

# Behind The Plan

Charting a new course for The University of Akron wasn't a task to be handled lightly. But most everyone on campus during the early 1990s recognized that major changes needed to be made to prepare the institution for the coming millennium. Some key facilities were aging, enrollment figures had piqued and no one could definitively foretell the future of the University.

It all seems moot now. With the \$200 million Campus Master Plan moving forward, a strong president in place to lead it and the University community committed to working together to give students the best public education in northern Ohio, UA's future has never been brighter. The New Landscape for Learning that's being shaped embraces continued growth and extraordinary improvement.

"We have dreamed of a redefined institution,"



**The Blueprint for Success: Ted Curtis (right), AIA, Vice President, Capital Planning and Facilities Management, discusses elements of the Master Plan with President Luis M. Proenza (left) and University Trustee Dr. John Fink.**

says UA President Dr. Luis M. Proenza. "We have dared to commit to an ambitious course of action that will bring our dreams to reality. The course we are undertaking will accelerate our journey toward greater academic excellence for tomorrow."

But exactly how have those dreams been turned into reality?

In the early '90s, the University's Board of Trustees began to examine the challenges of taking the institution to the next level—in academic programming, resources and facilities. The first step was to assess how the institution compared to other schools.

At the time, Akron had recently joined the Mid-American Confer-

ence (MAC) for athletics and the MAC consisted of several similarly sized midwestern public schools, including Ohio University, Bowling Green State University and others—a perfect point for comparison.

"What the Board found was that Akron more than held its own in academic programs—especially with

the polymer science and polymer engineering programs," says Dr. John Fink, trustee and chairman of the facilities planning committee. "However, the University didn't compare as well when it came to its physical facilities."

Fink says that there were a few important concerns. "We were the only MAC school not to have a student recreation center. Our student union was getting old and losing appeal with students. And it was difficult to tell where campus began and ended—there was no unity."

To compete against MAC schools in terms of facilities—and to move past them—the Board of Trustees knew that The University of Akron had to commit to some major changes. But the group wasn't about to make any sudden, rash moves.

The Board commissioned Sasaki Associates, Inc., an interna-

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tionally acclaimed architectural planning firm based in Boston, to study Akron’s situation and to forge a long-term development guide plan for the University. To bolster the process, the Trustees began a series of campus-wide discussions with students, faculty and staff to get their input on what needed to be done.

Soon after Dr. Marion Ruebel was named University president in 1996, the Board of Trustees and faculty and administrative leaders agreed that the guide plan should be more ambitious, and recharged Sasaki Associates to put

together the necessary elements for a complete transformation of the University. A capital campaign was launched to raise funds for the execution of the plan, as well as to bolster student scholarships, with a target of \$125 million set.

Sasaki’s findings for near-term improvements revealed what University Trustees and leaders had suspected. Major upgrades needed to be made to improve student life—more specifically, a new student recreation and wellness center, a new student union and a more convenient student affairs building to replace the

more than a century-old Spicer Hall. Also, the study identified a need for a home for the Buchtel College of Arts & Sciences, which had long been broken up in several buildings across campus.

But perhaps more importantly, Sasaki identified a need to redefine the campus itself—especially the need for greater unity through more green space, better circulation, upgraded parking and ideal building placement.

“It was clear that this wasn’t just about adding a few new buildings,” says Alex R. Arshinkoff, Board of Trustees chairman. “It

was about completely redefining the campus. And while we were excited about improving the physical facilities and aesthetic appeal of the University, we also knew that the guide development plan would have to work to meet our growing academic goals.”

Though the discussions with students, faculty and staff about the future of the University originally focused on capital needs, they also spurred strategies for taking Akron to the next level academically. With burgeoning programs in polymer science and engineering, business, law and several other areas, the University was poised “for greatness,” says Trustee John Fink. “It was only natural that the campus development guide plan would complement strides toward academic improvement—specifically the attainment of Carnegie Research II status.”

This concerted, cooperative approach helped attract several top presidential candidates to Akron in a

## KEYS TO THE PLAN

- Create a more user-friendly, safe, cohesive and aesthetically appealing campus that will attract and retain students, faculty and staff, and serve as a symbol of pride for alumni.
- Establish a framework for the future development of the campus that will guide the siting of capital projects and major landscape elements.
- Identify and establish major open spaces with clearly defined and designed pedestrian connections between the buildings and open spaces.
- Clarify and establish campus edges and character, including proposals for points of campus entry through portals, campus signage, lighting and tree-lined paths of travel.
- Restructure campus parking, vehicular and pedestrian circulation to enhance safety, convenience and the quality of the campus environment.
- Create a strong physical, programmatic and symbolic linkage between the campus and adjoining community to stimulate mutually supportive and beneficial interaction.

national search. The Board and the University community wanted someone who could lead both these efforts.

The approach also attracted the interest of UA's alumni, friends and partners. By early 1998, the capital campaign goal of \$100 million had been reached—ahead of schedule—and the campaign was extended to assure the University would be able to provide the best to its students.

At the same time, the Campus Master Plan was beginning to take a definite shape. UA's Office of Facilities Planning & Construction, led by Ted Curtis, vice president of Capital Planning and Facilities Management, began to work with architects and other contractors to develop strategies for individual building and landscaping projects. Integral to this process were Ramesh Vakamudi, director of campus planning; Phillip E. Bartlett, director of space utilization; and David J. Pierson, architect.

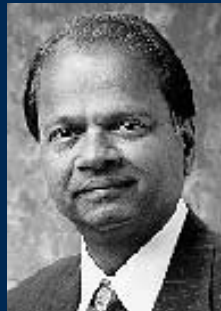
"We've been working many months to get everything right,"

says Curtis. "We're very pleased with how everything has come along, but we still have a lot of work to do."

In October 1998, the University, after a long and diligent search for a new and capable leader, named Dr. Luis M. Proenza as the 15th President of The University of Akron. "I wanted to be part of an institution that so boldly stated its aspirations and backed them up with such thoughtful and ambitious plans," says Dr. Proenza. "Truly, Akron has the ability and promise to showcase its leadership in education to the nation and the world."

Finally, after several years of thoughtful planning, the University's Board of Trustees and President Proenza announced the Campus Master Plan in September. It was, indeed, received with overwhelming approval by the University community. With construction set to begin in coming months, a New Landscape for Learning will begin to emerge—a landscape that boasts some of the finest caretakers in the world.

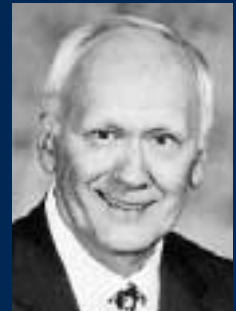
## ALL ON "BOARD" FOR CHANGE



**Mark N. Apte**



**Alex R. Arshinkoff**



**Donald E. Demkee**



**Dr. John Fink**



**Howard Flood (Ret.)**



**Patricia L. Graves**



**The Honorable  
Edna J. Head**



**Clifford Isroff**



**Raymond D. Meyo**



**David E. "Gene"  
Waddell**

Without the foresight and vision of The University of Akron's Board of Trustees, the Campus Master Plan might never have come to fruition. Board members were the first to dream of what UA could become. And they were the first to dare set events into motion—commissioning the campus-wide study by Sasaki Associates and hiring a strong leader such as President Luis M. Proenza to oversee the University's transformation.