

## *THE SEARCH BEGINS*

When they appointed him president, Dr. Lee told the board that he would serve only three to five years. His letter of resignation on August 24, 1987 shocked no one. In his letter, Dr. Lee reminded the board:

. . . when you elected me president in 1984, I agreed to serve for three to five years because of my interest in eventually returning to the corporate environment. I have fulfilled this commitment and I have received an outstanding opportunity to join Bassett Furniture Industries, Inc . . . . as Vice President of Administration.

However, what was shocking was that Lee had resigned in order to begin serving in a position that he had accepted with the Gallaudet chairperson of the board, Spilman. In defending her decision to entice Dr. Lee away from Gallaudet University and into Bassett Furniture, Spilman stated:

## 24 Triumph of the Spirit

Some people might think the chairman of the board is a Judas for having the [university] president come to work for her firm. But everyone knew that Dr. Lee would only stay as president for three to five years . . . This man is a businessman and it was very obvious that he was going somewhere. Thank God Bassett Industries was able to attract him.

Not only did Spilman lure Dr. Lee away from Gallaudet, she also convinced him to begin his duties with Bassett Furniture before his successor was selected. Responsibility for the day-to-day operations of the university was in the hands of a committee of four people. It was clearly more important to Spilman for Dr. Lee to be at Bassett Furniture than for him to continue to carry out his responsibilities at Gallaudet University. Spilman and Lee also took the outrageous step of gilding their self-serving deal at the expense of Gallaudet. In addition to the salary increase he received for moving on to Bassett furniture, Spilman gave Dr. Lee a contract as a consultant to Gallaudet. Indeed, it was an offer Dr. Lee said, "I could not refuse."

Shortly after Dr. Lee announced his resignation, the board began the search for Gallaudet's seventh president by establishing the Presidential Search Committee (PSC). The Presidential Search Committee consisted of 11 members – six board members and five individuals representing various constituencies on the Gallaudet campus. Six of the members were hearing and five were Deaf, with Phil Bravin, a Deaf board member, selected as chairman of the Search Committee. Committee members were:

Phil Bravin, Chair	Deaf	Board Member
Laurel Glass	hearing	Board Member
Alexander Patterson	hearing	Board Member
Gustave Rathe	hearing	Board Member
Robert Sanderson	Deaf	Board Member
Frank Sullivan	Deaf	Board Member
Catherine Ingold	hearing	Administration
Nancy Kensicki	Deaf	Alumni
Tim Rarus	Deaf	Student Body
Neil Reynolds	hearing	Faculty
Denise Sullivan	hearing	Staff

Certain groups in the Gallaudet community met the announcement of the Presidential Search Committee and its composition with displeasure. One of those groups was the President's Council on Deafness. The Council had been formed seven years earlier in 1980 by university president Dr. Merrill in response to concerns about employment practices at Gallaudet. The Council, which was initially called the Deafness-Related Concerns Council, was composed of faculty and staff who were Deaf and charged with the responsibility of keeping Dr. Merrill informed on the needs and concerns of the Deaf community at Gallaudet. One of the first tasks Dr. Merrill gave the Council was to address the issue of the employment and promotion of Deaf persons at Gallaudet.

In its 1982 report, "Employment of Deaf Persons at Gallaudet," the Council recommended:

There should be a process that when two qualified individuals are hired, the one familiar with the needs of the Deaf and skilled in the communication required for the position would automatically be placed a step or even a level above the one without these skills.

## 26 Triumph of the Spirit

The Council report made numerous recommendations for improving the employment and promotion of Deaf persons on campus. The university, however, adopted few of its recommendations.

After completion of its report, the Council became an independent watchdog and followed up on complaints brought to it by faculty and staff members who were Deaf.

When Dr. Lee became president, he was uncomfortable with the independent nature of the Deafness-Related Concerns Council and the image it portrayed – that the Deaf community had concerns about Gallaudet. He requested the name be changed to the President's Council on Deafness. In exchange for this name change, Dr. Lee would give the Council official university recognition. The Council would have a direct line to the president and it would be consulted prior to major decisions affecting the campus community. In 1985, the Deafness-Related Concerns Council accepted this offer and renamed itself the President's Council on Deafness (PCD), with official university recognition and status as a special advisory group reporting directly to the president.

Imagine the PCD's surprise when it found out the board had excluded it from membership on the Presidential Search Committee. Even worse, all three individuals the board had selected to represent the university (administration, faculty and staff) were hearing – Ingold (Administration), Reynolds (Faculty), and D. Sullivan (Staff).

On September 8, the PCD unanimously approved a motion that "Deaf people representing the faculty and staff be invited to sit on the board's Presidential Search Committee." The PCD developed a list of nine possible representatives for the board's consideration. In a letter

dated September 11, 1987, Dr. Lee was asked to petition the board of trustees to appoint two people from the list of nine to sit on the Search Committee.

When Dr. Lee presented the PCD's recommendation to the board, it was promptly rejected. The board's decision was based on their belief that "It was imperative that the structure of the Committee not become unmanageable." Did the board mean that a committee of 9 members would be manageable while a committee of 11 members would be unmanageable, or did they mean that a committee composed of a majority of hearing individuals (five hearing and four Deaf) would be manageable while a committee composed of a majority of Deaf individuals (five hearing and six Deaf) would be unmanageable?

Rather than accept the request of the PCD, the board assured the PCD it would have an opportunity to interview each of the final presidential candidates and submit their evaluation to the board. In response, the PCD established a task force to develop a list of qualified Deaf people from across the country that would be recommended to the Search Committee as candidates for becoming Gallaudet's seventh president.

The board charged the Search Committee with the responsibility "for identifying and developing a diverse pool of qualified candidates" and for "submitting [to the board] the names of no less than three but no more than five candidates who meet the qualifications for the position of president." On September 15, the Presidential Search Committee met and began planning the presidential selection process. The Committee's first task was to review the position description prepared by the board. The Committee approved the description and set a November 26 deadline for acceptance of applications.

## 28 Triumph of the Spirit

The board had said on numerous occasions it was seriously interested in appointing a Deaf person as president of the university. Was the board really serious about appointing a Deaf person or were they just giving lip service to the Deaf community?

Certainly the board's action not to include the President's Council on Deafness on the Search Committee raised questions about its seriousness. Another action the board took which questioned their seriousness was the development of the position announcement. On one hand it said the next president of Gallaudet should have "broad and deep knowledge of deafness and the variety of issues important to the higher education of hearing impaired persons" and on the other hand the board said "sensitivity to the issues significant to individuals with disabilities" might be acceptable.

The position announcement also said, "Proficiency in sign language is mandatory." However, if the person did not know sign language then "willingness to learn" was acceptable.

Willingness to learn?

Here is a board of trustees of a university for Deaf students whose primary mode of communication is sign language informing prospective candidates if they did not know anything about Deaf students or about communicating with Deaf students, it was acceptable. They could still become president of a university for Deaf students.

Can you think of any university in the world today where something like this could happen? Can you imagine Catholic University advertising for a president and stating, "Candidates for president do not need to be Catholic, nor be knowledgeable about the Catholic faith, as long as the candidate is sensitive to the needs of Catholic students?"

Can you imagine Howard University advertising for a president and stating, "Candidates for president do not need to be Black/African-American, nor even knowledgeable about Black/African-American students, as long as the candidate is sensitive to the needs of Black/African-American students?"

What about the University of Mexico advertising for a president and stating, "Candidates for president do not need to be knowledgeable about Mexican students as long as the candidate is sensitive to the needs of Mexican students. Proficiency in Spanish is mandatory. However, if the person does not know Spanish, then willingness to learn is acceptable?"

Actions speak louder than words and the board's actions raised questions about its "seriousness" to consider a Deaf person as president of Gallaudet. Another example which questioned the board's seriousness was its decision to appoint a committee of four people to oversee the day-to-day operations of Gallaudet. This committee was called the Central Administration Management Team and reported directly to the board of trustees Executive Committee. The board's decision not to appoint an interim president was a departure from its previous method of filling the vacancy.

In explaining why an interim president had not been selected, Spilman said the board did not want to send out "the wrong message to the campus community."

What wrong message were they afraid to send out?

Who were the obvious choices for interim president and what message would have been sent out by selecting one of them?

Some of the obvious choices for interim president were the four people on the Central Administration Management Team (CAMT) – the committee overseeing the day-to-day operations of Gallaudet. They were:

## 30 Triumph of the Spirit

*James Barnes* (hearing), Vice President of Administration and Business. Barnes joined Gallaudet in 1980 as a staff analyst. He served as director of Administrative Services during Lee's interim presidency and replaced Dr. Lee as Vice President of Administration and Business in 1984.

*Dr. Robert Davila* (Deaf), Vice President for Gallaudet University's Pre-College Programs. In 1983, Dr. Davila had been one of the candidates for the position of president of Gallaudet. In 1987, Dr. Davila had been inducted into the National Hall of Fame for Persons with Disabilities. He had served as president of both the Convention of American Instructors of the Deaf and the Council on Education of the Deaf, two of the premier organizations in the field of education of Deaf students.

*Marvin Garretson* (Deaf), Special Assistant to the President. Garretson had served under three presidents beginning with Dr. Leonard Elstad. Besides his duties as Special Assistant to the President, Garretson was responsible for overseeing the National Center on Law and the Deaf.

*Dr. Catherine Ingold* (hearing), Provost (the Provost is responsible for the leadership and direction of the division of Academic Affairs at Gallaudet). Dr. Ingold had the distinction of holding the highest academic rank achieved by any woman in Gallaudet's

history. She had been Provost less than one year. Prior to this, she had been dean of the School of Arts and Sciences for a little over a year and prior to that Head of the Language Department.

Who out of these four members of the CAMT would have been the best person to be interim president? Both Barnes and Garretson did not have the administrative experience nor educational background to assume the role of interim president. That left Dr. Ingold and Dr. Davila. What "wrong message" would the board have been sending the Deaf community if they selected Dr. Ingold as interim president? That the board considered Dr. Ingold a strong candidate for university president? That definitely would have been the wrong message to send the Deaf community.

One of the frequent excuses given by hearing people when explaining why a Deaf candidate is not selected for advancement has been the Deaf candidate did not have enough experience. Imagine the Deaf community's indignation when Dr. Ingold, a hearing individual who had very little administrative experience, was selected as Provost over two Deaf candidates with far more administrative experience. The Deaf community was still seething over the selection of Dr. Ingold as Provost. Selecting Dr. Ingold, as interim president, was not an option - it would have led to a revolt on campus.

The only other candidate for interim president was Dr. Davila. Dr. Davila had far more administrative experience than Dr. Ingold and the other two CAMT members combined. In 1983, Dr. Davila had been a candidate for Gallaudet's presidency. The board selected Dr. Johns instead. When Dr. Johns resigned, the board passed up an opportunity to select Dr. Davila as interim