

# 'All We Can and Should Be'

As last year's chairman of the Board of Curators' resources and planning committee, Jim Sterling, BJ '65, listened quietly as others presented a gloomy forecast of the future of the University of Missouri. The Bolivar, Mo., publisher returned to his motel room and wrote the following remarks, which he delivered to the board Dec. 2, 1988.

By JIM STERLING

## New curators appointed

Gov. John Ashcroft's three new appointees to the Board of Curators are all MU graduates.

On Jan. 4, Ashcroft appointed Carrie Francke, 34, of Columbia and Webb Gilmore, 44, of Kansas City to replace Jeanne Epple and W.H. "Bert" Bates, respectively, whose terms had expired. John Lichtenegger, 41, of Jackson, Mo., who has served a partial term on the board, was reappointed to a full term. The terms of all three expire in 1995.

Francke, AB '75, BJ '76, JD '81, MPA '84, is an attorney in Columbia. She twice ran for U.S. representative on the Republican ticket. From 1982 to 1986, she was an assistant attorney general under Ashcroft.

Gilmore, JD '73, an attorney in Kansas City, specializes in bond work. He is a Democrat and a former member of the Missouri Lottery Commission.

Lichtenegger, AB '69, JD '72, is a member of the Farm Bureau and of the Farmland Industries Inc. co-op in Jackson. He was chairman of the MU Alumni Association in Cape Girardeau County in 1976 and 1977.

The remaining members of the Board of Curators are Sam B. Cook, Jefferson City; Eva Louise Frazer, St. Louis; Fred S. Kummer, St. Louis; Peter H. Raven, St. Louis; James C. Sterling, BJ '65, Bolivar; and Edwin S. Turner, board president, BS Ag '62, Chillicothe.

—Terry Jordan

It has been suggested intelligently and articulately by members of this board that we have two ways to go with this University. One, perhaps, would be to rethink the entire structure, assuming present state funding, and to become better in some ways—but with fewer students.

I would like to take the route that takes us toward being all we can and should be—first saying that quality should always be foremost in our thinking. However, I do not believe that quality and being a great, growing, living, vibrant people's University are mutually exclusive. Consider Michigan, Ohio and our peer institutions across the country.

I believe the University of Missouri is one of the great universities in America. It has a long and rich tradition. Today it serves Missourians in many ways, with more than a quarter of a million graduates and nearly 55,000 students on our four campuses. I do not want to see this University become less than it is today, because this University is essential to the economic well-being of this state in the next century. We are not simply

**Still a member of the resources and planning committee, Jim Sterling is the 1989 chairman of the physical facilities committee.**

Jeff Adams photo

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concerned with education; we are concerned with the economic future of our state and the unique role of this University in building that future.

I would urge this board to drop our preoccupation with worst-case scenarios and self-flagellation and begin, instead, to talk more about what we should be doing to build a great University to serve this state. I applaud our efforts to establish an Agenda for Action and our administrators' thoughtful efforts to repair the base of one of our state's greatest assets. We are significantly behind other states; however, if we are successful, we will move all the way up to average in funding for our University system.

Just up to average!

Think about it. None of us around this table like to think of ourselves as "just average." Average is not satisfactory—not for my newspapers—not for [Curator] Sam's [Cook] banks—or for [Curator] Fred's [Kummer] hotels and construction company. The Missouri Botanical Garden [directed by Curator Peter Raven] is no average garden.

None of us wants an average lawyer representing our interests, and we want and will pay for the best when it comes to selecting a doctor. Why, then, should average or less be a goal of this board?

**W**e Missourians like our state. We think it is better than average. We think our University is above average, too, and it is. A great deal is being accomplished with smoke and mirrors. We do a tremendous job with what we have, and this is a credit to our dedicated faculty, our tremendous staff and the talented leadership in our administration.

I might say, too, that the students have not lost faith in us. Enrollments are up; test scores are up; and students somehow have been willing to pay higher fees for the privilege of attending one of the University of Missouri campuses.

But we have come to the brink. Time is running out. If we choose to be less than we should be, we are turning our backs on the essential role of the state's only public research University.

We must look to the present window of opportunity to be what we can

and should be. We must marshal the alumni. We must provide leadership in creating new coalitions and new partnerships of concerned Missourians willing to work for the future of our state.

**W**e simply cannot give up on our state or on our mission to do what is right for the state. The future of Missouri will be jeopardized if this University is allowed to do less than it should. Evidence of the key role that higher education must play in future economic prosperity is already on the table. It is being done in other states. We must form this alliance—or we will fall farther behind.

Texas has done it in the worst economic era since the Great Depression. It has happened in North Carolina, in Massachusetts and in Colorado. It is even happening in Mississippi and Kansas.

I am competitive enough to find it very distasteful to be in a position to do something—and not to grab the ring. I am proud enough as a Missourian to want the same benefit for our state, and I think we can have it!

We are giving up on our state and short-changing our children's future when we accept only what we are given and do not devise new ways to get what we need and should have.

I do not think we have received messages from the governor and General Assembly saying that they want to be last in assistance to higher education. They respond to the public; and, somehow, they do not have the message that we are in trouble. We may be dealing with low funding as a reality right now, but I believe we have an opportunity—a challenge—through our leadership to change that tomorrow.

We must begin by sending a clear signal that we know what we are doing. We must challenge the perception of Missourians that everything is OK with higher education. When we suggest publicly that we can do more with less, we are doing a disservice to the state. We are ignoring a basic problem, which no thinking person can deny; we do not spend enough on higher education. If we were just average, we would reach most of our goals. We could do our job more effectively. Our state cannot continue

to try to get by on the cheap approach. We are mortgaging the future.

We have our plans; we have the Knight Report, we have our Agenda for Action; and we have the independent Opportunity 2000 report. They all tell us what we should be doing and where we should be going.

I believe the people of this state want to enjoy the benefits of an above average or excellent environment in which to live and raise their families. I do not know anyone who does not like to see a bigger paycheck. I believe Missourians—when asked, when presented the facts, and when given the alternatives—will choose the right path. When Missourians know what is at risk, they will respond.

I think the corporate community already understands this. Moreover, I believe when things start to move in the right direction, the political leadership will find it advantageous to join the movement.

**W**e do have two ways to go. We can challenge this state to live up to its potential, and we can help provide the leadership to make Missouri one of the premier states in the next century. Or, we can regroup, cut back, be less, abdicate our responsibilities and watch our state fall behind while other states move forward. I ask you as fellow curators to take up the challenge to do the things we must to increase resources for this University. Private funding will increase at a faster pace when we are properly funded by the state. We must work in a positive fashion to tell our story and to persuade the public that funding for education is truly an investment with huge dividends that will make this a richer state with more and better jobs and more opportunity for all of our citizens.

I was reminded recently of something the late Robert F. Kennedy said: "Some people see things as they are and ask 'Why?'—While others dream of what might be and ask, 'Why not?'"

**I** want this Board of Curators—chosen for leadership roles for this statewide University system—to take the second route, to look at what we might be, and to say, "Why not?" □