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Ray Bowman to Folio Weekly March 3, 1998

Ray Bowman

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I believe the lack of early participation by students and faculty in recent campus planning brings me and others to our current position opposing the administration's plans for a Golf Learning and Management Center. The resolution to be considered by the Faculty Association at its March 5 meeting is an attempt to influence a planning process at the last minute. A golf center was not anticipated at the time the Campus Master Plan was adopted. Plans for the center were apparently developed recently in response to perceived needs in the community, to the needs of our athletic program, and in response to an opportunity to raise money.

The lack of involvement of students and faculty in recent campus planning seems to presage a fundamental shift in the philosophy that has guided the university's development for the past 25 years. In the 1970's, UNF President Tom Carpenter actively solicited input from faculty and students well in advance of making fundamental decisions regarding the development of our campus. President Curtis McCray, Carpenter's successor, established a University Planning Committee that included eight faculty members.

President Herbert has lead our transformation from a state supported institution toward a state *assisted* one. This approach may be critical to our survival. Nevertheless, I don't think the acceptance of a gift to build a Golf Management and Learning Center adjacent to the University Center was in the best long-term interests of our university. There are golf courses quite near UNF that can serve our athletic program, can serve our students seeking to learn golf course management techniques, and that can serve visitors who attend an event at the University Center.

In my view, it would be better to surround the University Center with an environment in which people may reflect on the meaning of life, on how individuals fit in the greater scheme of things, and on what each of us may leave behind. I believe that enveloping the University Center in natural surroundings—footpaths instead of fairways—will help make UNF a place where students, faculty, staff, and visitors are stimulated to reflect on human affairs, on trends in civilization, on the awesome power of Mother Nature, and on how each person may contribute to the well being of our planet and its inhabitants. I believe such an approach will promote greater appreciation of our campus, will better serve the needs of humankind, and will stimulate a greater rate of giving to the university.

Our university planning staff spent a great deal of time and effort developing the current Campus Master Plan and there were open hearings to share it with the university community. I attended one of the first. I asked the question, "What is the University's commitment to a Nature Preserve?" I received a short response. I was told, "You're looking at it."

What I saw was a preserve by default. Wetland areas, on which development is forbidden under normal circumstances, and highland areas, to which access is difficult, are identifiable. But I saw no indication that the planners had included these or any other areas in a nature preserve in any active way. I saw no indication of any permanent preserve nor even one with temporary boundaries that might shrink as the university developed. It was as though the planners were afraid to identify something that might get in their way later, something, I might add, that many consider to be UNF's most outstanding asset. When I hear the term UNF Nature Preserve, I have difficulty understanding exactly what the speaker means. Recently, I have heard the term used in the context of the proposed golf center, specifically that the center will not encroach on the preserve. Honestly, I don't know where the preserve is!

I believe history will judge the current UNF Campus Master Plan to be lacking in vision because the plan pays insufficient attention to our unusually rich natural endowment. UNF's natural setting places us in a unique position to become a national leader in academically sound, rigorous, and balanced environmental education. As a beginning toward national prominence in environmental education, I urge our university planners to become *proponents* of some form of nature preserve on campus. And I urge passage of the resolution submitted by the Faculty Affairs Committee. If we must have a golf center, it should be used as an opportunity to rehabilitate land rather than to destroy part of UNF's most outstanding asset.

Ray Bowman March 3, 1998

I am extremely disappointed that the University of North Florida has agreed to transform a part of its campus into a golf course. Although I believe athletics are an important component of a university, I am not convinced that the needs of the UNF Golf Team justify the transformation of a large section of UNF's remaining natural area into a practice course. Such a transformation seems contrary to the philosophy of the university's founders and contrary to what makes UNF truly unique. Building a three-hole golf course on campus seems imprudent when there are other facilities readily available to the golf team that can enhance their competitiveness. Moreover, if a golf course is to be built on campus, there are areas other than the proposed site (in the southern quadrant of the campus) that would be just as suitable as a golf course and much less valuable as natural habitat or as a living laboratory.

From the beginning, UNF's natural endowment has been viewed as one of the university's most outstanding assets. I believe it still is. Although the further maturing of the university will require devoting more land to buildings, landscaping, and athletic facilities, preserving as much as possible in its natural state could place the university in a unique position for environmental education. The university overlooked recent opportunities to rededicate a portion of its campus to be a nature preserve—at least for the foreseeable future—and now seems determined to replace some of its remaining natural area with a golf course. This seems to presage a fundamental shift in the philosophy that has guided the university's development for the past 25 years. UNF's shift comes at a time when a sister institution, the University of Florida, is attempting to "reorient [the UF] culture to a core philosophy of environmental stewardship" [Dr. Charles Kibert, UF School of Building Construction, October 28, 1997].

I applaud UNF Vice President Bob Fagin's initiative and willingness to reopen a candid dialog between the university community and those responsible for administrative planning, a dialog that has been dormant since the departure of UNF's founding president, Thomas Carpenter. I respect the good faith of those who volunteered to participate in the dialog as members of the newly formed UNF Environmental Advisory Council. I regret that the fate of the first issue to come before the EAC, the construction of a UNF golf course, was apparently decided before the council could respond. I hope that the EAC can generate constructive approaches to the university's inevitable growth and that the council will not become an instrument of false hope and manipulation.

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