, even if it's going to be more work and headache and heartache for me or my staff, or more cost to The Corporation, we have to do it if it's the right thing for the university. And the great thing is, in the long run, you get recognized as a university-first thinker, as opposed to "my agenda" or "my comfort zone" thinker. And so, the general question was, How have we shifted or changed? You know, I guess I would just wrap that in the general notion and paradigm of just being flexible. And I think we've been fortunate enough with our campus colleagues over the few decades I've been on campus, to have that sort of thinking. Where other CSUs have struggled more and are currently in some—I mean, we're in a difficult situation right now with the budget, but it could be a lot worse. You look at some of our sister campuses, and they are really struggling. And so, anyways, I'll stop with that. That's generally how I would answer that.

[00:55:28]

JK: I think I'll put the last two questions together. What are your hopes for the university moving forward? And is there anything else you'd like to add?

RE: Well, yeah, that's a good transition or continuation of what we were just talking about. That's that I really want the university—[I] hope it stays strong and continues to develop even more as a

juggernaut that we already are. And that starts with staying fiscally sound. We can't continue and go forward without proper funding. And I also want to see that enrollment continues to sustain and even increase, and that's more of a part of, I suppose, my reflection and concern with higher education in general, from young people in California. You know, there's this—I don't know if it's a growing movement, but you hear it in certain sections that higher education is not worth it. For one thing, that's false on many levels. It's just the simple value of cost to the CSU provides versus many other universities; is the best deal you're going to get. And then, yes, we have to do a better job demonstrating to all young people the benefit of a CSU or a CSUN education. But you know, at the end of the day, I believe CSUN will continue to thrive as long as our leadership, like I was talking about earlier, leadership, our faculty and staff, try to work together as a team with university-thinking.

I think the second part of your question, is there anything I want to add? Let's see. Well, I would say it's an honor every single day to work for CSUN, and actually, for every CSUN or TUC employee to work here. We all make a difference. The massive impact that CSUN makes on so many lives. The 2023 Wall Street Journal did their college pulse rankings, and we're fifth in the entire country for social mobility. I mean, if that doesn't give a spring in your step, right? I mean, and I bet that the metric there was graduation rates and salaries in the years after graduation, the again, social mobility, right? Social slash economic mobility. And we're a huge campus, so think about how many lives we change. I love being part of a huge campus with, what, thirty-seven thousand students? I mean, that's more inspiring to me than being part of an elite little college [of] three thousand students. I mean, we're making this huge impact. So again, every student or, student and employee should have a sense of pride and the role that we play.

You know, I'll finish up by mentioning the butterfly effect, right? So, a nice afternoon for a student at the Marketplace after being served properly by a server and then eating and studying and hanging out with friends, can really make a difference for a student. Or, being able to land an important faculty member or administrator who otherwise wouldn't come to CSUN without our housing. And then I talked about the impact that we have on students that are involved in research can have a huge, huge cumulative effect. So, yeah, I'll end on that. Hopefully I didn't go too long, Kim—or, Jessica, I'm sorry.

JK: Okay, let me go ahead and stop.

[Both laugh.]

[End of transcript]