



PRESS RELEASE

Alan J. Robertson, Second President of Santa Fe Community College, Died Sunday

November 21, 2005

Gainesville, FL--Alan J. Robertson, Santa Fe Community's College's second president, died Sunday of bone cancer at his home in Tampa. He was 84.

Robertson served as president of SFCC from December 1971 until his retirement in April 1990.

Robertson's dream was to make education more accessible. Under his leadership, Santa Fe expanded to the Blount Center in downtown Gainesville and the Andrews Center in Starke. Enrollment jumped from about 1,000 to 10,000 students.

He saw that Santa Fe custom-designed programs to fit the specific needs of business and industry, and established the college's modern transfer program. Santa Fe now sends nearly 3,000 students to the University of Florida every year.

Robertson was credited with directing SFCC "along a course that has taken it from the homeless waif in the University City to one of the leading community colleges in the state," in a March 1990 Gainesville Sun article about his retirement.

"Much of the Santa Fe that we know today took shape during his long tenure as president," said SFCC President Jackson Sasser, who renamed the administration building in Robertson's honor shortly after taking over as president in 2002.

"For all his accomplishments and stature, he was keenly interested in students, staff and people he knew as individuals," said Sasser. "He was a kind, thoughtful and great man."

Many of the buildings that comprise the college's Northwest Campus were constructed under Robertson's tenure, including the Health Sciences Building and the gymnasium.

Robertson helped transform the SFCC Springs Arts Festival into a regional event that draws 130,000 visitors a year. He oversaw planning of the SFCC Performing Arts Center, which now is the Phillips Center for the Performing Arts.

"He was a very open, charismatic leader, and a visionary," said Guy York, vice president of Administrative Affairs, who was hired by Robertson. "He really prided himself on knowing every employee on campus by name."

Robertson was born Sept. 17, 1921, in Barrow-in-Furness, England, but grew up in Pittsburg, Pa.

He served during World War II as a first lieutenant-navigator on heavy bombers such as the B-17 and B-24. He flew 57 combat missions in the South Pacific.

He earned both a bachelor's degree in public administration (1948) and a master's in economics (1949) from the University of Missouri.

Robertson served as dean of University Relations and Development at the University of Florida (1964-68) before coming to Santa Fe as executive vice-president. He was hired by Santa Fe's first president, the late Joseph Fordyce, just three years after Santa Fe opened its doors to students in fall 1966.

Robertson was the founding chairman of the SFCC Board of Trustees.

"He certainly possessed vision, commitment, and above all, honesty," said Bob Rowe, his longtime friend and colleague who served two terms on the Board of Trustees alongside Robertson. "He tenaciously worked his plan and pursued what he believed, but he was always willing to stand corrected."

Rowe added that his contributions extended well beyond the Santa Fe campus: "He changed the social fabric of the Gainesville community by his numerous contributions to education and the arts."

Robertson previously worked in private industry as vice-president of First National Bank, Fort Myers (1959-63), and executive vice-president of the Fort Myers-Lee County Chamber of Commerce (1953-55).

"He was an excellent leader," said Portia Taylor, SFCC's vice-president of Student Affairs who was initially hired by Robertson 30 years ago. "He was extremely compassionate. He was such a great presence among us, in the college and in the community. He'll be missed by many of us for a long time."

Robertson and his wife, Mary, are the parents of Barbara, Douglas and Nancy.

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