President gives interview

To mark the beginning of the new academic year, UNB President James Downey spoke to Timothy Lethbridge of the *Brunswickan* about the university and himself. This version is somewhat edited, the complete version can be heard Saturday at 6 p.m. on CHSR-FM's Focus program.

T.L. President Downey, you are in your third year as UNB president; reflecting back over the last couple of years, what do you think have been the most important changes and improvements in the university?

J.D. Changes are not necessarily improvements. It would perhaps be premature if not presumptuous of me to judge what have been improvements, and what have merely been changes.

There has been a very significant change in the system of governance at the university. The advent of the faculty unions certainly made a great deal of difference in the way in which a good deal gets done, a good deal of the management takes place within the university. That has been a significant change, it is not a change peculiar to UNB, it is a change that has gone on across the continent. We are still in the process of adjusting to the new structures and requirements and the ways of doing things. That has made a considerable number of demands on our time and energies in management and administration of the university.

It is too early to say whether that's all been for the better; certainly some of it has been. There have been in my view, some improvements in relations as a result of that.

That's one significant organizational change. Another change that has occured which has had a significant effect has gone on for some period of time and has continued. The university has been forced to adjust to levels of revenue, levels of income, which are less than we feel we need in order to do all of the very worthwhile things that we feel this university is capable of doing. Due to that, there has been some considerable adjustment in terms of our resource levels, in terms of our program offerings and so on.

Again, I would not say that all of that change has been detrimental to the university, I think there have been many splendid innovations in many areas, that have come about as a result of the pressures that we've been under. But I would be less than honest if I didn't say that I think that in some ways we have also suffered; and I could quote two quite specific areas of the university, the library, for example, some of our labs for example, personnel that have not been able to continue, and so on.

These have had, I think, rather unfortunate consequences for the university. But nonetheless I sensed in this an attempt on the part of faculty and staff to come to terms with it, to make the best of it, and in some cases indeed to capitalize on the situation.

T.L. You have travelled accross the country recently as president of the university, and you have spoken to groups of alumni and other university officials. What does the general attitude seem to be about the University of New Brunswick as a whole?

J.D. You are quite right, I have travelled fairly extensively within Canada since I have been president of the University of New Brunswick, attending meetings, visiting with alumni chapters and other groups. My general sense is that the University of New Brunswick is quite highly regarded in the academic community in Canada. And quite fondly thought of and highly regarded by its alumni.

When I have travelled to alumni chapters, the hidden agenda always has been a financial campaign that we expected people to participate in.

Wherever I have gone, dispite the rather grim economic circumstances that many people have been confronting, the response has been overwhelmingly favorable. Very encouraging. I think had it not been so encouraging one would have been tempted to say, this isn't the time to launch a financial campaign, let's wait. But the response to our appeal for help, our appeal for canvassers, our appeal for committees, has been such that I've been encouraged to continue. And I'd suggest that there exist among the graduates of this university, who are spread right across Canada, a sense of appreciation for the experience that they had here and a willingness indeed to assist the students who are here now or will be coming in the future years.

There's no doubt that within the Province of New Brunswick, the university is regarded as an essential institution, central in the development of the society, essential to its further cultural and social and economic development in the future. I have been struck time and time and time again as I have moved around the province with the sense of importance that the university has in the estimation of a great many people.

T.L. I understand the university has been doing particularly well with regard to the number of research scholarships that have been given to people connected with the university from the National Research Council and the department of Energy Mines and Resources. Could you perhaps expand on this.

J.D. I suppose one shouldn't cite statistics without having them in front of one, but I will.

One of the most prestigious scholarships offered now to graduating students in the natural sciences and engineering are the Natural Sciences and Engineering Research Council Scholarships. These are worth roughly about ten thousand dollars each year, they are tenable for, I believe, up to ten years; and so a graduating student in any field of science, engineering, forestry, mathematics and certain areas of psychology can really build a career, a graduate career, on one of these scholarships.

Last year, continuing a pattern which has now been well established here at UNB, this university did very much better than any university in the region. In fact, the statistics as I remember them are these: The University of Moncton had three NSERC post-graduate scholarships (these are first-year scholarships I am talking about), Mount Allison, I believe had six, Daihousie had eleven, Memorial had nine and UNB had thirty-six. And that is to my mind an absolutely astonishing achievement on the part of both the students and the faculty of this university.

Its one of the few measures we have of how well we are doing vis-a-vis other students. We don't award these scholarships, these are national competition scholarships. And with scholarships as prestigious as these, the competition is fierce as you can imagine.

Last year, we came behind only three universities in the whole of Canada; the University of Toronto, the University of Waterloo, and McGill, all of which are just so much bigger than we are. I think it is a remarkable achievement, I'm very proud of it as a matter of fact.

T.L. That's fantastic isn't it? The university is of course launching its Third Century Fund Campaign, as you mentioned just a few minutes ago. Do you find any problems with other universities having fund campaigns at the same time, and competing with this? How is the campaign actually going?

J.D. Oh dear yes! Yes, the same pressures that we are feeling of course, are being felt by all our public institutions, and certainly by universities across the country. I couldn't tell you off hand how many universities are having a fund-raising campaign at the moment, but it must be the majority of universities in the country. And we are all competing of course in our own quiet and civilized way, I hope, for the same money.

In such a campaign one has to be able to make a very unique case for yourself in order to receive support. Now, one would expect to receive support for a financial campaign within ones institution, from students, from faculty and staff and indeed from alumni. But when you move beyond that to the business community, beyond ones work to the region, beyond the region to the national corporations and foundations; there the questions tend to be what is so different, what is so unique about the University of New Brunswick that we should support it when we have very limited budgets for donations and we have so many competitors for those funds.

The way we have structured our campaign of course, it's a bit early to tell just how sucessful we are going to be. Let me just elaborate briefly on that. Ours is a campaign that really consists of six sub-campaigns, the first of which was launched in May, and we have called it an advance-gifts campaign. That is, we have appealed or are appealing to a very small group of people and a handful of companies, companies that we believe should have a special interest in the university of New Brunswick. The people are essentially the honorary graduates of the university, the members of the board of governors, special friends of the university that we feel will have a special interest in UNB.

That phase of the campaign will close at the end of September. Before it closes, the second phase will come into being which is the student phase of the campaign. Then that will be followed in October by the faculty-staff appeal then in November by the alumni appeal. Then in January, if we follow the present schedule, we will go to the Atlantic business community and make our appeal to them. And then finally in March we hope we will be going to the national corporations.

Now the idea that lies behind this kind of plan is that we can build up momentum for ourselves. When people ask what is special about UNB we hope we are able to say, when we go to the national companies, look at what the students, the faculty, the staff, the alumni of the university are prepared to do for it. Look at the measure of their committment. You know, that is a terribly important factor to companies when they decide their gift level. Are you willing to support? Do you believe in yourselves? And for that reason we are doing it this way, not that we expect to raise a lot of money from our students, obviously, in the present circumstances - that would be unrealistic; but we do hope to do well, and unless we do well it weakens our case.

Similarly with our faculty and staff. Similarly with our alumni. And if these groups don't come through for the university then I wouldn't be surprised if a lot of national companies say, 'well if you are not committed to your own cause, why should we support it'.

Remember we have a target of ten million dollars, and we have set for ourselves a goal of roughly 1.3 million for the advance gifts campaign. My guess is we will go over the two million dollar mark by the end of September - and that, in the present circumstance, is quite encouraging. The encouragement too comes from the response we have recieved to date from the students and their organization and their will-