

QUALITY BEFORE QUANTITY

by Alan Hall

At its March 14, 1985, meeting the NHCC Board of Trustees authorized the sale of \$10 million in bonds with some of the funds earmarked for preliminary and master plans for the West Campus in Tomball. At that same meeting the Board adopted reduction in force policies and procedures, apparently out of a concern for certain cuts in state funding and declines in enrollment growth. These concerns, along with a current hiring freeze, call into question the wisdom of proceeding with the Tomball campus at this time.

This semester NHCC offered in Tomball several night courses which had to be cancelled due to lack of enrollment. Consider the following facts regarding Tomball I.S.D. in relationship to the NHCC district:

Percentage of district population	4.3%
Percentage of students in public school, district-wide	5.3%
Percentage of high school graduates who enter NHCC	4.0%
Percentage of taxable property	6.3%

The original decision to move ahead on the Tomball campus was based on population studies reported in the NHCC Facilities Analysis Report, 1983. That study projected a 1995 student population at the West campus as follows: maximum 17,000; most likely, 15,000; worst case, 6,800. As a result of questioning from Board member Don Stewart, Dr. Airola has reported that revised figures now suggest a 1995 maximum of only 2,000 students. Don Stewart also noted that of those 2,000 students, 84% would be out-of-district and only 16% in.

The District opened the East Campus at Kingwood in September of 1984, resulting in a net gain of 547 students. We are currently spending 1.7 million in operating costs for these students, excluding costs for the administrative offices that the administration seems to feel necessary with two campuses. If the Kingwood enrollment increases, these costs will be justified, but can the District afford the burden of two campuses creating astronomical costs simultaneously?

The union is not opposed to healthy growth in the district: in fact, we supported the administration in the bond election. But the union prefers a more cautious, reasoned approach to expansion. As the demographics in Tomball change, a campus there no doubt will be justified, but not until the tax base and population significantly increase. If the Board overextends itself, serious problems may result similar to those in the Dallas system which created one campus too many in an overly zealous building program.

Faculty on the South Campus have expressed concern over the adequacy of our facilities. We do not have enough computer terminals for staff and student use, we have no swimming pool in our athletic program, and our library holdings are inadequate. The union's fear is that, rather than remedy these problems, the District will merely duplicate them, not once but twice (or perhaps three times - the Board is already discussing the possibility of a North campus!). The District should offer its taxpayers quality before it offers quantity.

b.

"Budget Cuts to Hurt Enrollment - U.H. Warns"
"A.M. President Issues Strong Warning on Cuts in Funding"

"Budget: It's
Cut & Freeze"

"Legislature
considers closing
Two Universities"



"St. Thomas Money
Crisis Grows Deeper"

N.H.C.C. TO BUILD
3rd CAMPUS

The College District Office makes quite an impression on visitors. Plush carpeting, elegant wooden furniture swathed with luxurious fabrics, expansive spaces and abundant computer terminals complement the modern suite's prime location on the first floor of a new corporate-style office building near Greenspoint Mall. It's like being in the offices of a prestigious law firm or a prospering oil company. To what end this display? Responding to a recent Semaphore which defends the location of the District Office, I posed a series of questions by letter to District Director of Public Information Tommie Caldcleugh. She replied promptly with much detailed information, some of which I shall present and comment upon. The full text of her letter is available in my office for anyone who wishes to see it.

As Caldcleugh's letter makes clear, there are really two separate issues to be addressed:

- 1) What is the justification for locating District personnel (numbering 25 people) off-campus when they could be housed on one or both of the existing campuses?
- 2) What is the rationale for selecting this particular site?

As for the first question, NHCC personnel contacted or visited thirteen colleges and four professional consultants (including Dr. George Baker, last fall's inservice speaker). The upshot was considerable concern over the main campus syndrome which is engendered by having on-campus District administrators. This syndrome is " . . . the mistaken perception that one campus has preeminence over others in a system where all campuses are, in fact, accorded equal status." Another objection to on-campus District administrators is that " . . . even under the best of conditions, lines of authority and lines of responsibility can become muddled, leading to confusion in the minds of personnel about 'who is in charge of what.' Even more of a problem is the perception that personnel would have, that the campus housing the district administrators might receive preferential treatment simply because of convenience and close working ties." Cases illustrating these points include the San Jacinto College system and some local public school districts.

It's easy to see how these problems could arise, but in my opinion the solution of separate offices is rather extreme: like cracking a peanut with a steamroller, as philosophers say of overdone solutions to cosmological worries. For one thing, it would not be necessary for all of the administrators to be on one campus. Some balanced way of distributing the prestige of their offices could be found. For another, I have enough confidence in the ability of our administrators to treat both campuses equally, and in the ability of our other personnel to recognize equal treatment when it is manifest, to doubt seriously that the problems of mistaken perception would plague us. As for the muddling of lines of responsibility and authority, I believe that the policy and procedure manuals can make things abundantly clear to personnel who seek administrative services. Administrators, for their part, have the responsibility of telling personnel who are knocking on the wrong door to go elsewhere. It shouldn't be that difficult, and it would be a lot more economical.



"What do you mean you won't ride on either ship?"

e.

The second question, predicated on whatever wisdom there is in moving District administrators off-campus, asks the rationale for the specific site that was selected. A Board of Trustees committee, assisted by Mr. John O'Dell of The Horne Company, began with a list of 77 possibilities in the area defined as centrally located. The top four finalists were rated as follows (ranking scale is 1-5; 1 is best):

	Three Greenspoint Plaza	Two Greenspoint Park	Danson Oil Tower	Northborough Atrium III
Known location:	1	2	2	4
Accessibility to all three campuses	1	1	1	1
Visitor parking	1	1	3	3
Ease of visitor access from building entry to suite	1	3	3	2
Visibility to corporate business community	1	2	2	3
Amenities (banking and lunch alternatives)	1	1	2	4
Stability of ownership; maintenance	1	1	3	2
Security	1	1	2	2
Overall economics	2	1	4	1

f.

On this basis Three Greenspoint Plaza was leased for five years.

The selection process strikes me as a curious mixture of sense and nonsense. Surely a factor like accessibility to all campuses is important, but it baffles me to see the District Office defined as centrally located. Shouldn't the center of three points be within a triangle formed by connecting those points? Surely factors like stability of ownership, visitor parking, security, and economics should be given weight, but Three Greenspoint Plaza came out only third of the four finalists in overall economics. For what are we paying extra? According to the chart, Three Greenspoint Plaza outranks economically top-rated Two Greenspoint Park in three areas: known location, ease of visitor access from building entry to suite, and visibility to the corporate business community. It does not seem worthwhile to me to pay extra to keep visitors from having to ride an elevator or pause a moment to consult a building directory. The visibility factor is said to be important because 1) local corporations pay taxes to the District, and 2) our graduates seek employment with local corporations. Both of these are valid points. Nevertheless, we must be on guard against the sort of mischief that an emphasis on corporate visibility could engender. If we really wanted to be visible to corporations, we would provide our administrators with luxury cars and send them out to regale local business leaders at the posh restaurants that surround the present offices (see "Amenities" on the chart above).

In a period of state revenue decreases and consequent cuts to the funding of education, the taxpayers expect public educators to continue their traditions of utilitarian quarters and equipment. The District Office at Three Greenspoint Plaza is a departure from this tradition. Let's hope that the College doesn't try to overdo the corporate grandeur bit.