

High Point University has been featured in two recent newspaper articles.

HPU plans \$40M mixed-use project

The Business Journal
by Katie Arcieri, Reporter
December 9, 2011

High Point University plans to break ground on a new 200,000-square-foot residential and student services complex covering two city blocks by June.

"Fifth Street Commons" will cost between \$40 million and \$50 million and will house 400 students and also include study space, a recreational center, dining facilities and other services.

The building is needed to accommodate continued growth in the university's student body. Applications for enrollment next fall are up by 17 percent at this point in the year from last year, and undergraduate enrollment is expected to hit 5,000 by 2015.

Frank L. Blum Construction has been selected as the lead contractor on the project.

The university is in the midst of a decade-long, \$2.1 billion expansion plan, and is exploring the development at a time when the school's undergraduate population is expected to grow from 3,800 to 4,800 by 2015.

High Point University has been steadily building new housing on campus, including the \$20 million Greek Village project that opened in August and now houses 190 students. The university earlier this year selected Frank L. Blum Construction as the general contractor for an \$18 million, 300-bed town home community.

The development adds to several university projects that have continued to help buoy Triad contractors amid poor economic conditions.

Earlier this year, Shelco Inc. was selected to build the school's \$9 million, 31,000-square-foot School of Education.

Mark Caudill, vice president of marketing and business development at Shelco Inc., said construction is going well.

"We're happy to be back doing a project on campus," said Caudill, whose company also built High Point University's School of Communication and Hayworth Fine Arts Center.

Loren Hill, president of the High Point Economic Development Corp., said the university's continued growth has been "extraordinarily good" for the city of High Point and continues to be a job generator.

"It's transforming High Point into a university town," Hill said.

'Meteoric rise' at High Point University

Winston-Salem Journal
By Travis Fain, Reporter
December 11, 2011

HIGH POINT -- Cataloging High Point University's explosive growth quickly becomes an exercise in redundancy.

Since 2005, the campus has grown from 92 acres to 300, according to university numbers. It has built, or is building, 47 buildings. It has added 18 majors and 2,350 more students for a total of 3,800.

It has more than doubled its faculty and nearly quadrupled its annual budget. Parent donations to the school have grown more than 200 times over. Its building boom will continue for some time, with a 2015 enrollment goal of 5,000 undergraduates.

"The only way you can describe High Point University is a meteoric rise," said university President Nido Qubein, the man behind it all.

Qubein, 63, whose name is pronounced *Needo Coobane*, was named High Point's president in 2004. He is a dreamer, an optimist and a massive success in a city known for furniture, hosiery and, increasingly, his university.

The school's story from the past half-decade is Qubein's story. And his story closely dovetails the quintessential tale of an immigrant's American dream.

He came here from Lebanon in 1966 at the age of 17, speaking almost no English. He had \$50 in his pocket.

His mother, a seamstress who went to school only through the fourth grade, sent him here to get an education.

He initially enrolled at Mount Olive College but got his four-year degree from what was then High Point College. He started a business, publishing newsletters and selling tapes on leadership by mail.

He worked hard, and people were impressed. They invited him to speak to groups and businesses. Eventually, he was giving hundreds of speeches a year. He wrote 24 books, became a millionaire, bought a bread company and started a bank. Today, he's on a number of corporate boards and gets \$25,000 to \$30,000 for speeches.

He has lived in High Point for most of his life and considers it his hometown. But in many ways, Qubein was called home in 2004, when the university's board of trustees voted to give him the presidency, though he had not applied for it.

"I thought I'd do it for a couple of years," Qubein said last week. "I fell in love. ... I am here for the long term, and I hope the long term means 15 (more) years."

Amazing growth

Growth takes money, and Qubein has brought it in by the millions.

He started with \$1 million of his own money and has since donated another \$10 million. The university's School of Communication is named for him.

Altogether, Qubein has raised \$172 million over the past six years, according to the university, including \$10 million each from eight families.

Some of the money, and some of the furniture that adorns university buildings, is local. But a lot of it comes from the people Qubein met over decades as a well-liked businessman and motivational speaker.

"I started with a very healthy Rolodex," he said. "I would sit with (potential donors) and I would simply share my heart."

Together, he would say, "We can make amazing things happen."

The word "amazing" comes up frequently as students discuss their campus. It goes beyond the manicured lawns and soaring brick buildings common on many campuses.

Inspirational quotes are set into the sidewalks. Bronze statues are seated on benches, depicting historical figures. William Shakespeare is there. So are Mark Twain, Amelia Earhart and Martin Luther King Jr.

Classical music or, this month, Christmas music, plays along the walkways. The domed auditorium is adorned with a massive, glittering chandelier. A lobby wall is filled with the pictures of former presidents and captains of industry who have addressed students in recent years. Former first lady Laura Bush is slated to give this spring's commencement address.

The School of Commerce, named for local furniture magnate and major donor Plato Wilson, features a stock trading room some brokerage houses would be jealous of. The School of Communication has a motion-capture suit and studio that turn an actor's movements into computer animation.

School buildings are luxuriously appointed with carved furniture and plush couches. Each has a designated seating area where students can hang out, study and discuss.

There's an on-campus steakhouse with white tablecloths and a high-class menu. Students can eat there once a week, provided they make a reservation and abide by the business-casual dress code.

Lessons on food and culture are given over iPads at the tables. The goal is to teach students how to blend in with success, Qubein said. To "call up in the mind," he said, "the art of the possible."

Sitting in a deep-cushioned chair, Alex Nelson, president of the largest freshman class in university history, said the aesthetics work.

"I was not a big studier," Nelson said. "The campus itself just really inspires me to learn."

Nelson, who is from Clayton, said he picked High Point University for a number of reasons. But the main one was "because it's just so, so nice."

Other students said much the same thing. It's the music. It's the statues. It's the beautiful buildings, the concierges in the dorms, the free coffee and ice cream on campus, the carriage rides at night and the free massages during exam week.

The university sends recruiting materials around the country and has become a well-known stopping point for Northern high school seniors touring Southern schools, said Linda Reilly, a parent from Pennsylvania who visited last month with her daughter.

Reilly's niece and nephew attend High Point, she said. Her husband, like many people, calls it "the country club." Reilly said she was blown away by the steakhouse and the way it taught her nephew manners.

And she felt safe walking the campus at night, beneath the bright lights and with a security guard basically following her family around.

"I'm sold," she said.

A gem in the city

Qubein and his university put smiles on a lot of faces in High Point.

Just about everyone calls him "Nido." They say he's quick to return phone calls, and many went to college with him.

The university's growth has been spectacular, Mayor Becky Smothers said.

It is "an unbelievable example of vision," said Tom Dayvault, president and CEO of the High Point Chamber of Commerce.

It is "the only show we've got in town," Kepley's Barbecue owner Bob Burlison said, filling hotels and restaurants during weekend parent visits.

"It's helping our whole economy," he said.

The university's construction boom has helped a building industry hard hit by the recent recession. Dave Simpson, North Carolina building director for the construction trade group Carolinas AGC, said he'd like to have "a hundred High Point Universities."

But the hyper-competitive reality of the industry has driven bids down, and many companies are taking on projects at or below actual costs, Simpson said. The university "is getting great deals," Simpson said.

There are some complaints that the university is sending too much construction work out of the area. But the university pegs its economic impact at \$412 million, and several local contractors said they have had a great experience.

"I do think they make a concerted effort to try to keep the money local," said James Murphy, owner of Furniture City Glass and Mirror in High Point.

"Were there some (contracts) that haven't gone like I would like them to? Sure," Murphy said. "But we have done a lot of work, either directly or indirectly for High Point University.

"I'm not saying we would have gone out of business without it," Murphy said, "but it certainly has helped."

Academic gains

The university has made academic gains along with its growth.

Its student body's average SAT score has increased 100 points over the past six years, even with the 162 percent increase in undergraduates, according to university statistics. Roughly 80 percent of university faculty has a terminal degree, and students can pick from a wide range of internships in what Qubein calls "experiential learning."

The university moved up to No. 3 this year on U.S. News and World Report's annual list of Southern regional colleges. But at \$38,000 a year, High Point is easily the most expensive of the 73 schools the magazine ranked. And its acceptance rate remains high compared with other private colleges in the area.

Davidson College, which Qubein named in 2006 as a role model for his university, admits just under 30 percent of its applicants, according to U.S. News and World Report. Elon University, whose Burlington campus has seen its own building boom recently, admits about 49 percent of its applicants. Wake Forest admits 40 percent.

High Point is at 68 percent, but that's 9 percentage points lower than in 2004. The university has stepped up recruiting efforts, particularly out of state, and has a student body assembled from 51 countries and 44 states, according to university statistics.

Qubein attributes the large growth in student body and academic improvement to "happy students ... and very satisfied parents."

When Forbes moved the university up nine spots this year on its annual list of best colleges, to No. 497, the university touted its position as "one of the top colleges and universities across the country."

The ranking placed "HPU in the top 7 percent of the 6,600 higher-education institutions throughout the United States," the university's news release said.

But another way to say this is that the university was No. 497 out of the 650 institutions Forbes reviewed. It was four slots below the University of North Carolina at Charlotte, which is about \$10,000 a year cheaper for out-of-state students.

It's also 201 positions lower than Forbes ranked High Point in 2009.

Asked about this, university spokesman Roger Clodfelter said High Point is "honored" to appear on Forbes' list and others. But "we don't focus on them," Clodfelter said.

"They simply validate what we already know," he said.

Just how High Point's ascendance has been received by the broader academic community is not clear. Wake Forest President Nathan Hatch declined to comment for this article, as did administrators at Elon University. Attempts to interview a spokesman for Davidson College were not successful last week.

Hope Williams, president of North Carolina Independent Colleges and Universities, a partnership between the private colleges around the state, called High Point's growth "of the highest quality." She noted that the school just got approval from the Southern Association of Colleges and Schools to start a doctoral program, the first in university history.

"(Qubein) understands the importance of education," Williams said. "Being president of High Point for him, I think, is absolutely a mission. ... They are for real."

Philosophy and the future

Qubein teaches a required freshman class. It is, essentially, a course on success.

He speaks of "planting seeds of greatness" in every student's heart and focuses on the importance of making a good impression on the world.

"If you cannot present your ideas persuasively ... you won't be able to achieve your goals," he said. "If all you get in college is information, people will use you and discard you."

Qubein said he also tries to instill a culture of giving. The university has long-standing ties to the Methodist church, and Qubein said the school has been successful because "God wanted to bless this university."

Volunteer service is not required to graduate at High Point, "but we inspire it," he said.

Qubein also said he's just getting started at High Point University. He has a \$2.1 billion plan, all of which he wants to implement by 2020.

Just last week, the university announced a \$40-million-plus, 200,000-square-foot dormitory complex it plans to build next year on Fifth Street. "This is a 15-chapter book," he said. "We are on chapter two."

For now, the university "pretty much" has the land it needs to grow, Qubein said. Beyond its existing campus, the university owns several parcels, including Oak Hollow Mall.

Eventually, the school will add football to the 16 varsity sports it offers now, and that takes a lot of acreage, Qubein said. He called the addition "inevitable, but not in the next five or six years."

Qubein has turned his attention lately beyond his campus's borders, calling on the city's leadership to be more proactive. Smothers, the mayor, said Qubein has been pushing her to bury power lines near campus, an expensive proposition.

Qubein acknowledges that he's "somewhat frustrated" that the city as a whole is "not as dynamic as we ought to be."

"I don't want (this university) to be a magnificent jewel in a city that's any less of a jewel of that magnitude," Qubein said.

Said the mayor: "We're a few steps behind. Sometimes direction's what's important, not the speed."

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