

In *From the Temple of Zeus to the Hyperloop*, anyone can find a person, whether it be the trailblazing Lucy Braun or the celebrated Carl Blegen, or a place, be it the changing landscape of Ludlow Avenue or the new frontier for the DAAP College, to which he or she can relate. Such figures, places, and stories present a sampling of the UC experience. *From the Temple of Zeus to the Hyperloop* offers readers an inside look at the many lives that have influenced UC and the opportunity to envision how their own stories can be a part of its future.

Just as Hand titles his introduction, “a dedicated crew of bearcats assembled this book,” the University of Cincinnati and its story continue to be a community effort, deeply intertwined with the lives of the people who have made up the university and its two-hundred years.

“An effervescent cocktail revealing a stunning array of University of Cincinnati ‘flavors.’”

—Molly Wellman, Owner of Molly’s Brands, including Japp’s and Myrtle’s Punch House

“The gift that keeps on giving...This is a remarkable story of an institution has warmed the hearts and contributed to the health and cultural welfare of virtually every citizen in the community. From its first century of extraordinary pioneering efforts in the fields of law, medicine, science, engineering, business and the arts; through its second century of expansion; this history is like no other. I can’t wait for the next two hundred.”

—Jim Tarbell, Cincinnati City Council and proprietor of the original Ludlow Garage

“Romance, mystery, the roots of stardom, and adventure—all add up to an enticing read. This collection of essays delightfully reminds us that two centuries of history is 200 years of living, breathing personas, their stories and their experiences.”

—Neville Pinto, University of Cincinnati’s 30th president

FROM THE TEMPLE OF ZEUS TO THE HYPERLOOP

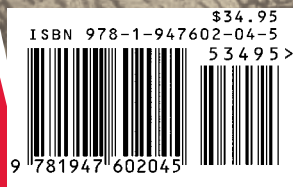
FROM THE TEMPLE OF ZEUS TO THE HYPERLOOP

University of Cincinnati Stories



ABOUT THE EDITOR

Greg Hand, proprietor of the “Cincinnati Curiosities” blog, retired in 2014 as associate vice president for public relations at the University of Cincinnati. In addition to his blog, Hand is a freelance writer and consults on public relations planning and crisis communication. He contributes regularly to *Cincinnati* magazine’s “City Wise” blog. Hand is co-chair of the Spirit of History Committee, which was responsible for the development of the Bicentennial books.



UC CINCINNATI

Edited by Greg Hand

As the University of Cincinnati celebrates its bicentennial, students, faculty, staff, and alumni look back on the university’s remarkable past and its progression as a pioneer in higher education. *From the Temple of Zeus to the Hyperloop: University of Cincinnati Stories* reflects the breadth and diversity of the University of Cincinnati over its rich and eventful history, emphasizing just what makes UC’s history so special and inspiring—its stories.

Former Ohio Governor Bob Taft remembers his law school days in a building named for his great-grandfather. Broadway star Faith Prince recalls her musical theater start at UC’s College-Conservatory of Music. More than thirty-five contributors provide their own unique perceptions of this extraordinary urban university. Some are well-known names like Taft and Prince, while others are current students and alumni whose education and futures were profoundly shaped by memorable experiences connected to UC. Clark Beck recounts the struggles he initially faced upon coming to UC and offers readers an inspiring story of perseverance and tenacity. Sid Thatham gives a captivating tale of his move from India and the home base he made in Cincinnati with UC graduate students. Other contributors celebrate the relationships, such as that between the strong-willed duo of Jack Rouse and Helen Laird, that give UC its storied past.

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TEMPLE OF ZEUS
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University of Cincinnati Stories

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About the University of Cincinnati Press

The University of Cincinnati Press is committed to publishing rigorous, peer reviewed, leading scholarship accessibly to stimulate dialog between the academy, public intellectuals and lay practitioners. The Press endeavors to erase disciplinary boundaries in order to cast fresh light on common problems in our global community. Building on the university's long-standing tradition of social responsibility to the citizens of Cincinnati, the state of Ohio, and the world, the press publishes books on topics which expose and resolve disparities at every level of society and have local, national and global impact.

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*In memory of Bob Dobbs (1953–2017),
among the Spirit of History Committee's
founding members and inspiring contributors.*

Foreword

Five Presidents 1984–2016

Different Styles, Different Times

by Buck Niehoff

In the course of one year, 2009, I served as chair of the UC board of trustees with three presidents—Nancy Zimpher, Monica Rimai, and Greg Williams. That’s a record number. At no time in the two-hundred-year history of the university has there been so many in such a brief period. I had worked as a volunteer on a number of projects with Joe Steger, who preceded Nancy, and with Santa Ono, who followed Greg. As a result, over three decades or so, I have become an amateur presidential observer, deeply appreciative of their diverse contributions to the university and fascinated by their charming quirks.

Of the group, Joe was probably the least presidential in the traditional sense. But, in many ways, he was the most effective. After all, he lasted in the job for nineteen years (1984 to 2003), far longer than any of the others. Only one UC president, Raymond Walters, outdid him, serving twenty-three years, from 1932 to 1955.

Joe’s easygoing attitude, quick jokes, and humorous comments gave an impression more of an insurance salesman than the head of a major university. Once, at a dinner party, I introduced him as the president of UC to an out-of-towner, who looked at me in confusion and said, “You’re kidding.”

For Joe, jocularly leveled the playing field, put people at ease and empowered them. He especially enjoyed teasing his friends. Because he did it with warm-hearted intelligence, you felt complimented and understood, rather than embarrassed or put out. His humor made everyone comfortable around him, even though he might be their boss, or their boss’s boss.

He encouraged you to express your ideas and was willing to support you if your suggestions made sense for the university. Of course, the best idea he embraced was the signature architecture program that transformed UC into one of the most beautiful urban campuses in the world.

I always admired his commitment to this plan. Although he knew a great deal about many things, he knew very little about architecture. Actually, nothing.

I got a sense of his ignorance on this topic once when he and I were having lunch together at the Maisonette, Cincinnati's former five-star French restaurant. As we were studying the menus, trying to decide about a wine, I began chatting, to make conversation, about architecture, a particular passion of mine.

I said, "You know, I really like Le Corbusier. Really wonderful." Looking up from the wine list, Joe said, "Oh. That's good. Le Corbusier is one of my favorites, too. Let's order a bottle of it." To this day I don't know for certain if he was kidding.

In the history of the university, Joe's legacy is the rebuilding of the campus, transforming it from asphalted acres of surface parking lots, surrounded by mundane, uncomfortable structures, to an interconnected pattern of world-class buildings, designed by the most accomplished architects of our time.

But, for me personally, his true legacy is the humanity that he brought to the university, expressed by his friendly humor and intelligent wit.

If Joe was a bit laid back, his successor, Nancy Zimpher was nearly the opposite. A dynamic extrovert, she exploded with more energy than she could use up in any given day. But her gregarious enthusiasm was exactly what the university needed, from 2003 to 2009, to propel it to the next level academically and enable it to evolve as a leader in our region.

At the beginning of her administration, she collaborated with many stakeholders to create a plan known as "UC|21: Defining the New Urban Research University." It got everyone focused on quality in our academics and teaching. Along the way, admission standards were raised and enrollment increased substantially.

She initiated the Proudly Cincinnati Capital Campaign, which had an initial goal of raising \$700 million. But her energetic vision demanded a larger objective and she encouraged the campaign leadership, including me as one of the co-conveners, to increase it to \$1 billion, making it the largest campaign for any organization in the history of the Greater Cincinnati region.

When the higher goal was announced, I remember thinking that we might get to that amount eventually but not within the period of time we had set for the

campaign. I was wrong. Not only did we reach the goal within the timeframe but we exceeded it by \$90 million. As Nancy often said, “Make no small plans.”

She also became a leader in the community, improving UC’s visibility and connection with the region. She co-founded StriveTogether, an innovative “birth to career” educational initiative, which has spread to other communities across the nation. She chaired the Uptown Consortium, responsible for much of the development in the neighborhoods adjacent to the university.

Her extroverted energy was one source of her success. She came alive in a crowd and the more input she had, the more outgoing she became. Once, at the end of a long day crowded with several difficult meetings about various matters at the university, she and I went to a retirement party for a beloved staff member. I remember she was so worn out that she could barely drag herself into the party. But as the excitement of the gathering hit her, her face relaxed, and she started to smile and banter. People energized her.

Another example of her outgoing nature was her plan to revive the Commencement ceremonies by shaking hands with each graduate. If you think about it, that is the sort of thing only an extrovert would want to do.

With this change, students and their families for the first time in decades enthusiastically enjoyed the ceremonies. They liked the personal connection with the president. Attendance skyrocketed and students looked forward to walking across the stage and being congratulated by the president.

As a member of the board of trustees, I sat through many of these Commencements and watched her joy in greeting each graduate. With not much to do during the hour or two of hand shaking, I passed some of the time by counting how many she would do in a minute. She was pretty good at it. As I recall, she managed as many as thirty-five, or one graduate every two seconds.

Sometimes I think that her famous, highly patterned stockings were another aspect of her gregarious personality. They were part of the electricity that surrounded her.

Once they played a small part in her unsuccessful attempt at jogging. After she was at UC for a few years, she mentioned one day at a meeting that she wanted to start an exercise program. “I have time now to get in shape,” she declared. I couldn’t imagine how she handled half of what she was already doing. But I picked up on her comment and volunteered to help her start jogging. We agreed to go for a run early one morning. On the day we selected, I ran the two miles from my

house to her building. I found her in the lobby and suggested that we run for about a mile and a half. She was dressed in shorts, a bulky Bearcat sweatshirt, and her trademark fancy patterned stockings. “Usually,” I mentioned, “people consider socks are more comfortable to run in than stockings.”

“I always wear stockings,” she gruffed. She seemed unhappy, almost sullen, which was very unusual for her. “Let’s get started,” she sighed. We jogged out the door and headed down the long driveway at a slow but steady pace. When we reached the street, about 250 yards from where we had started, she stopped suddenly. Turning to me, she smiled politely and said, “That was great. I really enjoyed it. Let’s do it again sometime.”

With that she spun around and went back toward the building. At first, I worried that my sock comment had discouraged her in some way. More likely, though, she probably just didn’t like exercise. Anyway, we never ran again.

Just over a week after I was elected chair of the board of trustees in late January 2009, she resigned. But I was not the cause of that. She had been offered a major promotion, to become chancellor of the State University of New York system. With 460,000 students, it is the largest university system in the country. It was a job as large as her energetic personality.

Nancy was almost a walking billboard for UC, usually wearing the university’s colors of red or black or both. As she often said, “Vision trumps everything.” She inspired us all to dream, to think of the university as better than great—to envision it as premier. She encouraged us to believe that we could pretty much accomplish anything, and during her presidency we did a lot.

By contrast our next president, Monica Rimai, was a nuts-and-bolts pragmatist, who kept the ship running smoothly from March to November 2009 through the chopping waters of selecting a new president and transitioning to new leadership.

Whereas Nancy enjoyed leading the parade, like a high-stepping drum majorette, Monica focused her energy more in the background, making certain that everything was in good order. She had served Nancy as senior vice president for administration and finance, and had helped to organize and push through many tough decisions, such as performance-based budgeting for the academic departments.

While Nancy inspired change through excitement and bold vision, Monica relied on steadfast tenacity, hard work, and thorough research. At every meeting I attended with her, Monica knew the facts about the issues better than anyone in the room. She simply out-prepared everyone else.

Even her leisure activities involved hard work and tenacity. She often “vacationed” by mountain climbing and long-distance bike riding—two interests we shared. We swapped tales about her climb to base camp on Mount Everest and my summiting Mount Kilimanjaro, and on many Sunday mornings we rode with the head of the UC Recreation Center on the Little Miami bike path. Invariably, those rides, which started pleasantly enough, turned into all-out, exhausting, competitive races.

For me the visual image of Monica’s focused dedication was, surprisingly, her car, a Mini Cooper. I will always recall seeing it on McMicken Circle one morning as I drove up Clifton Avenue about a half hour before a meeting that she had scheduled with me for 7:00 A.M. Hers was the only car I saw. The sole person working at that early hour was the top leadership of the university.

I think that her behind-the-scenes nature was challenged when it came to Commencement. Before the ceremony, she looked stressed. I sensed that being center stage as president and having to connect with several thousand graduates as they “walked” did not appeal to her.

But she was determined to do her duty and she soldiered on. During the ceremony, when I counted the number of handshakes per minute that she was doing, I was astounded. She reached as high as sixty, one graduate per second. I turned to another trustee sitting next to me on the stage and asked, “How come she is going so fast?”

“None of the students know her,” was the response. “They just walk past and don’t really notice her.”

Being unnoticed was, I suppose, an important aspect of her leadership style. Her primary tools were discipline, keen analysis, and solid dedication, exactly what the university needed at the time as we transitioned to a new president.

If you were casting a president for a Hollywood movie, your choice might well be Greg Williams, who led UC from 2009 to 2012. With classic good looks, he not only looked the part but, with a reserved, scholarly demeanor, he acted it, too.

Typical of many academics, he was thoughtful and sensitive to others, but perhaps a bit remote. As a scholar, he wrote four books and earned four advanced degrees, including a Juris Doctor and a PhD, as well as five honorary degrees. For him the life of the mind was part of his personality and was central to his leadership style.

It was natural for him to use the power of reasoning to influence decisions. Unfortunately, not everyone was on his wavelength. Many people were unable to grasp the complexity of what he was saying. His cerebral approach probably was out of step with our current personality-oriented society.

But he was extremely sensitive to people's feelings. This awareness probably resulted from his difficult childhood in Muncie, Indiana, which he described in his award-winning memoir, *Life on the Color Line: The True Story of a White Boy Who Discovered He Was Black*. Instead of becoming bitter about his early life experiences, he became compassionate and determined to help others transform their lives.

In the hundreds of speeches that he gave each year to groups on campus and to organizations within the community, he emphasized the transformative value of education. As well as encouraging diversity and access for first-generation students, he developed a program to help gifted students and distinguished faculty to receive well-deserved recognition through seeking national awards and grants.

During his tenure, he enhanced the national stature and academic reputation of the university. He helped to create our current athletics conference, the American Athletic Conference, and he developed a plan, UC2019—Accelerating Our Transformation—that expanded Nancy's UC|21 agenda.

His primary gifts to UC were this focus on excellence in academics, and more importantly, encouraging us to believe that our job was to help transform and improve lives through everything that we do at UC. He was a good judge of character and he filled many of the senior positions and deanships with some outstanding picks, including the provost, Santa Ono, who succeeded him in 2012 and led the university until 2016.

Without question, Santa was UC's most student-oriented president. He simply loved being with students and he enjoyed interacting with them in many ways. He embraced their preferred method of communication—social media—and became known, nationally, for using his tweets to give a human voice to the UC president.

His Twitter account, which gave birth to the hashtag #HottestCollegeIn-America, had more than 77,000 followers. He was famous for responding, almost immediately, to emails, posting photos of his daily activities, and tweeting about everything from the best doughnuts in town to his favorite Taylor Swift songs.

He was willing to try anything that the students were doing. Once, when he practiced with the football team, he learned to catch a pass if it was lobbed very gently in his direction. Another time, he sweated through a hot yoga class with thirty students.

Perhaps the most visible evidence of his student interaction were the bowties which he wore nearly every day and which became part of his identity. He started wearing them after having dinner at a fraternity house, where he became aware of their popularity. At first, like most people, he had trouble tying them. Several

times, as someone who has worn them since the 1970s, I had to help him, until he finally got the hang of it.

Because he believed in putting students first, he chose not to live in the president's official residence. Instead, he urged the university to sell it and to use the proceeds for scholarships. As many as forty students each year were able to receive this funding.

However, not all of his student connections were a success. When it came to shaking hands at Commencement, he proved to be much slower than any other president. He could only manage a meager fifteen or so per minute. The problem was he was so popular that many students paused to take a selfie with him. Eventually, the university had to ban these selfies.

While continuing the university's tradition of selecting the best people for the job, Santa also perpetuated our commitment to diversity. Nancy had been our first woman president. Greg was our first African American and Santa was our first Asian American. All three of them contributed to our cultural richness that has helped propel UC to international stature. In this regard Santa supported UC's strategic partnerships with several international universities, including Chongqing University, Hong Kong Polytechnic University, Beijing University, and Botswana International University.

Santa signed on to the establishment of the UC Press, to promote academic scholarship through publication. This plan was advanced by UC Libraries Dean Xuemao Wang, with encouragement from the UC Bicentennial Commission's Spirit of History Committee, which was responsible for creating books about the university's 200-year history. Santa intended that this Bicentennial book of essays would be one of the first produced by the press. He also envisioned that the press would be one of the tangible enduring legacies of the Bicentennial celebration.

Santa's leadership style can be summarized in one word—enthusiasm. He found something positive in nearly every idea that came his way and he was generous in his efforts to give new ideas a chance. As with nearly everyone, however, his greatest strength was also his greatest weakness. The many novel ideas that he embraced sometimes could not be seen through to completion.

His gift to UC was the excitement for learning and passion for college life that he gave to the students. He brought the students to the forefront, where they truly belong.

Each of these five presidents has been, I believe, the right person for the time they served. Their various personal styles helped to provide balanced leadership that propelled UC into one of the great urban research universities in the world.