# Dean VanTrease

Over three decades of leadership at Tulsa Community College brought access to public education and national recognition.

**Chapter 01 – 1:11**
**Introduction**

**Announcer:** Until 1969, Tulsa was served by two private higher education institutions. State lawmakers addressed the lack of a public post secondary institution for Tulsa area residents by chartering Tulsa Junior College, TJC, in April 1969. The colleges Board of Regents supported Alfred M. Phillips as TJC's first president and Dean P. VanTrease as executive vice president.

Dean VanTrease became president in 1989, and was responsible for the oversight and operation of four campuses and a conference center reaching more than thirty thousand people each year. Performing Arts took on a new role with the opening of a center, which became known as the VanTrease Performing Arts Center for Education.

While today Tulsa Community College is recognized nationally it had very humble beginnings. The first classes were held in leased space in the Sinclair Oil building located at 909 South Boston Avenue in downtown Tulsa. In his oral history, Dean VanTrease chronicles the growth of Tulsa Community College, which includes his thirty-four years in leadership roles.

Listen to Dr. Dean VanTrease as he takes you back to the beginning of Tulsa Community Tulsa on *VoicesofOklahoma.com*.

**Chapter 02 – 8:05**
**Asterisk In Between**

**John Erling:** My name is John Erling. Today's date is February 23, 2012. Dean, state your full name please, your date of birth, and your present age.

**Dean VanTrease:** I'm Dean Paul VanTrease. My date of birth is September 5, 1938.

**JE:** Your present age?

**DV:** I believe that's seventy-three.

**JE:** Yes, I just checked it out, it's seventy-three.

**DV:** Thank you.

**JE:** Where were you born?

**DV:** In Lewiston, Idaho.

**JE:** We're recording this here in the recording facilities of VoicesofOklahoma.com in Tulsa. Your mother's name? Maiden name and where she grew up?

**DV:** Hazel Corrine Greer. She grew up in Lewiston, Idaho.

**JE:** How would you describe her personality?

**DV:** She was quite a gal. She was a school teacher for quite a few years. In the community, she was very respected. Mom and Dad live close to my brother in Idaho. Just one brother. She was very involved in the church and in community kinds of things, which were expected then of young women that were teachers.

**JE:** Um-hmm (affirmative). Her being a teacher, did that have some effect on the fact that you ended up in education?

**DV:** You know, it probably did. At the time I didn't think it would but I think it did.

**JE:** Your father's name and where he lived and grew up?

**DV:** Edward Paul VanTrease, he went by Paul. He spent much of his time in Clarkston, Washington, which is across the river from Lewiston, Idaho, and Potlatch, Idaho. He worked in the lumber mills and eventually had a cut stock plant, they call it the cut stock and you could take lumber boards and make them into smaller pieces that might be useful for toys or whatever they wanted to make from there.

**JE:** Um-hmm (affirmative).

**DV:** He was a very interesting dad too, a very good dad.

**JE:** You mentioned your brother, and his name and was he older or younger than you?

**DV:** His name is David Burton VanTrease and he's eighteen months older. And he was a school teacher for thirty years. Terrific teacher.

**JE:** Your education, your elementary school, where was that?

**DV:** In Clarkston, Washington. And this was a small town, probably about 2,500 to 3,000 people. It was across the river from Lewiston, Idaho. Lewiston, Idaho, Clarkston, Washington, named after Lewis and Clark.

**JE:** All right.

**DV:** And their travels.

**JE:** So elementary then junior high school and so—

**DV:** And high school. All of it there.

**JE:** In Clarkston?

**DV:** Um-hmm (affirmative).

**JE:** Let's talk about high school. What kind of a student and were you involved in school and activities?

**DV:** I—yes, I was an okay student, you know, I wasn't the valedictorian but I did well. I was All-Conference on our football team that had a terrific season, senior year. You know, I was in various class offices growing up in different roles. I was senior class vice president .

**JE:** So you began to show leadership back then?

**DV:** Oh, I'd say way back, early on, yeah.

**JE:** How big was your class?

**DV:** Not very big. We graduated ninety-eight.

**JE:** It was bigger than mine, which was twenty-five, so—

**DV:** Twenty-five? Well, it was big.

**JE:** So you graduate from high school in what year?

**DV:** Nineteen fifty-six.

**JE:** And then it was an automatic that you would go on to college?

**DV:** Yes. This was an interesting uh, interesting to me how my mother graduated from high school when she was fifteen. She was one of eight girls. And her father was killed in an automobile accident in 1925, when she was twelve. Her mother was very bright, she was a Woman of the Year one year in Idaho.

But my mother certainly was supportive of my going to college. But my dad, who had finished the eighth grade, that wasn't that uncommon back then for men, you know, they were working. He was the one that sat my brother and I down in high school and he said, "Boys, you're going to college."

My brother decided to go to the Washington State College, WSC back then, it's Washington State University today. And I decided to troop it over the mountains to the University of Washington. And I was, I think, the first one of two graduates from the Clarkston High School at the University of Washington, so I was sort of proud of that.

**JE:** Sure. In college then, your major, did you know exactly when you went in?

**DV:** No, my dad did a lot of reading and he lot I ought to be a CPA. So I took quite a bit of accounting early on, in fact, I had over twenty hours of accounting by the end of my sophomore year. That wasn't me, so I went into marketing, graduated with a major in Marketing and minor in Accounting. And then I went on and received an MBA from the University of Washington.

I also will say this, I dropped out of the University of Washington for a year, and that was one of my best experiences. I always had wanted to see the world and a friend and I, his dad fixed up a '48 Willys Jeepster. We drove it down to San Jose, Costa Rica, slept in the fields. You wouldn't do that today. Ended up making it to Panama.

We got on a sailboat, three of us sailed that boat to Marquises Islands and he needed to come back. He had a lower draft number for the military. And the skipper and I, we sailed it to New Zealand.

**JE:** Wow.

**DV:** And I had five bucks in New Zealand. I worked as a gardener, painter, you know, whatever. I put that in there because that had a lot of bearing on my career later, in terms of understanding global education and a lot of things about people and what have you.

**JE:** At what point in your college career did you drop out?

**DV:** At the end of my junior year. And that about killed everybody but I just had, I mean, college was fine, but I had that opportunity. He and I talked about doing it high school. Back then you wrote letters, you couldn't afford a telephone. And he wrote me a letter and said his dad had fixed up this Jeepster convertible, painted yellow, had a white top. And I was free to do it.

My folks, you know, they had some questions about it probably, but they were okay.

**JE:** Must have been shocked at first?

**DV:** Yeah.

**JE:** You went for a year and then you had no qualms, you knew—

**DV:** Um-hmm (affirmative).

**JE:** ...that you'd be coming back to finish.

**DV:** Um-hmm (affirmative).

**JE:** That was not an issue?

**DV:** Um-hmm (affirmative), no, it wasn't an issue. And I had a fellow in New Zealand that was building a boat, having it built in Australia, to race in the America Cup. And I'd never heard of the America Cup then. And he'd liked me. I'd sailed with him some in New Zealand. He had a construction company. He paid my airfare to come back and finish college and he was hoping I would come back and sail and be his cook and sailor on that boat when he raced.

I came back and the gal I'd dated before I left, I realized I was in love and we married. So I never got back. And I paid him back 'cause I thought that was the right thing to do.

**JE:** You learned sailing on this year that you went down there?

**DV:** Oh, I did, in fact, he needed a navigator and I'd built a boat in high school. This friend and I had a small thirteen foot boat, a Mark Twain Mercury. It couldn't pull you out of the water but it could pull you off the dock. So I was familiar that way, but he needed a navigator and so I told him I would be his navigator.

I got a book down there in Panama, *How to Navigate*, by Mary Blewitt. I'm not sure that was her real name. We got some great charts from the US Navy down there. That was interesting. And I learned how to operate a sextant and mark the chart. And our

Skipper was from Ireland, so he knew something, obviously, about navigation.

But I knew I had about fourteen days before we'd see the Galapagos Islands. And I'd get out and swing that sextant a couple of times a day and mark the chart. I was right on so I felt pretty darn good about that.

But that's a good growth experience and that's the reason I sort of mention a lot of times it's maybe the asterisks in between that are just as important maybe as your normal course.

**JE:** Yeah.

## Chapter 03 – 6:48
## Dean meets Dr. Al Phillips

**John Erling:** This young lady that you met and married, what was her name?

**Dean VanTrease:** Oh, Vesta, Vesta Simonton. We're still married, it's fifty-one years actually.

**JE:** Wow. And how many children?

**DV:** Two, Phil and Gail.

**JE:** Did they end up in the education world?

**DV:** Well, Phil works for Mr. Kaiser. He ended up with a MBA law degree, actually that's from the University of Oregon. He's an Oregon doc. But he went down to Trinity Undergraduate and has the law degree I mentioned.

And Gail is a teacher. Gail was born profoundly deaf so she's never heard a word in her life. She signed on and she's finishing her eighteenth year of teaching school.

**JE:** Where?

**DV:** Arlington, Texas.

**JE:** Wow. So that was—

**DV:** I'm proud of both of them.

**JE:** Absolutely.

**DV:** Um-hmm (affirmative).

**JE:** You said Mr. Kaiser, you meant George Kaiser?

**DV:** Um-hmm (affirmative).

**JE:** So he's an attorney.

**DV:** Well, he is but he works with Argonaut with Mr. Kaiser. It's a special arm that they get involved in interesting ventures.

**JE:** You graduate then with a bachelor's degree and a master's degree.

**DV:** Um-hmm (affirmative).

**JE:** From the University of Washington.

**DV:** Yes.

**JE:** Then what is your first job?

**DV:** I ended up as assistant business manager for a school district in the middle of the state. It was in the desert and people don't think of the state of Washington as having a desert, but it does. Between Seattle and Spokane. The reason I mention that school district, it had a lot of money, it had a SAC base. And they had a public law 94142, as I remember, that provided a lot of funding for that school. In fact, we had a terrific music program all the way down through the elementary schools.

That was a great job for me. They were also starting a college called Big Ben Community College that Dr. Al Phillips was the president of. So he and I got to know each other quite well at that point. But that was real interesting.

**JE:** So the fact that your father had encouraged you to be a CPA, and you followed that for a while—

**DV:** Umm (thoughtful sound).

**JE:** ...did help you then for your first job?

**DV:** Oh, terrific. In fact, that's helped me all through, I mean, starting schools like I was involved with. You had to handle money, you had to know how to move money, you needed to make sure the i's were dotted and the t's were crossed. Accounting was very valuable as well as the marketing was extremely useful too.

**JE:** But even though, as you said, "That wasn't me, being a CPS."

**DV:** No.

**JE:** Wow, what a great recommendation on the part of your father.

**DV:** My father had a good idea, sure.

**JE:** Yeah. Meeting Al Phillips. You'd just see him at meetings because you were all in the education business in that district?

**DV:** No, actually, he came over and interviewed me also.

**JE:** For—

**DV:** At the University of Washington.

**JE:** Oh? As a first job?

**DV:** Yeah.

**JE:** It could have been a first job.

**DV:** It could have been.

**JE:** So he interviewed you for what?

**DV:** Well, teaching business. But the school district actually offered a little more money and they had a data processing operation in that district, which is really progressive way back then. I didn't know much about data processing, why, I drove 140 miles once a week to

take a class how to understand these, I guess we call them computers today. So that was great background there for me.

But I met him interviewing at the University of Washington, didn't accept a job from him but liked him very much. And then I got a job with the school district. The school district was responsible for helping start the college. So I worked then with Al, in terms of the building, the custodial, the maintenance, all of that development. Not the teaching per se, no, I taught as an adjunct faculty member there, taught out in the base.

**JE:** At Big Ben Community College?

**DV:** At Big Ben Community College. And that's where I got to know him. Then, you're just going to think I'm a vagabond, but after a couple of years, we didn't have kids. And I said, "Vest, how'd you like to buy a Volkswagen? We'll pick it up in Europe and drive it through Europe." We didn't have kids, she had money, she was teaching school, and that's what we did. We ended up driving it for about five or six months all through Europe, down to Israel, down through Syria, Jordan, you know, Turkey, on. And came back.

Well, then Al asked if I'd be full-time with him and I did as business manager of the college and taught and helped put together some instructional programs. So it's sort of an interesting way it worked. Al Phillips and I hit it off and throughout all of our lives, I mean, he paid me to be sort of an alter ego when I was executive vice president of college here. But the truth is, I had terrific respect for him and he did for me too for a long time.

**JE:** So when you first met, this was back in the early '60s?

**DV:** 'Sixty-two.

**JE:** 'Sixty-two.

**DV:** Um-hmm (affirmative).

**JE:** You want to expound more on him because he's central to this story as well, Dr. Al Phillips.

**DV:** Well, I'll tell you a little bit about him that I knew. He was a very visionary thinker. He could see the future. And he was a very strong person. If you knew Al, I mean, he believed in something. I mean, he was very persistent about getting it done.

**JE:** Um-hmm (affirmative).

**DV:** Before he came to Big Ben he was president of a college in Wyoming, Sheraton, Wyoming. And then before that caught in an administrative role in college in the state of Washington, Gig Harbor, I think it was called.

**JE:** Where was he originally from?

**DV:** Kansas. He's a product of Emporia State. And his last degree, I think, was at Washington State College.

**JE:** He had a salesman's personality?

**DV:** Oh, very much so.

**JE:** Outgoing?

**DV:** Oh yeah. Interestingly enough, these were small schools compared to these community colleges, called junior colleges back then. But he was on the national board for junior colleges. I think they was called AJC American Junior Colleges. That's important to know because he met Bill Priest, who was on that board and Bill Priest was the new chancellor coming in for Dallas Community College system from California. He wanted Al to come down and be his executive vice chancellor.

And the long and the short of it, what happened then, back then if you were president of a college you might ask two or three people that you wanted maybe to go with you to go. He asked myself and two others, Al did, if we would go to Dallas.

I didn't have a doctor's degree then and I knew if I wanted to stay in administration of the college—and I loved community college, I loved the concept—I'd need a third degree. So that was helpful to get me to Dallas too.

## Chapter 04 – 5:30
## Dallas

**John Erling:** So a couple of key pieces here. You're meeting Al Phillips?

**Dean VanTrease:** Um-hmm (affirmative).

**JE:** He meets Bill Priest.

**DV:** Um-hmm (affirmative).

**JE:** Two big cogs there in this journey. So did you and your wife think twice about this or was it a no-brainer? "Yes, we'll go with him to Dallas"?

**DV:** I would say it was pretty much a no-brainer. Now when I say that, I was treated very well where I was, but back then, they didn't want you to get three degrees from the same university. Today it doesn't matter, but back then that wasn't acceptable particularly. So the University of North Texas, what it's called now, was close to Dallas. And they had a wonderful PhD program that worked very well for me.

**JE:** So that made that move attractive.

**DV:** That was critical.

**JE:** Yeah.

**DV:** And we'd traveled enough and I'd traveled enough that I thought, "Well, Dallas would be interesting." So.

**JE:** Had you ever been in Texas before?

**DV:** Well, I don't recall.

**JE:** You're a Northwest boy so?

**DV:** Northwest boy, I don't recall that I had, per se, no.

**JE:** The mission then in Dallas was to do what?

**DV:** The mission in Dallas when we went there was to establish seven campuses that would serve fifty thousand students by the year 2000.

**JE:** And what year was this?

**DV:** Nineteen sixty-six.

**JE:** Was that the founding then of the Dallas County Community College?

**DV:** Yes.

**JE:** That was the very start of it. So you were on the beginnings there of a community college.

**DV:** Yeah, and actually I was their first faculty association president. I couldn't hold a job in that district very long. They made me division chair and then they made me coordinator for vocational/technical. And then they moved me to dean of the first new campus. And Al got a job offer in Tulsa and wanted me to come. So I did that.

And Dallas, by the way, accomplished what they were asked to do and they [*word indiscernible*] by that year 2000.

**JE:** How old are you about this time when you go to Dallas.

**DV:** Twenty-seven.

**JE:** Is Dr. Phillips about the same age?

**DV:** He's about fifteen years older.

**JE:** That's interesting too that age difference.

**DV:** Um-hmm (affirmative). That was a nice difference.

**JE:** So you really looked to him maybe as a mentor as well?

**DV:** Oh, I just had a lot of respect for him. You know, I still refer to him as Dr. Phillips a lot of times, out of respect. Now he likes to be called Al. He likes for people to call him Al, but I always had a lot of respect for him.

**JE:** In Dallas, Dallas County Community College, were you setting some new trends there as you set that up?

**DV:** Oh, my gosh, yeah. I just think back some about what was going on in hiring cases then. Most of the universities, many were good, but if you were coming back from the Korean War to college you were considered an old man. Now you think about that.

**JE:** Um-hmm (affirmative).

**DV:** If you were a woman you weren't as likely to go to college. If you were a working adult it was difficult for you to go to college. The reason I say that, they had very few evening classes. Many of them weren't in large urban areas. So there was a lot of opportunities for us with those challenges of the universities. And I saw that.

**JE:** So then that was when you offered evening classes?

**DV:** Well, yeah. Day, night, weekend. Let me tell you what we did. We went out and decided to ask the business community what they wanted in terms of the specialized jobs that they had. Dallas is moving into data processing, they called it back then. So we'd go out and visit these companies and find out what they wanted. And then we would tailor programs around them. Now that's very commonly done today, but that wasn't as commonly done back then. We offered tele-courses in Dallas, they were on television. They were developed by Dallas and Coast College from California, St. Louis, and Miami-Dade, four of us, four colleges. The Annenberg Foundation funded them.

So you could take a history course on your TV set, watch it, because we knew a lot of people didn't have access to college. They were living in more rural areas, or maybe they were a firefighter. There was a lot of jobs that weren't conducive to going to class five mornings a week or three days a week. So we got involved in tele-courses, which later became what we now commonly refer to as online courses.

Dallas was very innovative.

**JE:** No question about funding?

**DV:** In Dallas there was no question about funding.

**JE:** Was that mandated funding from the state?

**DV:** Yes, but also a lot of it was local funding. I mean, we had money to build buildings. Oh, we had the money in Dallas, it was unbelievable.

**JE:** Money was no object, as they say?

**DV:** No, but we learned a lot of humility when we came to Tulsa in terms of that aspect of it.

**JE:** And maybe you and Dr. Phillips tried things there that you hadn't done at the Big Ben Community College back in Washington?

**DV:** Yeah, some, like the tele-courses, that was entirely new. But we had the concept. We understood, we'd just never been in a big system like Dallas was opened as and became much bigger.

## Chapter 05 – 5:45
## Tulsa Junior College

**John Erling:** How many years were you there at that college?

**Dean VanTrease:** I was there four years. Al came here in '69, and he went in '66, so he was there probably thirty-three and a half years.

**JE:** Oh, so he came here first?

**DV:** Yes.

**JE:** And you remained in Dallas?

**DV:** Well, that was an interesting story. I was finishing course work for my doctorate while I was down there. So when I told Dr. Priest that I'd like to come to Tulsa, those were the words that he used. Now he was a great baseball pitcher in college, but he used interesting language. He said, "I'd like for you to stay as you finishing your course work and stock the two new campuses, find faculty for the two new campuses." It was building Eastfield and Mountain View at the same time.

So I stayed and helped stock those campuses while Al was up here. Al came up, I think, October '69. I actually didn't come up here full-time until that following year in '70. But I did come up part-time.

So here I was down there finding people for them and I'd come up, I told Al I'd come here. I'd drive up on weekends, about every darn weekend, my wife and I'd come up and we'd stay with Al and Janie, that was his wife, and then I'd be interviewing, Saturday, Sunday, because that's pretty much what I was doing was finding people for the new system here. And I'd drive back on Sunday night and do my thing down there.

**JE:** So the vision for seven campuses, was that realized by the year 2000?

**DV:** Yes.

**JE:** So it did develop and today is a very going college.

**DV:** It's huge, yeah, it's huge.

**JE:** Many cities in the United States had community colleges or junior colleges, as they called them?

**DV:** Well, they do now. I think every large city does. I think they're all called community colleges. A junior college was a carry-over term from the old days where they really were sort of the prep for the universities, you know, the first two years of a four-year degree. In Oklahoma, that name stuck and that's why we ended up calling it Tulsa Junior College here rather than Tulsa Community College initially because in Oklahoma they were all called junior colleges.

**JE:** So you knew that there's no sense in introducing this community concept at this point?

**DV:** No, no, so we went with that.

**JE:** When Al Phillips comes here, where's the money coming from?

**DV:** Okay, now you've got to remember he came in '69. The board was appointed, I think, in early '69, maybe. So he was appointed in '69. The state regents for education had a planning study done in 1965, that said there ought to be junior college or community colleges, whatever you call them, in the two major metropolitan areas. That was Oklahoma City and Tulsa.

**JE:** Because they were in the rural areas?

**DV:** Yeah, they were, and good ones. So from that the Tulsa Chamber was involved, ORU, and TU, and Tulsa Public Schools were very supportive of this junior college actually. Oral Roberts was one of the big supporters. It was interesting.

But what I'm saying, all of this took a little bit of time in terms of getting funding for the college and the state really wasn't fired up on it in terms of a lot of money, but they had a bond issue that allowed for four million dollars for the building. We thought it would be matched and the state thought it would be matched. I think we spent the last of the federal matching money in Dallas. There wasn't any matching money left.

So we didn't have enough money to go out and build a new campus.

**JE:** Let me come back again—

**DV:** That's the beginning.

**JE:** The four million, what I'm trying to get to is—

**DV:** Yeah.

**JE:** When Al came here, what was his budget then?

**DV:** Ohh (drawn out oh).

**JE:** What kind of money did he have?

**DV:** I would say maybe half a million.

**JE:** And that came from?

**DV:** The state.

**JE:** The state. They said, "Here's a half million dollars to start a college"?

**DV:** I mean, it was so tough. We didn't know if we could have enough money to open it. You have no idea how tough it was in the beginning after being in Dallas, coming with this. And I remember the chancellor and our board chair, John Subner, went over to see the chancellor and said, "We've got to have a hundred thousand more dollars or we can't open it." And I think we were all willing to lay our jobs on the line.

**JE:** And the chancellor—

**DV:** He found the money.

**JE:** What was his name?

**DV:** Dr. E. T. Dunlap. Now that's the operating money. And there was the capital funding, and now it's just as tough.

**JE:** The salaries you guys had was quite minimal.

**DV:** Yeah.

**JE:** The funding was difficult, you had to go beg for another hundred thousand. Was there any time in here that either you or Dr. Phillips said, "Do these people really get it?"

**DV:** Well, we thought they got it, but politically, I think Tulsa County had one senator, one, in the mid-'60s, in the state of Oklahoma. One. I think Oklahoma City had two and they claimed another one from Cleveland County, so they had three. When you looked at

state funding and where the people came from most of them rural. So that was a big challenge.

**JE:** Since the Board of Regents has said, "We'd like two junior colleges in our major cities—"

**DV:** Um-hmm (affirmative).

**JE:** ...is one started at the same time in Oklahoma City? Did that happen?

**DV:** No, they had two of them over there, one in South Oklahoma City, and one they called Row State. They opened a year later but they were working on it.

## Chapter 06 – 4:45
## Friends and Funds

**John Erling:** What is your first mission then, once you get in place here with Dr. Phillips, what are you doing?

**Dean VanTrease:** Well, I was primarily finding staff, faculty and staff. We did everything.

**JE:** Your offices, where were they?

**DV:** They were down where Parker Drilling was, downtown off of 3rd and Boston. Bob Parker gave us some space to use. We had a nice relationship early on with a lot of the leaders in Tulsa, they were good people and are good people still.

**JE:** So Bob Parker—

**DV:** Yeah.

**JE:** ...gave you your first space?

**DV:** Um-hmm (affirmative).

**JE:** And gave it to you?

**DV:** As far as I know.

**JE:** Right.

**DV:** It's my memory, that's what I remember.

**JE:** Right. You work out of that office.

**DV:** Um-hmm (affirmative).

**JE:** Then you're working on faculty but I suppose both you and Dr. Phillips are trying to meet as many people in Tulsa as you can.

**DV:** Yeah, there's always two things we believe, well, the main thing. You first of all had to make friends if you wanted to garner funds. We always felt friends and funds go together, so absolutely. In fact, the second summer I was here. I spent half the summer going out to these companies and sitting in these little offices talking to them about what they needed in terms of their company and what they saw for the junior college to do.

But we had a vice president for computer services and data systems that was way ahead of his time, Bob MaLott. We had a vice president for planning, development, Roger Smith, he had done this in several locations before Tulsa, including Dallas. So we had people that understood what needed to be done and could be done and the truth is, we all worked all these things. I did more the employment side of it than they did.

**JE:** You don't have to name any names—

**DV:** Um-hmm (affirmative).

**JE:** ...but were there influential people in the community who didn't receive you and the idea very well? And they could have jumped on and been influential for you but for some reason they didn't?

**DV:** Yes.

**JE:** That had to be surprising to you.

**DV:** No.

**JE:** Why not?

**DV:** Because it was such a change. And you've got to remember, Tulsa was and still is a very private city in terms of focus. Many of their kids went to Brown or Dartmouth or Princeton or Harvard or Yale, and I'm not labeling because we had some that had kids there that was great supporters. I think if you're a bookie back then and tested the marketplace here in terms of would this college ever take off and do anything, I think at least 40 percent of the people wondered why they ever had a junior college in Tulsa. Maybe a higher percentage than that.

There were some, maybe, I'd say, 15 and 20 percent that thought it was a pretty good idea probably.

**JE:** A smaller percentage?

**DV:** Oh, much smaller. And usually when you talk to them about it, it was probably a good idea for someone else's kid. Do you follow that?

**JE:** Um-hmm (affirmative).

**DV:** But didn't mean they were bad, they'd never been educated to what could be. But, yeah, we had some strong critics. Truthfully.

**JE:** So then you had to go back, both of you, to your heart and to know, "Well, I know this is right."

**DV:** Okay.

**JE:** "I know it's worked before."

**DV:** That's right.

**JE:** "And we'll just..." You never, ever thought about giving up?

**DV:** No, no. In fact, I fell in love with the community college concept in 1962, when I became familiar with what they were doing for people. They were taking people where they were,

all kinds of people, and helping them achieve their dreams. And they were doing the same thing with businesses, a lot of these small startup companies as well as the big ones, you know, they had needs. You don't have to be too smart, I think, to understand this. You could see there could be quite a match.

**JE:** Yeah. Maybe it's because I'm looking back, but some of these leaders in our community who didn't support and should have and could have helped you, that they would see if it wasn't for their children, or even an eighteen-year-old, that it was serving the need of businesses. And it was serving the need for so-called "adults" at that time. And they still didn't support that.

**DV:** Well, they were very neutral about it.

**JE:** Okay.

**DV:** Let's put it that way.

**JE:** They didn't speak out against it but they didn't help you.

**DV:** The only ones that really spoke out against the college was like when we located downtown that we had some legislators that wanted to have it in North Tulsa or South Tulsa or West Tulsa. We had that kind of thing going on.

**JE:** Is Bob LaFortune the mayor then?

**DV:** Bob LaFortune and I always put Bob LaFortune on a pedestal because we needed some additional money to buy the building that we were leasing. That was the Sinclair headquarters building.

**JE:** Let's talk about that a little bit here.

**DV:** Okay. Bob LaFortune plays into that.

## Chapter 07 – 2:35
## The Sinclair Building

**John Erling:** There you're sitting in your offices at 3rd and Boston and eventually you say, "All right, we need to move ahead and we need a building."

**Dean VanTrease:** Um (thoughtful sound).

**JE:** So the word went out in the community and I suppose everybody who owned a building said, "Here's a building."

**DV:** Oh, hey, we crawled through about every empty building in Tulsa. Someone, the vice president and Al also looked at them. The answer is yes we did, we looked at all kinds of buildings.

**JE:** Then you settled on the Sinclair building as a leasing situation to begin with.

**DV:** Yes.

**JE:** Why the Sinclair building at 10th and Boston?

**DV:** One, the price was right and the building could be reconfigured if we chose to do it on a relatively inexpensive basis. And the other thing, it was a terrific location itself. It still is a terrific location, it's incredible and more people stuck on metro campus. We knew we'd have parking problems with that building, but we'd have parking problems with about any building in downtown.

Also, you need to know this, we were provided land. Part of the deal was that the city or the community had to come up with some land. Well, they ended up coming up with the railway depot and about three and a half blocks down there. It's a nice facility, I love the depot, the Jazz Hall of Fame now and all, but—

**JE:** Union Station?

**DV:** The Union Station. And then we had land that was provided across the river on the west side that wasn't conducive to us, which later became through Dr. Phillips's thinking, the OCOM, the Oklahoma College of Osteopathic Medicine site.

**JE:** It was a trade out there, wasn't it?

**DV:** Well, we sort of give and took, yeah.

**JE:** So you say you had this land, why did you have this land?

**DV:** It was provided to the college through the community.

**JE:** Okay. We have four campuses now. Was that the vision from the very start, to have four campuses?

**DV:** Yes, by the year 2000.

**JE:** Oh, you set the goal here too by 2000?

**DV:** Uh-huh (affirmative).

**JE:** Did we reach it by 2000?

**DV:** Yeah. Fourth one was open in 1995, I believe.

**JE:** Let's go back again to the Sinclair building where you leased, I believe, the bottom three floors.

**DV:** That's correct. It was all painted green. As you remember the Sinclair green back then, they had a little old gas station on one little part next to it, the Dinosaur. Remember the Dinosaur?

**JE:** Yeah.

**DV:** But that's what we did. We ended up leasing it and it worked out very well. I believe Arco had two floors, and the top floor, I think, was called Red Bud Fertilizer. We shared it with the businessmen. We shared the cafeteria and different things.

## Chapter 08 – 2:05
## Outsiders

**John Erling:** The newspaper, the *Tulsa World*, did they editorialize? Were they helpful to you from the beginning?

**Dean VanTrease:** Overall, yes. Overall. Once in a while they had some cartoons in there that were pretty tough.

**JE:** They didn't see the vision or they didn't like the way it was going on?

**DV:** Well, you had legislators blasting us for not putting it where they wanted it located. I'm not sure that I can find it, but I think one time they a cartoon about sending three of these Texans back across the Red River on a horse. Now, when I say that, I think the *Tulsa World* itself, the leadership, the ownership, yes, was supportive.

**JE:** Um-hmm (affirmative).

**DV:** And the *Tribune* was involved then too, you know it?

**JE:** That's right.

**DV:** But I think knowing what I know today they're probably as supportive as they could have been under the circumstances.

**JE:** Right. I was going to ask you that earlier, you really would be perceived as—even though you weren't—Texans.

**DV:** Oh, we were.

**JE:** How—

**DV:** We were and I laughed. Dr. Phillips was from Kansas.

**JE:** Yeah.

**DV:** I mean, none of us actually were from Texas, but actually coming up Bob MaLott, who was our vice president for data systems and all, he was at that point with Tarrant County in Fort Worth. Roger Smith had been in Dallas, so there were four of us that had really been down there. So you can see where that came from.

**JE:** We should point out too, this was the first startup of a school in fifty years.

**DV:** That's right. That's a big deal for Oklahoma. A first public institution in fifty years.

**JE:** Yeah, right.

**DV:** Yeah.

**JE:** With this community so supportive of OSU and OU I suppose there were those and, in fact, those at those two schools were worried about the fight for money?

**DV:** I can't speak for them but it always turns out that way. Now in the end, I'd have to say that OSU and OU, as far as I was concerned when I was president, were very supportive of us. I just have to tell you, but I think we earned that respect over a period of time. That's my take.

**JE:** But they must have looked askance at the beginning?

**DV:** Yeah, I'm sure.

**JE:** Yeah.

## Chapter 09 – 3:10
## American Airlines

**John Erling:** Some names of people that were important. The president of American Airlines, and what was his name?

**Dean VanTrease:** George Wordy.

**JE:** Wordy?

**DV:** W-o-r-d-y.

**JE:** Was he an early supporter?

**DV:** Yeah. He was on our board. He became president of American Airlines just after he was named regent for the college. By the way, he started out as a mechanic. Did you know that?

**JE:** I did not know that.

**DV:** Worked all the way to the presidency of American Airlines. And I'll tell you why George was supportive. George had to move to New York right after he was named president, so he was almost named to our Board of Regents, and then got on the next plane to New York to live. But he loved Tulsa, you know, and he came back and he retired in Tulsa. He liked Al Phillips and he wanted American Airlines to have their own computerized reservation system.

I remember, there were only boys in this room at this time. He says, "Boys," the three of us, "do you think you could train people to operate these computers if we put what we would call the saber system in Tulsa, Oklahoma?"

So I go back to my career, getting an early start with data processing in '62, our experience, all of us, in Dallas, and Bob MaLott, who was our vice president for computer systems, he was a genius in that area, and he said, "Absolutely. We can train all you want, how you want them." That's how we ended up with saber systems.

**JE:** Wow, in that moment that was real key, wasn't it?

**DV:** Oh, it was key, in fact, American Airlines, ten years later their saber system referred to us in their publication as the MIT of the Southwest in computer education.

**JE:** So and Dr. Phillips must have said, "I believe we have something here," right?

**DV:** Oh, gee, it was terrific. He was one of the early ones. John Sabut was another one. John was our board chair and he was a good friend of the governor.

**JE:** Dewey Bartlett Sr.

**DV:** Yes. And Dewey was a big supporter of ours too, by the way. He likes MO Tech and I know he liked our school.

**JE:** That was good to have the governor as a friend. Did funding come about because of Dewey's support of your concept?

**DV:** Oh yes. I couldn't say that directly, but yes, he had to have been key to that.

**JE:** I think there's a neat Bartlett family story connected to the Southeast campus land.

**DV:** Oh, it's a wonderful story. Later on, we were looking for land in the Southeast. Dewey was still alive. He had cancer at the time. They had a nice plot of land out there. Dewey then passed on and his wife and Dewey Jr. sold us that eighty acres out there for half price. And today it's worth phew. So I'll always be beholden to the Bartlett family for what they did.

**JE:** Yeah.

## Chapter 10 – 4:55
## Oral Roberts

**John Erling:** Let's go back to Oral Roberts. To what degree did he support? And did you meet with him initially and how did he receive you and the idea?

**Dean VanTrease:** Okay. Al really became Oral's good friend initially. First of all I'll say this, I believe that ORU, TU, and the Tulsa public schools each contributed twenty-five thousand dollars for a study related to the establishment of Tulsa Junior College.

**JE:** Hmm (surprised sound).

**DV:** So I give them all credit, TU, ORU, and Tulsa public schools. But Oral, he became really critical to us because he publicly supported the college right off the bat.

**JE:** His school had already been—

**DV:** Here.

**JE:** ...established.

**DV:** And were doing a terrific job.

**JE:** Right.

**DV:** But he saw the need for Tulsa Junior College. In fact, we were the only place that he would let his full-time faculty teach as adjunct faculty members.

**JE:** Hmm (thoughtful sound).

**DV:** Does that tell you something?

**JE:** Yep.

**DV:** So I always will have good memories of Oral Roberts.

**JE:** And the community then knew that—

**DV:** Yeah.

**JE:** ...that he was supportive.

**DV:** Yeah.

**JE:** And he was very outspoken about it.

**DV:** Yeah, yeah, yeah.

**JE:** President of TU at that time, Paschal Twyman.

**DV:** Paschal Twyman. He was good. Gene Sweringen was another that, you know, had been president and had been dean at OSU. There were a lot of people that were supportive and spoke out in favor.

**JE:** With Tulsa public schools, would Bruce Hall have been part of that at that point, or not?

**DV:** It was a little before Bruce.

**JE:** Yeah.

**DV:** But Bruce was key. He was very, very important.

**JE:** Obviously you found out the needs. You had this product and you went to the consumer, which would be potential students.

**DV:** Uh-huh (affirmative).

**JE:** To find out what they needed the most.

**DV:** Um-hmm (affirmative).

**JE:** Did you already know that from your Dallas experience?

**DV:** Some, yeah, because we had to put together catalogs before we opened. We actually published our programs. We didn't have any money for printing hardly, but we decided to go directly to the people. So we ran ads with just our programs and courses in the *Tulsa World* and the *Tulsa Tribune*. That was our marketing, but believe it or not, it worked. And so you could go back from then and see what courses we were offering. We picked that up a lot from Dallas. Hey, we had the traditional pre-university, some of them, but we had fire fighting, we had some health courses, we had a little engineering in there.

You got to remember, the committee didn't think we'd have fifteen hundred students come downtown. And with that modest marketing and all we ended up with 2,796 students.

**JE:** Did you have to sell to the other major institutions the fact that you were not duplicating what they were doing? That you were meeting the needs of businesses?

**DV:** Yeah, we believed we were meeting the needs of businesses. And we were charged, we needed to, in effect, duplicate university courses at the freshman/sophomore level. Because that was part of our mission.

**JE:** Okay, so you—

**DV:** Like English, History, the main thing there was to make sure it was compatible with what they offered, and we did a very good job of that. So when students would transfer, say,

from Tulsa to OSU or to OU or TU we worked a lot of the private schools in the same field early on so that all those courses that they took that were the pre-university courses, they wouldn't have to mess with them again.

**JE:** Well, those major schools didn't see you as competition at that level?

**DV:** Well, I'm not going to speak for the school, but there were people in the schools that saw us as competition. But the leaders saw us primarily as complementary, or not a real threat. We were probably a threat to them money-wise going back, but they weren't too sure that this community college would much themselves, probably some of them.

**JE:** Even to this day they offer, what is it, fourteen different languages? Was that from the get-go, an offering you began with?

**DV:** Well, I told you about my trip to New Zealand. And the trip to Europe, Middle East. You're talking to a person today that is very global and has been global way before people pronounced the word.

**JE:** Before global was global?

**DV:** Before global was global. Boy, Tulsa was so receptive to these languages with the oil ties. I couldn't believe it. And then we even had them coming from ORU. We could teach the right kind of Greek language for them because we were large enough. We had enough students to be able to offer all these courses, but we'd still have fourteen languages. Now we didn't start with fourteen languages.

**JE:** Right.

**DV:** We started with three. I think it's the largest program probably still throughout the Midwestern United States. It's huge.

**JE:** Hmm (thoughtful sound).

## Chapter 11 – 5:35
## Opening Day

**John Erling:** What's the date of the first day you opened up?

**Dean VanTrease:** September 12, 1970.

**JE:** Tell us about the first day. What was that like?

**DV:** Ha-ha-ha. It was rather hectic from my standpoint, it was thoroughly null. We had people lined up everywhere. We hadn't been able to get all the green off the walls so they were in that green Sinclair building, trying to get enrolled. We used cards, get them in classes. It was way beyond what anybody in the community expected in terms of numbers of students. We knew there'd be more, we didn't realize there'd be double.

Our facilities could only hold so much, maybe that's why we started out with that fire fighting program initially. We had to have the fire fighters with us.

**JE:** Yeah.

**DV:** Because we really jammed up those rooms. We bought chairs, we got chairs for probably a couple thousand. So we needed people to bring pillows; they sat on pillows, some brought lawn chairs.

**JE:** There was a lot you'd have only about fifteen hundred but you opened up with almost three thousand?

**DV:** Yes, so that something right then, didn't it? Yeah. Yeah, it was wild. And I have to say this, probably our first three years when we were leasing that Sinclair space before we bought the building were three of the most exciting years of the college. For everybody, for the students, faculty. We had five faculty members in an office, some of those offices. Some of them smoked, some of them didn't.

Think back about that, I feel guilty about that today. It was packed but everybody got caught up in the deal. I mean, they really were focused on making it a success.

**JE:** How many faculty members did you open up with?

**DV:** We opened up with sixty full-time people and probably forty-five.

**JE:** Where did these faculty members come from?

**DV:** Primarily from this area, not all of them, but primarily from Oklahoma, at the start.

**JE:** And you were able to be competitive with salaries?

**DV:** We did our best. You know, I was sort of trained to be a salesman too, so I tried to sell them on the idea this is something new, something you could really make a difference for this community, this state, and have an opportunity to be part of the ground floor. And I'll tell you, John, of those sixty, twenty-five years later half of them were still with us.

**JE:** Wow. That's great. That opening day, the demographics, the age, the gender, how does that break out?

**DV:** Well, it was predominantly male, it was 60 percent male, 40 percent female. Today it's reversed. They were older. I can't remember what our average age was then, I think about twenty-five. I don't what it is today, probably about twenty-seven. And they were from all walks of life.

When I think back, you remember pot smoking was sort of in?

**JE:** Yeah.

**DV:** You know, every generation has their own thing, but if we saw young people that saw it maybe it was just a fun place to come and party or whatever, we tried to really talk them out of it.

**JE:** Um-hmm (affirmative).

**DV:** The people that were there, when I think back to those first classes of people and what they've become, I mean, our first student body chairman has been a dentist for years in Tulsa.

**JE:** His name?

**DV:** Joe Diggs. Dr. Joe Diggs. And his wife was a teacher.

We had one Mike had a little question about that ended up heading the security program I think at OU. I mean, it's amazing.

**JE:** Um-hmm (affirmative).

**DV:** I'm pretty sure we weren't their first choice in a lot of cases, but because of where they were in life and maybe where their family situations were, here they were. And they were shining stars.

We had a gal come with us, she was Miss TJC back then, Dana Geesey. That's not her married name, that's her maiden name. Her parents were deceased and she had a sister in high school that she was taking care of. I almost have tears when I talk about her. We found out about her and got her some money to help her. She majored in chemical engineering, graduated 3.8 from TJC. She graduated with that high grade point average at the University of Tulsa.

**JE:** Hmm (thoughtful sound).

**DV:** See, so we had a lot of them that were really motivated.

**JE:** The faculty could give these students really some close to one-on-one—

**DV:** Ohh (drawn out).

**JE:** ...because they were really tight and close with them, weren't they?

**DV:** They were. In fact, one of my goals, one of my hidden agendas, I wanted every student to have one champion at the college. I didn't care if they were a security officer or a librarian or a receptionist. I'd talk about that with our people, I said, "You know, if every one of these students had somebody outside of their home that they thought cared about them I think it'll change their life.

**JE:** Yep. Yep.

**DV:** I don't know how successful we've been, but I think pretty successful.

**JE:** I'm sure you were. Tuition, what was the cost?

**DV:** Seven twenty-five. But I'll tell you what, back then tuition was pretty expensive. The University of Washington was seven twenty-five a credit hour. That was a few years earlier. It was pretty reasonable.

**JE:** At the end of that first day, both of you must have been exhausted and all—

**DV:** Oh, we were.

**JE:** ...but every—

**DV:** But you're excited. You know, if you've ever played sports and you win a big game, you can't go to sleep at night.

## Chapter 12 – 3:00
## Robert LaFortune

**John Erling:** I believe also then that you were searching for other places for a campus. You wanted land, but then it was decided to purchase the Sinclair building.

**Dean VanTrease:** Yes.

**JE:** How did that come about? And the funding for that?

**DV:** The legislature ended up giving us an additional two and a half million dollars, but we needed $2,956,000. So we were short $456,000. Now we'll go back to Mayor Bob LaFortune.

**JE:** Yep.

**DV:** The legislature said that was it. We couldn't negotiate it any further on that price. That's the lowest they would give it to us. We didn't know what we were going to do. Al became good friends with Bob LaFortune. He would go down and he'd talk to him. And he said, "I don't know what we're going to do. We've got this difference."

**JE:** And he made the difference?

**DV:** Bob had him visit with the city leaders. They were different back then, you had a team of five that ran the city, like the council. Then the city had, I think, something they called models city monies, and they had about a half a million dollars left over. That some way they believed they could transfer. They checked it out very carefully, $456,000 to the college. Bob LaFortune led that effort and that's how we ended up with the Sinclair building.

**JE:** Wow. There was no community push back on that or if Bob said it, it was a good idea because he—

**DV:** Well, Bob had a lot of influence, I mean, yeah, if Bob said it, it still does today. I mean, if you want to pass a bond issue, Bob would do it. He was the guy you wanted on TV or on the radio.

**JE:** Huh. Another key moment for you, wasn't it?

**DV:** It was a very key moment.

**JE:** But you can't just buy buildings and do this, you needed to go out and buy land for the buildings.

**DV:** We had to have the land basically donated for the buildings.

**JE:** Okay.

**DV:** So the land that ended up sufficing for the Sinclair building was actually the depot. And the land across the river, that became the jetama as far as the state was concerned. Now the fact that later we swapped some of that land near the depot building for the eighty acres for the northeast campus. That's a whole nother story.

**JE:** Okay. But why did the land have to be donated?

**DV:** It was just written in the law.

**JE:** The state law?

**DV:** Yeah, yeah, or the regents. I'd have to go back and—

**JE:** And you couldn't go out and buy the land?

**DV:** Oh, you could buy the land but we didn't have money for anything.

**JE:** Okay.

**DV:** But the original idea was that it'd be donated by the community.

**JE:** All right.

**DV:** But later we did buy the land on the southeast campus. We did have the land donated for the west campus and the northeast and the metro campus, so there's three of them.

**JE:** So the mission was four campuses from the get go?

**DV:** Uh-huh (affirmative).

## Chapter 13 – 3:20
## Campuses

**John Erling:** The northeast campus, let's talk about that a little bit because that was the first campus, beyond the metro.

**Dean VanTrease:** Yeah, beyond the metro.

**JE:** Moving out of downtown.

**DV:** Yeah.

**JE:** Tell us about that land and some of your challenges there.

**DV:** Well, we had a lot of challenges. We had a lot more students that wanted to come to the metro campus, was what we called it, than what we had space for. And we didn't have the money to build anything out on the northeast campus. And Williams Companies were involved because the land was near Williams site in Tulsa now. There was a land swap that Williams got involved with, with urban development, a federal program where the arrangement was very legal, very interesting. That two blocks of land downtown was swapped for eighty acres, which was acquired through Urban Renewal. And could have been considered a donation of that land.

That land swap occurred, I think, in the early '70s. We didn't have, again, a nickel for it, but we had all these students who wanted to come. So we ended up in State Office building. We ended up with three floors of the State Office building across from the convention center.

**JE:** Um-hmm (affirmative).

**DV:** In that building. Before we opened we had close to ten thousand students. We used a little bit of Memorial High School, Broken Arrow Middle School, some different locations. So in 1976, the State Office building was an intermediary facility for the college until we get some money for the northeast campus. We got enough money to buy a double trailer for the northeast campus and we taught horticulture in that double trailer out on the northeast campus. Those were our first campuses' classrooms, you would say.

And then we ended up with some state bond money. The state had a bond issue. That got us started really with some permanent buildings out on the northeast campus. We wanted to open in '79, we didn't get the construction done till that winter of '80. So you ended up in Douglas Elementary School, which now is a police facility out there.

Think about the water fountains and the toilets and all. But we made do a semester out in that school and we're thankful to have that sort of in the interim. But the northeast campus in '79, and we focused that campus—all of our campuses had the liberal arts, the general education. Northeast we wanted focused more on engineering and aviation and some of these programs.

So every campus sort of has some specialized non-duplicative programs. The northeast, ooh, we couldn't afford to pave the parking—I think every car got pushed out some time during the winter. You know, it was muddy. We ran two by twelve planks down so if they get from their car to the plank and could stay on these two by twelve's they could probably make it to the building.

But, you know, it was sort of a fun time too. And I can just tell you a million stories.

## Chapter 14 – 3:00
## Ethnic Mix

**John Erling:** Early on then you had to decide on the programs for each campus.

**Dean VanTrease:** Uh-huh (affirmative).

**JE:** And you wanted a good ethnic mix.

**DV:** Oh yes.

**JE:** And so the choice of curriculum for each campus helped spread the ethnic mix out.

**DV:** Yes, very much so. That was important to us and it was also important to us that everyone that attended the college feeled that their campus was the best campus. On every campus, every campus at that college you will find programs. They'll tell you the best in the United States. Like if you go to West they'll tell their child development program is

one of the top five in the United States, and there's no doubt in my mind that it is. Or they'll tell you that their vet tech program is one of the top three in the United States.

That's no accident, we wanted every campus, like Metro—do you know at one time Metro campus offered 130 different classes in the computer sciences?

**JE:** Wow.

**DV:** I'm talking about different, not the same sections over and over, different titled classes. So every campus sort of ended up, you know, if you was going to take Police Science or Fire Protection it would be Metro quality programs.

Southeast has their share too but also their music and their bio-medical. So every campus is set that way.

**JE:** So there was no duplication other than the very basics—

**DV:** Yeah.

**JE:** ...beyond that?

**DV:** Because you couldn't afford it. But because of that you had a great ethnic mix too.

**JE:** When the Northeast campus was built nothing had been built up north for a long time. Some people scratching their head on that too? And why would you go up north?

**DV:** Well—

**JE:** Why would you build there?

**DV:** We wanted to do that. I still have a real soft spot in my heart. I still see a lot of other opportunities for us in North Tulsa, I'm talking all of Tulsa. But the only way to have a totally successful community is having all parts of the community successful.

**JE:** Hmm (thoughtful sound).

**DV:** A lot of people in Tulsa, who shall remain nameless, had never been to North Tulsa. We just thought we needed to make a statement today, it's only four minutes from the airport. It's got a wonderful freeway system to the campus. And we just thought we had to do that.

Now a lot of them wanted us to go south, we wanted to go south, but we knew if we went south before north we may never get to north.

And I also need to tell you we also had land donated to us for the West campus. Very early on, but the roads weren't set up for it. They had a reversion clause and eventually we had to allow that to revert back to the owners.

But Northeast campus is a very special campus, yeah.

**JE:** Um-hmm (affirmative).

## Chapter 15 – 3:45
## Helping Others

**John Erling:** You helped other schools get started too, didn't you?

**Dean VanTrease:** Yeah, we did. We helped Ocan's, Ocan College West Opathic Medicine get started early on. In fact, they used our library, they used the building, which is now the Alfred M. Phillips Health Sciences Center. That was the old Oklahoma School of Accountancy. They used that facility. We made them part of our family in the beginning. We shared cafeteria, books.

And then with OU when they decided maybe they needed to bring over their OU School of Medicine, we worked with them in the same way to get them started. I feel really good about those things.

In my whole career I've always believed in partnerships. I always believed you help someone else do the right thing everybody benefits.

**JE:** Right. Langston? Did you help Langston?

**DV:** Oh yeah. Did we help Langston. We gave Langston their initial space when we vacated the State Office complex. We gave them the furniture and the things that we could give them. Now they still had to lease it, you know, from the state. I can't remember how that all worked, but I'm still a supporter of Langston.

There's a lot of stories there in terms of all the schools that are now here and I'm thrilled that they are here.

**JE:** But you had a hand in helping them at the beginning?

**DV:** All of them, every one of them, OSU Tulsa and OU came over. I look back and I'll always have great respect for David Boren and Jim Halligan and people because they worked with us. They saw the possibilities, and look what they've done. It's pretty amazing.

And I look at what NSU has done in Broken Arrow. I even take a little credit for Roger State. I don't know if it's still but because I was always sort of out with all these different folks we were sort of like a little dog, you might say. And I could invite all these people to meetings, presidents and all and they'd show up. Because I don't think we were really a threat to anybody and they'd sort of rub our tummy and make us smile, you know, and that was a neat thing. That was a really good time in Tulsa, for Tulsa.

My vision back then too was that the Tulsa area should be serving seventy-five thousand students in higher education by the year 2020. We're going to see if that dream comes true.

**JE:** How many is it serving today?

**DV:** I think over fifty.

**JE:** Um-hmm (liking sound).

**DV:** When we came it was serving about seven with ORU and TU.

**JE:** So it looks like you're on target then, doesn't it?

**DV:** Well, I don't know, we'll see.

**JE:** Tell us about the first graduation ceremony, how many you had and what a joy that had to be.

**DV:** Ha. Our first graduation ceremony was actually at the end of our first year. Because we had a few students transfer in with enough credits to graduate at the end of the first year. We were checking them off and working with them and listening to them and looking at data. We actually had eleven of them go through graduation and it was on the third floor of the Sinclair building. Governor David Hall, who was the commencement speaker, it wasn't a huge crowd, probably 150 maybe showed up. That's about all that room would hold, but it was special.

And what is interesting is knowing today how successful many of those early people have been in their lives. I had no idea but it is really interesting.

**JE:** Hmm (thoughtful sound).

**DV:** And the one that I think I mentioned earlier is it was the chair of the student association, he's a dentist. He did graduate the first year, his wife's a teacher. I mean, it's just amazing how well a lot of them have done.

**JE:** That had to be a big day.

**DV:** Oh, it was a big day.

## Chapter 16 – 6:00
## Dean Becomes President

**John Erling:** Dr. Phillips retires in 1989.

**Dean VanTrease:** Yes.

**JE:** Tell us a little bit about why he felt he needed to retire.

**DV:** He was sixty-six, I believe, or sixty-seven and he just felt he had done what he could do. He was ready to pass the baton on to somebody else, I'm sure, because I'd worked with him so long he probably really hoped I would get the job and probably was influential some way in that. But he was ready.

And I was too when I retired, I mean, you just reach a point, you say, "Well, I've been at this a long time." You know, being a president of a college is usually about a five-year cycle nationally. So if you've been president, in his case it's almost twenty

years, my case fifteen years, you've probably gone through three cycles of presidents in most colleges.

**JE:** Um-hmm (affirmative).

**DV:** I think he was just ready.

**JE:** And then you became the president.

**DV:** Um-hmm (affirmative).

**JE:** And the CEO in 1989. That was a no-brainer, I'm sure for Board of Regents and everybody else.

**DV:** Well, you'd have to ask them. They interviewed and went through a good process. We had good boards collage sakes.

**JE:** So you're fifty-one years old—

**DV:** Um-hmm (affirmative).

**JE:** ...when you become president.

**DV:** Um-hmm (affirmative).

**JE:** When was the name changed from Tulsa Junior College to Tulsa Community College?

**DV:** In 1996. And I want to give a little credit where credit is due. Roger Randall suggested that. We were working on some legislation together and he said, "Dean, why don't you change the name?"

You know, I thought about it. You know, Roger had a pretty good legislative back then too, so we just put that in at that time. That's a good time to do it because nationally all of them were being called community colleges.

**JE:** Right, even though we were a junior college concept idea—

**DV:** Yeah.

**JE:** ...in Oklahoma, that was not a pushback on that, I'm sure.

**DV:** No, no, uh-uh (negative).

**JE:** When you become president then did you have some new goals? I know one of them, one of your achievements, was the creation of the Performing Arts Center for Education.

**DV:** Well, that was one of them. But sure, I had a lot of things that I knew I needed to do and we didn't have the West campus. That's a whole nother in itself. I wanted to move us strongly into Internet learning. In fact, today we may be one of the largest schools in the country using the Internet. I saw the possibilities of that. And the reason for that.

Do you remember Peter Drucker?

**JE:** The name?

**DV:** Writer?

**JE:** Um-hmm (affirmative).

**DV:** He was a management guru, very highly respected for business throughout the world. He said that by 2030, one-third of the adult students will learn through Internet or alternative learning. And I believed in that. Tele-courses, I was involved in the beginning of those in

Dallas. And I believed adults needed options. And what you wanted to make sure you avoided was people thinking they could just grab a beer and sit back on their sofa and watch TV.

**JE:** Um-hmm (affirmative).

**DV:** Initially we tried to talk them out of tele-courses, required them all to come to campus. Said, "Look, we don't want you taking these courses if you just think it's going to be a blow-off deal." And then we did the studies that compared how they did in those courses with others. They did just as well.

That's still my main thing, this anytime, anywhere learning, because I think that is a—in fact, in America, the other thing I read about early on was that half the people by 2000, would not be employed full time. I think today in America, less than half the people that are employed are employed full time. You might check me out on that. And they're having to update in their jobs or changing jobs regularly.

Back then I felt they would change jobs seven times during their lifetime. Today it may be more than that. So I felt we had to have an education system in place for these adults and women. There was no reason for not as many women going to college as men. They're just as bright.

Well, that changed the whole deal. I mean, our enrollment flipped from 60 percent male to 60 percent female because they were way behind, in terms of the opportunities. There had to be a lot more choices for them because women, a lot of them were raising children, they were working outside the home, they were doing a lot of different things. And for them to go somewhere five days a week at ten in the morning, that was pretty tough.

So today I think we now have enough things for the employers—oh, and the other thing was I remember we taught classes at McDonnell Douglas when they were here, at midnight.

**JE:** Hmm (thoughtful sound).

**DV:** On site for them. You got to take it anywhere, anyplace, anytime. To me, that's where education is today. The universities are basically there in a lot of ways.

I remember the president of OU when we opened. He spoke two weeks later at the Rotary downtown to Al Phillips. Al Phillips talked to him about all these big dreams. He didn't share much of any of those dreams, you know, because his university wasn't doing much with evening classes.

**JE:** Who was president then of OU?

**DV:** Holloman, Dr. Holloman. I'm not putting him down, I'm just saying that pretty well reflected a lot of the thinking. But, boy, you look at the universities today, I mean, they're out there teaching anywhere and everywhere. Globally. And we had sister colleges, universities even back then.

The second OU president was part of that point four program with Truman, President Truman. That was way ahead of its time, I mean, in terms of a university. As a land-grab college it was. But I think the colleges are really living with where it ought to be in terms of this global, anyplace, anytime.

Hey! If guys need to go somewhere in the military they ought to be able to continue their learning while they're there at your institution.

## Chapter 17 – 10:00
## Change Agents

**John Erling:** Did you have the vision for the Internet in 1989?

**Dean VanTrease:** Oh yeah.

**JE:** You gave credit to Dr. Phillips for being a visionary. You were a visionary as well.

**DV:** Well, we sort of traveled the same path in terms of looking at the future.

**JE:** Community colleges became a change agent.

**DV:** That's what they were. I was a change agent.

**JE:** Yeah.

**DV:** If you want to ask me what I was the people would've said, "Probably a visionary, highly motivated, a change agent." I've always believed in risk-taking. I'm going to tell you, this is sort of a side story but an important part of my life. I always tried to employ a group of people who were change agents. Like our vice president for computer systems. Our person who headed the international language program—I got her luckily out of the University of Texas—that I knew would rock the boat. I mean, they had to be tough people and I knew a lot about these people.

Change agents are like angels on earth. They got their old wings flapping, doing good things, but they rock the boat. A lot of people don't like change agents, they like the status quo. So every once in a while these angels, change agents, they'd flop and hit the cement.

My role is to grab them off the cement, dust them off, and get them back flying again. And I give a lot of credit to our college the fact that we supported change agents. People that looked at things differently, were willing to risk their careers in doing things differently.

Like our lady, Dr. Laura Walker, from the University of Texas. When we brought her in most universities taught French, Spanish, and German. After I talked to her a while, I said, "Laura, what do you think if we teach these people how to function in these environments where Spanish is spoken, or Portuguese?"

And that's what she wanted to do. She was traditionally trained, but she said, "You know, we need to teach them the practical."

And that's why the program, I think when I retired, had four thousand enrollments or some as huge. You don't learn languages to learn language.

Like I needed to learn language to receive my PhD. I had to learn two languages, pretty much learned them on my own, but that was not the way to learn them. So you could take languages here for credit. You could take them in East Coast special programs, continuing education.

And I brought in another gal, she had worked with Amerada Hess. I don't know what her role was over there, administrative something, assistant, Sue Lowman. We couldn't find somebody as a change agent for what we called non-credit classes. That was part of our function. So the first year we didn't offer it.

So we brought in a gal that had our legal secretary program, penal system. Her name was Sue Wilson. After watching her for about a year I thought, "You know, this is the gal that's going to be our change agent for a lot of our programs." I talked to her, I said, "Well, I need somebody to come in and figure out programs that are just valuable to the community. They won't have college credit in the traditional sense, but things people like to take." And she was the one. I could just tell it.

Her first class was, as I remember, Lady Know Your Car. Taught by a guide who was involved in our security. Everybody loved him, Cal Newton. Taught gals, you know, the mechanics sort of blew them off.

We also started the College for Kids, this is one of the programs I'm most proud of. Took it down to three years old, put courses primarily in the summer together for these kids. I had my own take some of those courses too. Out of that was the Computer College for Kids. I took my two kids up to the lake where I had a place and we didn't have a TV there. We didn't allow TVs in our house up there at the time.

But one time, Christmas time, I took our little TV and I bought a TI-4A computer, that little computer, I paid ninety-nine bucks. And saw my kids could program that computer in basic to sing the "Yellow Rose of Texas," or whatever the song was. And they did, and they were pretty young.

So I came back to Sue, I said, "Sue, we need to have a computer college for kids this summer." There was only one school that I was aware that was doing something, actually that was called North Texas State, that was in North Texas, was doing some things. So I sent her down there.

We didn't have space, we leased some out at Memorial High School. The air conditioner wasn't very good, but it was a school and they appreciated it. Every parent I talked to about it said, "Nobody is going to do this."

I said, "We're going to set this program out here. We're going to have these kids come for three hours and fifteen minutes in the morning, and we're going to teach them computers."

They said, "Well, nobody will ever come."

We had a thousand show up, they didn't even want to take potty breaks.

**JE:** And how old are the children?

**DV:** Those were middle school/high school at that time. And maybe younger. I can't remember, but it was just instant. From that then we had the Community College for Kids, we had College for Young Scholars, we did some of those with TU.

We wanted more women involved in sciences and health programs. TU had space for housing and that was a great way for our faculty and their faculty to get to know each other.

We had College for Young Scholars, we even had Duke University, who was nationally known for these summer programs, we were the only college university selected in the whole Midwestern United States that they recognized for the program for kids. The only one.

**JE:** Wow.

**DV:** So, yeah, I feel good about some of those things. I don't take any credit, all I did was support them, cheer them on, pick them up when they needed a little support, but special programs is still huge today. All the different things.

Retirees, I've got a friend that just retired, architect at St. Francis, he takes Scan out on the Southeast Campus.

**JE:** Your children, how old were they when you went to the lake with them?

**DV:** Nine and seven, maybe.

**JE:** What year would that have been about?

**DV:** Late '70s or early '80s.

**JE:** You were on the cutting edge, the early edge of computers.

**DV:** Oh yeah.

**JE:** And the fact that you brought that idea back and said, "You know, if my kids can do it everybody else can do," and drove that.

**DV:** I still have that computer too, by the way.

**JE:** That's great.

**DV:** A lot of it's just being out there and listening to people. It is.

**JE:** What is the name of the program?

**DV:** It's College for Kids and College for Teenagers. They market it, they've got their own information online and hardcopy probably too still.

**JE:** And then you have the distance learning courses?

**DV:** Oh yeah.

**JE:** So you have many towns that are affected by this.

**DV:** Oh, very much so. One of the neat things that's happened, Glenpool is building a facility now for the college to operate. And, John, another thing, I've always believed that kids today are probably two years further along than I was in terms of social activities, maybe further, I don't know. I think things that I probably did as a junior in high school maybe they do as a freshman. I'm not arguing rightness or wrongness, that's just how I see it.

I've always been concerned about the dropouts in high school, 30 percent. Some cities it's as high as 50 percent. I don't know what it is now in Tulsa but it used to be pretty high in most urban cities. And I figured half those kids had some special needs that we needed to take care of. It might be in physical, it might be other things. But the other half were terribly bright, they just didn't fit into the system.

I don't put myself in that category but I might have been on the edge of that. So I quasi relate to that. So in Moses-like worship we offered classes, college classes for sophomores in high school. That was in 1962. Here we've done that for some time, juniors and seniors in special situations for sophomores or if you're in the top end of the brain scale, however that's measured, you could get in every earlier.

At one time, I thought that the high schools might finish, say, at age sixteen, more like Europe. It still seems like a community college would fill that role then because it's a different setting. And then they could go from there, you know, they could branch low-tech, stay in higher ed, different things. I thought that might happen and it still may.

But what I'm seeing now, many of the school districts here already have the concurrent enrollment heavy with the college. But like Glenpool is setting up a special facility for college there. Broken Arrow is setting up, I think Tulsa Pub—you just have to think differently from where society is and for whatever reason I'm able to do that effectively some of the time. Okay.

**JE:** I'm noticing here that West Tulsa serves Sand Springs, Sapulpa, Bristow, Cleveland.

**DV:** Oh yeah.

**JE:** Glenpool, Drumright.

**DV:** Yeah, everywhere. That's a wonderful campus, it's the only one that we built that sort of looks like an eastern campus, because I felt that all the people over there thought that all they would ever get were some more juvenile retention facilities and all. So I thought, "You know, we've got an opportunity to put in for a new look in the campus forum." And I think it is, I think it's doing very well.

**JE:** So then under your leadership, you developed the West campus.

**DV:** That was under myself as president, right.

**JE:** Yeah.

## Chapter 18 – 9:10
## Performing Arts Center

**John Erling:** As you develop these program in the West campus you take an interest in the performing arts programs. Let's talk about that because that is a wonderful facility. Did you have that as a vision a long time ago? Or how did it come about?

**Dean VanTrease:** It goes back to how you're raised, I think. My mother had me playing the piano when I was little. I didn't play it very well, didn't like to play it very well, so I played the violin. I had to give up the violin in high school because that interfered with sports, but I was first chair when I was a sophomore. And so I sort of liked music. I was president of our chorus in high school.

When I came here, I'm fast-forwarding now, it's a long time from when I grad—'56 now, I'm jumping to 1970. I got to thinking, "Well, what can the college do that's something really out of the ordinary and very special for a community college?"

And I got to know Jimmy Said, Said Music? We started talking about a performance facility back in the '70s. Well, we didn't have a penny for that, but I liked Jimmy. And we started the Great Community Band with Jerrold Lawless. He headed the Young Tulsans for years. They went to Europe and won a competition in Europe. Jerrold headed our program in music back then and several others.

And the arts, we got a guy by the name of Carlton Winters that won major competitions. We didn't get to the Lincoln Center but one year we were in the quarter finals. This was junior college back then. They practiced in the Fred Jones Truck Garage.

My point with the music is this, I always had that in the back of my mind, I just decided that people learned better, many people learn better if they have some music in their background. Whether they ever perform, the fact is they'll probably do better in math. I was an early believer in that and there's data now that shows that.

Then I had another problem in the '80s, the schools, because of their funding situation, you remember the oil crisis, and then the savings and loan and all. Well, they started taking music out of their elementary schools. Well, I wasn't used to that. In the state of Washington, they had terrific music in the elementary schools. So I thought, "How can I help change all of that?"

It sounds like I thought a lot about I, but in this case, it was sort of an I.

**JE:** Sure it was.

**DV:** I thought, "Well, when we get this Southeast campus going music's going to be an important part of it." It wasn't an important part of the Metro campus because of what I've told you earlier. But I thought, "Now we can really build a facility."

At the time, I had great board members, we'll say that. I thought, "You know, that's stretching it, you know. We're viewed as a meat and potatoes college. How will the community receive that?" I worried about that, but they didn't keep me from moving ahead.

So we got some funding for the Southeast campus.

**JE:** Where is that funding coming from?

**DV:** Through a local bond issue. It wasn't any real huge amount, but in the Southeast campus, that portion of it really was most of it from the state. My construction committee regents, I told them about this vision of this performing arts center. We started traveling, looking at other performing arts centers and thinking about it. We had people still hitting us up on football and we realized we couldn't do that. So we thought, "Well, here's an interesting opportunity." And the board went along with my thinking on that.

At the same time, Dr. Barry Epperley was the head of the symphonia and they were having problems. They was always having problems, they're all good groups, but they were all sort of looking for "How do we do things and do them better?"

And I thought, "Well, here's an opportunity for us maybe to take something like the symphonia and do something's that's still, I think, unique in the world." And that's have a community college with a professional orchestra. Little did I realize how good and how successful they would be. I mean, I knew they'd be successful, but it's incredible.

So that's sort of the long and the short of it. And we got the money and it was a good time to build one. It was fifteen hundred seats, that's the size we determined it needed to be. You had the Brady here that was larger, you have the Performing Arts Center that was larger. If TU hadn't of built the eight hundred-seat one they did, which is great, that would have been the next one if I was still around, I'd have put out there. I had an idea for an eight hundred- or a five hundred-seat.

Then we also put in the big black box for theater out there. But, the reason for that, unless you're tapped on the shoulder to be a star it's pretty hard to become that star. You might have more talent, you might have it all, but if somebody doesn't recognize you you're going to be in community theater or a professional orchestra in your community or something like that.

So I thought, "There's a real niche for us in this role." And then I got to thinking about ballet dancers. I've always enjoyed ballet. Now always but when I was in college started to. And I realized that lighting technicians earned as much, if not more, than some of these ballet dancers. That's terrible to say but it's true. So I thought, "Well, whose teaching these people how to be lighting technicians, sound technicians, all this kind of stuff?"

So that's how we put it all together. Now out of that, our current president, who is terrific, Dr. Tom McKeon, has finished and built the Center for Creativity. It's taken it up—

**JE:** Which is right across the street from your—

**DV:** The Metro cam—

**JE:** …original campus downtown.

**DV:** Yeah. It's interesting how things evolve. But I'm just thrilled about what's happening there. And now the public schools are offering much more music in the lower grades. We have volunteers that teach three thousand of these kids.

**JE:** Music?

**DV:** Music.

**JE:** It's a beautiful facility, seating on three levels and it's just absolutely gorgeous. You were also in the selecting the proper seat too for that place, weren't you?

**DV:** Well, in the end. I didn't like the seats that they had recommended for up in the balcony and the box seat area. So I said, "Look, if we can't find them here," I said, "let's go somewhere else and pick out about three different types of seats. What I want you to do is bring them out to my office, outside of my office, and we'll just put them out there." And I looked at them, three different choices. It was fun for me and it gave us an opportunity to market the new Performing Arts Center.

**JE:** Um-hmm (affirmative).

**DV:** People would come by and I'd say, "I'd like for you to sit in these three chairs and tell me how comfortable you think they are. We've got a reason for this." And that's how those seats out there were selected.

**JE:** Um-hmm (affirmative).

**DV:** I love those seats. I went up with some really smart people and these architects that were on our board that were very involved with construction. They looked at a Performing Arts Center at Johnson County Community College that is very similar, very nice. They had built it earlier. It had 1,260 seats, I think they said, in it. When you go to these places the first thing they want to tell you is how they'd do it differently.

It's just like when they would come to me. The first thing I'd tell them is, "Well, I would have done this maybe or this." The first thing they told me is they'd have fifteen hundred seats in it. They built it a little too small.

We went to another place up in Michigan that had a fifteen hundred-seat and they really liked that. None of us are smart enough—at least I'm not—to make those decisions on my own. You know, a lot of it is you just got to go out and feel and talk to people. I didn't want any impairments to the vision on the stage, I wanted everybody to hear the people on stage without a mike, and they pulled that off. Now they do mike on stage, but if you sing opera or something, I mean, they won't allow them to sing with a mike.

I knew we'd hit it, we didn't have the seats in, all we had was cement up at the upper level where we were going to put the seats, and the stage. I walked up there, up

there on the balcony, I would talk to the workmen on stage, and I knew that we had nailed it.

**JE:** Yeah.

**DV:** I learned about these, you can't make your auditoriums too deep. That's why you don't have a lot of space. So I had to comply with the fire department, you know, you can't put too many seats in a row if you're going to put them a little closer together. I learned a lot about that stuff. If you sit in a seat out there some seats are twenty-two, some are twenty-one, some are twenty, in terms of the width of the seat. They're a little different so you're not directly behind anybody.

## Chapter 19 – 3:15
## VanTrease PACE

**John Erling:** When did you learn that they were going to name the Performing Arts Center for Education after Dean VanTrease?

**Dean VanTrease:** Ah, total shock. I was just sitting there, I can't remember the performance.

**JE:** They announced it during a performance?

**DV:** Yeah.

**JE:** Wow. Ha-ha-ha.

**DV:** Well, yeah, and really when I retired. It's sort of a blur with a lot of that. And then they also named the boulevard downtown at the Metro campus.

**JE:** Yeah.

**DV:** I never said anything because I knew they were talking about selling the street names, you remember that, John?

**JE:** Yeah, yeah.

**DV:** I thought, "Well, jeez, I hope that never comes up."

**JE:** Well, you deserve that kind of recognition.

**DV:** No, I don't know about that.

**JE:** Well, I'm telling you, you do.

**DV:** But it's nice.

**JE:** The VanTrease Performing Arts Center for Education and if they name a street, if they name a block after you, whatever—

**DV:** Yeah, well.

**JE:** ...it ought to be there. So you oversaw the operation of the four campuses with thirty thousand students. You led the development construction of the TCC West campus.

**DV:** Um-hmm (affirmative).

**JE:** You led the initiation of the online curriculum, the distance learning courses. Today it is the largest two-year college in Oklahoma, four campuses and a conference center. An annual budget of $84 million, employees about 2,800 people, 275 full-time faculty, and 843 adjunct faculty. That's a summary there and we could go on and on and on, I'm sure.

**DV:** Yeah.

**JE:** But think back to the day when you first came up here with Dr. Phillips. What a journey this has been for you.

**DV:** It's been, it's beyond what I ever believed I would ever have an opportunity to do. And I want to say this, I give Dr. Phillips a lot of the credit for all of this coming about. We never had a lot of the money initially to do all the things I was able to be part of during his presidency. But he had the vision, the dream, all of that.

I think our current president, Dr. Tom McKeon is doing the same kind of thing, stepping it up, taking it to another level. I just appreciate being part of that knowing everyday that I'm out walking the streets or in some meeting that somebody will come up and say, "Hey, you may not remember me, but I was a student there," or "I taught there," or the companies. I think of all the advisory committees we had. I remember one time we had 570 people on different advisory committees.

**JE:** Right.

**DV:** And they still use them, telling us what they need. A lot of them have taught with us, many of the committee leaders, like at Williams initially in the computer area, the vice president for computer data systems taught classes. They wanted the computer thing to go. These top people in these areas, they had a lot invested in those companies, but I mean, that's a thrill to me to have been a part of it. And I say, maybe an important part but a small part in terms of the numbers of people that have been involved in one way or another in the community.

I was just given the gift of maybe leadership.

## Chapter 20 – 2:38
## Leadership Skills

**John Erling:** Well, I was going to ask you that.

**Dean VanTrease:** Yeah.

**JE:** What do you think were your leadership skills? We have students who will be listening to this and they want to be leaders, what were your leadership skills?

**DV:** Vision. I had a lot of vision, dreams, I had high self-esteem. I don't say that as patting myself on the back, but I knew in what I was doing as a change agent I'd be subject to a lot of criticism over the years. And you have to be able to accept that, if you want to be there more than five or six years. I'm a very enthusiastic person. I still am, still am for Tulsa and this area and Oklahoma. I mean, I still have that enthusiasm. I'm very persistent, still persistent. And I think I have the ability to listen, and most of the time, not all the time, communicate effectively. I think those are important leadership skills.

I never expect somebody to do something that if I'm able that I wouldn't do. I remember one time we had a major water leak. The president then, Al Phillips, our vice president for business services, Herman Robbins, and myself were mopping and cleaning the floors. Someone came by and said, "Well, why are you guys doing this?"

We said, "Why wouldn't we do this?"

And I think, that I give to my parents and the community. If you want it done you chip in and nobody is above anybody else, basically. You might have more money, you might have this or that, but we all have an opportunity to give and help people become better people.

**JE:** Have a servant attitude.

**DV:** Servant leader, yeah.

**JE:** Then advise to students as they search for careers? Beginning careers, what would you say to them who may be listening?

**DV:** Well, I would say, "Try to do something meaningful, meaningful to you and meaningful to others." I would say, "Learn to be flexible, learn that there's many more paths that are right than maybe you think are right. Learn to stand your ground if you're right. If you believe you're right and you feel strongly about it there's nothing wrong with standing your ground. But mainly if you're in a leadership role make sure you do your best to support your people and help them become the best they can become." Because that's what most of them want to do. There're not very many wonderful teachers that maybe want to be a college president, but they want to be the best teacher they can be. And they should be respected for that.

## Chapter 21 – 4:20
## How To Be Remembered

**John Erling:** How would you like to be remembered?

**Dean VanTrease:** Hopefully just helping this place on earth become a little better place. A little better place to live, maybe eventually helping people break down barriers. I mean, if I

could live another thirty years you'd probably see me help start thirty community colleges globally. Maybe the first several would be in Israel and Palestine, we'd go from there.

I've spoken in South Africa about community colleges. I've spoken in Israel about community colleges. I've spoken in Singapore, China, Australia. They don't have to call them community colleges, some of them have something like that. But I see them as a very important part of their success. Two-thirds of the world's people, if it's still true, likely cannot read or write.

So you have to take people where they are and maybe it's just teach them how to build a block house or do something with their hands. And then keep working with them to move up the chain. The universities are wonderful institutions but they only serve about 6 percent of the world's population. And I think community colleges could serve at least 50 percent or more.

So hopefully I will have added a little bit to that global idea at an early phase. And if that happens, you'll see countries change. You don't have to change them, they'll change within themselves.

**JE:** Well, I haven't used the word here nor have you, but you and Dr. Phillips are pioneers. No question about that. You pioneered the concept in Tulsa and for what it's done here—

**DV:** Um (thoughtful sound).

**JE:** ...in our town and in our state. And others have emulated what you have done. You are to be commended and it seems like in life when we begin to trace back we didn't know that the seeds were being placed—

**DV:** No.

**JE:** ...back here in the state of Washington.

**DV:** No.

**JE:** And how this thing moved along and you're sitting and talking about it today, saying, "Wow, I guess there was a plan."

**DV:** Well, I believe there's a Creator, and I believe that there's a role for us all to play to make this a better place. You've made it a better place, I've tried to make it a better place. It takes a lot of people to do that, but, you know, it's pretty tough to put the genie back in the bottle when you've given them some more education. Because they start taking their upbringing though and bringing other things to it to become who they become.

And I encourage all of it. That's why I told you early on that I dropped out of college. That's why I told you I sort of dropped out of life and traveled, what-have-you, because I think those things have an important part to play in your life, a very important part.

You know, if you become a rock star, I'm thrilled for that. But I want to make sure we help you, if that's where you want to be that we can play a little bit and I can play a little bit. I want to help you move along that path. I don't care about how people dress, I

really don't. Or how they move around or how they do a lot of those things, that's their business. I just want to them to become a better person if they want to be. And support that because I think most people want to become successful, whatever that is. That's sort of where I was.

**JE:** And now look at the generations, one, two, three generations down now are being effected because Grandma went, Grandpa went to Tulsa Community College, then to junior college.

**DV:** And that's true, that's true, that's true.

**JE:** Right. And their lives are better off for it, wherever they go to school.

**DV:** The interesting thing is you asked me were there people here that really didn't like what we were doing, key people? Some of those same people, different names, but were in similar roles, my best CO, that maybe went to Brown or went to Duke or wherever, their kid and grandchildren, many of them have gone at least a year to Tulsa Community College.

**JE:** Isn't that something?

**DV:** That's a remarkable, remarkable shift.

**JE:** Yeah. Thank you.

**DV:** You're welcome.

**JE:** This was a fun journey and I enjoyed it very much. I appreciate you spending time.

**DV:** Thank you, John.

**JE:** Absolutely.

## Chapter 22 – 0:33
## Conclusion

**Announcer:** This oral history presentation is made possible through the support of our generous foundation-funders. We encourage you to join them by making your donation, which will allow us to record future stories. Students, teachers, and librarians are using this website for research and the general public is listening every day to these great Oklahomans share their life experience. Thank you for your support as we preserve Oklahoma's legacy one voice at a time, on *VoicesofOklahoma.com.*