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Don Farshing

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C: Today is March 17, 2006, [and this is] the UNF oral history project. I'm Jim Crooks interviewing Don Farshing. Don, let's start off by asking you about your background and how you got into engineering and where did you grow up and get your degrees and so forth and what brought you here?

F: I was born in [a] North Carolina, Piedmont Town, Salisbury by name, July 4, 1925. I was one year old when talking movies started and four years old when the 1929 stock market crashed, sixteen years old when World War II began. I remember listening to the radio to Franklin Roosevelt's speech, where he told the nation that we had been attacked at Pearl Harbor. I went to public school in Salisbury and was graduated from Boyden High School, age sixteen. At that time we only had eleven grades. I think we probably learned more in those eleven grades than kids are learning through junior college now. They had good teachers, dedicated teachers who were there, not for the money, but for the joy of seeing kids learn. I went off to the Citadel for one year as preparatory work for an appointment to the U.S. Naval Academy. I entered the Naval Academy in 1943 and was graduated in June of 1946, the class of 1947. During World War II, the Academy bunched up and got young naval officers out in three years, collapsed the curriculum and shortened up on a lot of things that normally they spend four years doing. So I went to sea in destroyers to start out with in my first two years in the Navy as an ensign. I learned a lot about the ways of the sea and about the men that man the ship. The first ship was the *USS Taussig* (DD 746). That was a short hull Sumner-class destroyer. Then I got orders to the *Maddox* (DD 731) which was another short hull Sumner-class for another year. So I spent two years in destroyers, the first year was in China, Tsingtao, we operated out of Tsingtao. The second year was on the west coast in the *Maddox*. Then I went to flight training and became a naval aviator in 1949. I flew in an attack squadron for three years as a dive bomber guy. That's basically what we did. We had two carrier cruises, both to the Mediterranean, one aboard a straight deck carrier, *Roosevelt*, and the second aboard *Midway*, another straight deck carrier. I had some interesting experiences. All the time being inculcated, if you will, with the Navy and the life of a naval officer, managing people and equipment.

C: How long did you spend in the Navy?

F: Twenty-six years. Three at the academy and twenty-three out there. I retired in 1969 with the rank of Captain. The last two years I spent in the naval aviation headquarters up in Washington. We called it NavAir. The Navy likes to use a lot of acronyms. If you've ever been around them, you know that. Before I went up there, I had spent three years over in London in the Office of Naval Research - branch office. I spent a lot of time going around Europe looking at what was going on over there in the aviation business for defense, their defense. When I came back from there, I came to Jacksonville for a tour here, and then went to my last tour in Washington. Somewhere in there too, after my squadron tour I went to graduate school with the U.S. Navy Postgraduate School in Monterey and came out of there in two years with another bachelor's degree in

aeronautical engineering and then went to another school up in New Jersey called Stevens Institute of Technology.

C: I'm familiar with that.

F: I did a master's program in aeronautical hydrodynamics. That was an exciting year with a major professor who had walked out of Russia through Siberia back in the 1918 revolution, a fascinating person. He was real sharp on ocean waves and motion of the ocean. My preparation at Postgraduate School in Monterey with the Navy gave me a leg up on him in complex variables. So I was able to help him with the math a little bit sometimes between us, so he got me through that master's program.

The Navy career was wonderful, and I still look back on it fondly. But all of it was engineering after I left the academy, mixed in with leadership of human beings and flight, and studying and research for graduate work. Let's see what else out of the Navy and engineering which tells me, might tell anybody, a little bit about why I'm so interested in engineering. I could see that engineers do something that's unique for society. They take things that are available, materials and information, and create for the betterment of mankind. I am a religious person, and I think I was put here to work for the betterment of mankind, so I think the engineering profession is an honorable one in that it does what we were put here for.

C: What did you do after the Navy? You got out in 1969.

F: After the Navy I spent five years as an engineer for Eastern Airlines. I went to Miami. I managed hydromechanical engineering for Eastern. We had the responsibility for flight controls and hydraulic power and wheels, tires, brakes, and the landing gear on the Eastern fleet. That was an interesting five years. I was able to put some of my leadership skills and some of my engineering skills together in that role. And one day I realized that Eastern was probably not going to make it, and I figured I'd better find something else to do. So I took a letter of resignation in to my vice president, which was accepted with reluctance. He wasn't glad to get rid of me. I came up to Jacksonville and just stumbled into teaching at the community college. I had done some teaching before, in the Navy, and I enjoyed it. So I taught a lot of engineering technology subjects for FCCJ [Florida Community College at Jacksonville]. Kind of across the board in electrical and mechanical engineering. The opportunity came along to come to UNF in 1984, so I came and took a job in Continuing Ed[ucation] with Tom Healy. Bill Merwin was the Provost. They hired me to take over the FEEDS [Florida Engineering Education Delivery System] operation, which was in its embryonic stage at that time.

C: Would you describe for us the FEEDS operation?

F: Yes, FEEDS is an acronym for Florida Engineering Education Delivery System. It was created by a budget amendment in the Legislature to have the Colleges of Engineering within the State University System set up a way to deliver graduate studies in engineering to engineers originally at the Cape [Canaveral]. The contractors that came in after the first budget decline down at the Cape in the 1970s, reinvigorating the Cape to start the space program again. The whole thing was driven by the industrial people who were bringing engineers into the Cape to do the work down there. They needed a way to attract engineers to come there. One of the things that they saw missing was a young engineer could come there but he couldn't work on his graduate degree. So they got a hold of Wayne Chen, who was the Dean of Engineering at the University of Florida at that time, and some other industry and legislative people, marched over to Tallahassee, and the industry really were the people who pushed the Board of Regents to get something going. So the Regents went to the Legislature. The Legislature appropriated \$2.6 million to start it, and that's how it got started.

C: Was it a graduate program in the beginning?

F: All graduate. To this day, [the program] has maintained that posture for the most part. Now, I guess since about the mid-to-late 1990s we started delivering undergraduate courses that were appropriate, especially to some new institutions like Florida Gulf Coast that have no engineering but wanted some engineering presence. My interest here at UNF, when I came back to Jacksonville and saw that other communities around the state had an engineering presence and we didn't, I felt compelled to try to get UNF into it. I was disappointed at the lack of interest here in trying to get it going.

C: This would have been the early 1980s?

F: Yes, 1984.

C: You came back here in 1979 to teach at FCCJ?

F: 1974.

C: You taught at FCCJ for ten years. You saw this happening with the FEEDS program on a statewide basis. How were you able to push it at UNF?

F: When I got here, I was preceded by a vocational teacher named Jack Hutchinson—John M. Hutchinson. John had been an Armco [major steel works, now AK Steel] steel employee. He had run the local office here. He was an engineering graduate from Auburn. He loved engineering like I do. He was in Continuing Education. I think at the time Adam Darm was the chair of Voc[atational] Ed[ucation] or whatever they called it. About that time, about 1982 was when FEEDS was created. Tom Healy was running Continuing Education and saw an opportunity there to get into it, not as a creator of FEEDS programs

and courses, but as a participant. We called it originally primary centers and cooperating centers. Continuing Ed here was a cooperating center for FEEDS. So Hutchinson got it started. They put him in to take over and he contacted me and said, this is the job for you. So I came out and we talked back and forth a little bit and I was hired.

C: You said that Healy was supportive and that Merwin was supportive, but you also said that there was a lack of support or a lack of enthusiasm?

F: I felt across the board in the university there was a lack of enthusiasm for engineering. When the university was created, there was an opportunity to have an engineering program, and I think the leaders at that time turned it down. There was no real sentiment across the board in Jacksonville for an engineering presence in the university here. So it took a while to get that warmed up. Now, Merwin had that vision and Healy, to recognize that it was worthwhile. Following my arrival here, we set up—in the late 1980s, 1987 or so, before Merwin left—some meetings with all of the Jacksonville engineering community and the legislative council in Jacksonville and got them warmed up. We had a couple of big meetings and big breakfasts out here and invited them all and had some speakers and told them about the value of engineering here at UNF. They were all ready to make it happen and had even gone back to Tallahassee and appropriated some money for us to start. But the mistake we had made was not to put this on the master plan through the Board of Regents. Uncle Charlie Reed over there arranged for the Governor to veto it. So we didn't get started. I guess they felt a little sorry for us. Even though they didn't like the end run, they admired our tenacity. So they said, we'll give you a booby prize. You can have a program, but you'll have it with the University of Florida, and you all get together and figure out what it'll be. So everything got started with the University of Florida being the degree-awarding institution but having a presence on our campus here. They chose electrical engineering to start with.

C: That's when undergraduate course work came on?

F: Right.

C: Part of that time, FEEDS had been simply graduate work?

F: That's right. Till that time, and even to now, we are still servicing place-bound engineers, so to speak, that is people who can't take off of work and spend nine months on a campus somewhere getting their master's. It takes longer through FEEDS to get a master's. It takes roughly three years to get all the course and the thesis or whatever was required to get the program done.

C: Is that a UNF degree when it happens?

F: No, the degree comes from the institution that the individual has enrolled in for their primary institution.

- C: Well, if the place-bound person in engineering came to UNF to get graduate work in the FEEDS program, would they then get a UNF degree?
- F: As soon as we get graduate engineering here and start offering, yes.
- C: But until that happens, who awards the degree?
- F: Well, if they sign up with the University of Central Florida and take over 50 percent of their courses from the University of Central Florida, Central Florida will award the degree.
- C: Although the work is done on the Jacksonville campus?
- F: Yes. But it's Central Florida Work. It used to be delivered by videotape. The student would have to come in and sit down in the library in front of a video machine a couple times a week and watch tapes.
- C: Is it now delivered online?
- F: Yes. Now we stream it. The student now can watch it live or they can download it off a server and watch it at home at night while eating popcorn with their feet propped up. We deliver now any time any place. The University of Florida has got some students that are taking their courses out in China. We're worldwide now with FEEDS.
- C: Now does your connection continue with FEEDS, or are you also involved with the College of Engineering.
- F: Back in 1992, when Bob Roggio came along as the Dean of Computing Sciences, he felt like I could provide him some assistance and created an assistant to the dean position, which was my line just moved. But they moved me over from Continuing Ed at that time to the College of Computing Sciences, which became Computing Sciences and Engineering. As his assistant I took care of FEEDS, and we did other things too. All it meant was whatever was being done to get engineering rolling here.
- C: Once the board gave authorization, was it a challenge to get it going, and were there major problems that you had to solve?
- F: You don't want to know. [laughter] Technical problems were a piece of cake, but the personnel problems were unbelievable—jealousies, in-fighting, territorial battles.
- C: Between computer scientists and engineers?
- F: No, between the two universities.

C: Between Florida and UNF?

F: Yes. Also between the faculty that Florida had hired to work here. It was a peculiar arrangement. The faculty that came here were hired by the University of Florida, the initial engineering faculty, and they were paid by Florida while they worked here. They had no faculty rights down there and they weren't part of this faculty, other than being present on campus, so they were kind of men without a country, if you will. I don't think anybody actually spit on them, but they kind of felt like that. They had no way to earn tenure. It was just not a good setup. Adam Herbert recognized that early on in 1992, I think it was 1991 or 1992, he arranged, and we did wrestle that program away from Florida and take it home-based here independently. There were some ups and downs for a couple of years until it stabilized, especially the personnel problems.

C: Were those UF faculty then transferred to UNF lines?

F: Yes, to start with. Some of them left immediately, some waited a while. But I think there's only one surviving member of the whole bunch who's still here. The rest of them bailed out.

C: May I ask who that is?

F: Tayeb Giuma. That particular department has had several changes in faculty and leadership. I think they've finally settled down now.

C: Under Dean Coulter?

F: Dean Coulter is the dean and Steve Nix is the director of engineering, which is a chair position, but it's a little above a chair because he's got three departments he's looking at, the civil engineering, electrical and mechanical. We've got three engineering disciplines under Steve Nix. Steve is in civil engineering himself.

C: So electrical engineering began in 1992, you say?

F: No, it began in 1987-88.

C: Undergraduate programs?

F: Undergraduate. As a joint program with the University of Florida. Freshman and sophomore work was done, of course, at UNF and they would move up to junior and senior level. They actually got their degrees from the University of Florida.

C: When were civil and mechanical added?

F: Civil was first after electrical. I'm going to say they came in about 1994. You know, it's on the record. I don't remember exactly. They came in with a cohort of

about twenty students. Very shortly they were up to fifty. When their first cohort graduated we were applying for accreditation from ABET, that's the American Board of Engineering and Technology. The first visit from ABET was the next year. They got ABET accreditation for three years, which is good for a first-time school, with another visit after three years. I think they had to make an annual report. Electrical took a long time because after we got them we had some ups and downs. We said, we can't go for accreditation yet. We had to graduate the first class through here before we could apply. So it was 1994 before we applied for accreditation for EE. But they got accredited, and then civil accredited, and mechanical was just accredited.

C: What did your role become? You started out as assistant to the dean, what was your job at that time in the College of Computer Science and Engineering?

F: I kept tabs on FEEDS, I kept that running. I just more or less acted as an advisor to whoever was the chair at the current time for the programs that were running. I helped out with a lot of the accreditation reporting and acted more or less as a staff person to advise and assist.

C: Did you serve under deans after Bob?

F: Well, right now I'm serving under Coulter.

C: Despite your young age, you're still full time?

F: Yes. I'm on DROP. I'm going to leave December 31, 2007.

C: What's your perception of the engineering program based on your experiences in various areas, whether students or UF? How do you perceive our engineering program?

F: We're in our infancy. It takes a while to build a faculty. Even after you get a faculty in place, it takes some time to form and build a cohesive reputation. We are really young. If we keep looking for and bringing in quality people and get more research going—particularly technical faculty who have to do regular research to stay on the cutting edge of their discipline, as we get more into that, and we're doing a lot better now than we did when we started, we will become a mature, what I'd call really first class place. We've got a splendid facility. We've got some very good labs. We've only got three programs, civil, electrical, mechanical. By the time we get to be a really nationally recognized engineering school, we'll probably have an environmental program and maybe some manufacturing engineering, certainly biomedical. There are a lot of disciplines out there that we're not into. We don't have faculty lines for them. The College just hasn't grown to that stature yet. I think we will in time.

C: In ballpark numbers, how many faculty and students have you now?

F: The biggest component has been in Computer and Information Science. I think they're running about 700 students, and I guess 12 or so faculty. Faculty in engineering has got about the same. Between electrical, civil and mechanical they've got about 300 students.

C: So that part is growing at a decent pace?

F: Oh, yes.

C: There's obviously a demand for engineering in the First Coast area.

F: And we're serving the region very well.

C: Have you had much to do in the Computer Science Department?

F: No.

C: Because they've been around since the very beginning. Was there any connection between Adam Darm's technology program and the beginnings of engineering? Is there a technology program within the College now, or did that fade?

F: The only thing out of Adam Darm's original is building construction. That's in the College of Computing, Engineering and Construction. Construction stayed in technology for a long time after everybody else left. Then when Adam Darm left they moved it over into the College of Ed. Kathe Kasten had them for awhile. They did have what they called engineering technology, too. I don't know what they do.

C: Do you teach at all?

F: I have not taught in about two or three years. The last course I taught was in electrical engineering. I taught a basic circuits course.

C: Were the students pretty good?

F: Not very well prepared in math, but interested. They were interested. And don't get me started on what's gone wrong in the secondary school system. That's a disaster. When I went to high school, gosh, Jim, when we finished high school, we could do all kinds of math problems, and we understood the basics of physics. It was just part of being educated. Today, it looks like they get out of high school and a lot of them don't have a clue.

C: I've heard that from other, particularly math, professors, even though they've worked with math teachers in Duval County and the St. John's County school system, our math program appears to develop these students who come not well prepared. Presumably they've had some math before they move into

engineering that would help in their preparation. But that's a common complaint across the board.

F: Engineers and what I would call the purist mathematician see math in a different sense. I think the mathematician sees math a subject unto itself and a pure science or whatever, mathematics. The engineer sees it as a tool, don't bother me with the proofs and the details, just show me how to use it and let me use it. So there's a lot of applied math in engineering until you get graduated, and today the engineer lets the computer do all the work.

C: Beyond the College of Computer Science and Engineering, have you had other roles in the university?

F: Yes, I've done other things.

C: Anything you feel is significant enough to share for posterity?

F: Probably haven't made a mark anywhere. The kinds of things I've done are within the culture, like just trying to simulate thinking and here and there and other places. I'm not really a devil's advocate, but I do like to probe and to get people to think about what they're doing and saying.

C: You've been here over twenty years. What's your perception of the university as it has developed over twenty years?

F: I think it's shown healthy growth. I do. I think timing has been good for things that have been brought in.

C: Such as engineering?

F: I was delighted to see the fine arts come in and grow. I'm a strong proponent of a good general education. I think if people are going to compete in today's world, they need to know more than just a science or just a technology. They need to be broadened. I got a phone call the other day from a young lady over in the President's office. I guess I shouldn't have done it, but she just made a horrible English mistake on the phone, and I corrected her. One of the things I've thought about a lot lately is a failing of my generation to do more correcting when we spot things that need to be fixed, rather than let them go. Maybe our society would be different if we had done more of that instead of just letting it go.

C: That could open up hours of discussion and debate. Were you here when we became a four-year institution?

F: The year I came was the year we became a four-year institution.

C: So your experience has been more with the traditional university than what it was before.

F: I saw the tail end of two years.

C: You've been here under McCray and Adam Herbert and Anne Hopkins and now John Delaney. Do any of these people stand out from your experience?

F: I liked Curtis McCray. I know he wasn't popular with everybody, but I thought he made good decisions for the institution. I liked Adam for that reason, too. I wasn't fascinated with Anne. We have to be careful here, I don't want to condemn anybody, but on the other hand, if you're asking for comparisons, I would say that Curtis and Adam were the best two.

C: What stood out about Curtis? Just [give] examples of both Curtis and Adam.

F: He [Curtis] could listen to an argument, understand it and make a decision. To me, it usually seemed like the right decision. Adam was more or less the same way except it was obvious that his own interests came first, but he was certainly open to everybody else's and he would listen. I'm not sure Anne heard all the arguments, and I'm not sure all the decisions were the right ones.

C: With regards to the various VPs and Provosts, was John Minahan here when you came?

F: No.

C: So you began with Bill Merwin and John Bardo, Ken Martin, and David Kline, I guess?

F: Yes.

C: Any of these people stand out? You mentioned Merwin already.

F: John Bardo stands out as the worst. I didn't think he was up to the task of the leadership needed running academia at this place.

C: Any specifics on that that you want to share, or just a sense?

F: There were some specifics, but it probably would be better if we didn't put it on the record. Personally he was a nice guy, and I enjoyed being in his company. Gary Fane [Interim Dean, College of Business] was a good place keeper, I thought. I never could get a handle on what Galloway was doing.

C: He was Interim VP also, between Martin and Ling and Kline.

F: He kept the door open.

C: What about Ken Martin?

F: I liked Ken okay. At the time he took over, I don't think he was [prepared]. I think he's learned a lot since he's left. I know he learned a lot while he was there.

C: Did you work with David Kline at all?

F: Yes. I would swear at David a lot of times inside myself, but overall I think he probably did a very good job.

C: When you started, the Dean of the College was Charles Winton, was it not? Wasn't he Dean of the College of Computer Science and Engineering?

F: Winton was Interim Dean after Bob Roggio.

C: Bob was brought in to head up the new combined College. Winton was Interim Dean and then Coulter came?

F: Right.

C: Have you had much experience with faculty outside the College? Any of them stand out?

F: Not a whole lot. I have a lot of respect for Jace Hargis. I thought a lot of David Jaffee.

C: Jace Hargis does what? I don't know him.

F: He was heading up the Office of Faculty Enhancement.

C: Which Jaffee used to do before he moved over to Arts and Sciences.

F: Right. I never worked a lot with Ed Healy, but I've always had a good respect for him. I enjoyed working the time I did with Kathe Kasten and Marcelle Lovett.

C: She came on after Tom Healy?

F: Yes.

C: I guess Tom moved over to work with the President and Marcelle came in, and you worked with her for a number of years?

F: Right.

[End of Tape A, Side 1.]

C: One question that the committee who organized this is wanting to ask everyone is, are there any unforgettable characters that you've gotten to know at UNF, with

the emphasis on unforgettable and character? Are there any people you've run into that could be categorized as that?

F: Yes. In an administrative position, I think I'll probably never forget Deb Kaye.

C: Why?

F: There was just something unique about that woman. I don't know, she dives into whatever she's got to do and gets it done, and she's cheerful. She can bitch about something and be pleasant.

C: While that's going on in your brain, let me ask almost the final question, how would you define our university today compared to other regional universities? Obviously you can't compare UNF with Florida and Florida State, but with Central Florida, FAU or Gulf Coast, are we distinctive in any way, or do we stand out in any way, or are we simply a generic university?

F: No, I think we have some distinction. I think we have a First Coast marking of some sort.

C: That means it's geographic?

F: A little. Parochial, maybe a little.

C: Parochial sometimes has a negative connotation.

F: Oh, I don't consider it negative. I'm not offering that in a negative sense. I sometimes get a little disappointed with what I perceive to be a general attitude of our faculty. There's an awful lot of *laissez faire*. There are a lot of people on the faculty who sit back and let a small group tell them what to do and run them around and dictate to them. I guess that's the organized group.

C: Are we talking the union and Faculty Association?

F: Yes. There are some people that have the reins on the union, and I don't see them as team players. I see them as special interest groups working to improve their position but not working to improve the institution. Frankly, that ticks me off. I feel like it's a privilege to be here. Part of our job is to make the institution look good. If I don't look good, that's my fault. If the institution doesn't look good, that's my fault and everybody else that's working with me's fault.

C: Do you see the institution not looking good?

F: Our face to the public is a good one. I see looking inward as not so good at times. I don't offer that as a general indictment, just on some issues and some things.

- C: Would you be willing to give an example of that?
- F: I think all this piddling around that's gone on for the last two or three years between the labor relations.
- C: The contract that we just settled.
- F: Yes, I think it's nauseating.
- C: Is the Faculty Association part of the problem?
- F: No, I don't think they are. Not in the sense of being a part of it. I think maybe a part of the problem in the Faculty Association, if you say there is any, would be their not being more directive towards the union and say, hey, you guys are only a part of us and the rest of us have a say, too, and here's what we have to say. I don't think the union listens to them.
- C: In your twenty-plus years here, do you see any missed opportunities on the part of UNF? Or another way of phrasing that, has the institution made any mistakes or missed opportunities?
- F: I don't think so.
- C: Okay, that's a question I ask because some people may feel there are some, and most people so far have not seen any.
- F: Yes, maybe my antennae aren't up that high. If I were working out of the President's Office or somewhere at that level, I'd probably see things I don't see down here a foot under water.
- C: Have you any additional reflections about the university or your experience here that you'd like to share?
- F: The change in governance and the Board of Trustees and all that—I think we're walking a new line. I guess it's inevitable that politics has to get into everything. I hated to see everybody jump on board and bring a politician in as President. I think the institution would have been better off to have waited a little longer and looked a little harder and find a good academician that could also run an institution. I don't mean to say anything negative about John Delaney, but I don't think John really understands academia. I mean, superficially he makes all the right remarks at the right time, but I really don't think he has an understanding of what goes on in the trenches on the level below him. God help us if we don't have the right Provost to run it and to feed him. So far I like what Mark Workman is doing. I don't agree with everything, but at least he takes a stand on what he needs and what he wants. He would make you think that by his demeanor he is stepping back, but I think he's stepping up to the plate.

C: He's a candidate.

F: I know. I wouldn't be sorry to see him appointed.

C: Okay, thank you very much, Don, for sharing your reflections.

[End of Interview.]