

NCSU Creative Services
Centennial Campus Interviews — Hunt
August 5, 2004

Q: Interviewer, Ron Kemp
Hunt: Governor James Hunt

Q: James Hunt on August 5, 2004. Conducted by Ron Kemp. Thank you. Governor Hunt, can you give me a brief history of your political career in North Carolina?

Hunt: Well, I grew up in North Carolina. I went to North Carolina State for two degrees and law school at Carolina. I became active in Young Democrats work while a student at NC State. Frankly, I got involved in Terry Sanford's race for governor by organizing college students all over the state. I went overseas with the Ford Foundation and came back. I made my first move by running for the president of the State Young Democrats. I was elected to that. In 1972 I ran for lieutenant governor. The constitution had been changed and the office had been made a full time job. I ran for that. There was a big primary and I won that. I was the first full time lieutenant governor. At the time, the lieutenant governor was very powerful in appointing committees, referring bills and all of that. At the end of that term in 1976 I ran for governor. I was elected. The constitution was changed so that a governor could run for a second term. I did that and then I went out at the end of that in 1985. I practiced law at a large law firm in Raleigh and ran again in 1992. No governor had ever thought about that I guess. I hadn't either until just before I did it. I was elected then and served for two more terms, which finished in January of 2001. I thought about it one time. I served as governor in

the '70s, in the '80s, in the '90s and for about two or three weeks in the 2000s.

I've actually served in four decades as governor.

Q: Why did you decide to run for governor at that point in time?

Hunt: I ran for governor, I ran for lieutenant governor and then governor because I really wanted to build the state economically and create more good jobs, not just jobs. I understood that excellent education was necessary for that. We talk about these knowledge jobs and all of that. I really did understand that. I wanted to see North Carolina make some big progress, not a little bit. I was tired of the state being... Even if we said we were first in the south, what was that? I wanted us to be among the tops in America. I ran, frankly, very clearly—I wasn't confused about what I was running for because I had run television ads. We scrolled across the screen exactly what we planned to do. We did, at different times, plan to have children get a good early start in life. It is now Smart Start. To improve the quality of teaching and the pay for teachers and to raise standards so that our students were learning more and we were measuring it. To focus on high technology like microelectronics and biotechnology and all of that. It was all aimed at helping our people, giving them a better chance in life and making those chances available for every citizen all across the state.

Q: What about Centennial Campus? How did this come about? Whose idea was it? How did this thing spring fourth?

Hunt: I don't know where the name exactly came from.

Q: Well, the Research Campus.

Hunt: I know where the idea of getting the land for NC State came from. It came from me. Towards the end of my second term, and remember I'd established the microelectronics center and the biotechnology center—the North Carolina School of Science and Mathematics. I was always thinking, “All right. How do we improve our economy?” I'd seen Japans come over here with some new plants and so fourth. Initially all they did was bring stuff they'd already made and let us assemble it. It was very low level, low paying kind of stuff. I wanted us to do the high value work that pays high wages and high salaries. I was always thinking, “How do we do that? What does the state need to do?” We had these great universities and we were making them better. We must always continue to do that. I looked around my alma mater, NC State, and I saw that we were land locked. We didn't have room to grow. And by the same token, I saw the Dorothea Dix Hospital there. I knew about their dairy farm because I had bought cattle from it when I was a dairy farmer growing up on my farm at Rock Ridge in Wilson County. I knew they had closed that dairy farm and they had hundreds and hundreds of acres out there. Indeed, it was more than a thousand acres when you include the forestland. Towards the end of my term, the mayor of Raleigh, a lot of the business leaders and realtors here came to see me in the state capitol. They said, “Governor. We need more downtown housing. We would like for you to have the state sell this land so we can have more housing.” I listened to them but I also was thinking about, “How should we use this property? What is the highest and best use,” you might say. It was clear to me that enlarging the capacity of the university, of the university that deals with industry and

technology and agriculture and forestry and all of that—giving them a substantial space where they could grow and do more research and create more ideas that will turn into jobs and companies and jobs, that that was what we really needed to do. I decided that we needed to convey this land to North Carolina State University. At the end of my second term, when I was about to go out of office, I visited with all the people: the commissioner of agriculture and the other members of the council of state. I had the research done as to how this could be done and so in December, before I went out of office in January of 2000—in 1985, I had my administration convey 355 acres that we controlled totally to NC State for the Centennial Campus. In my budget message, the outgoing governor prepares the initial budget for the next two years, and in that budget I recommended that the state convey another 740 acres to North Carolina State University. I think within two or three months about 350 acres of that was done. No, more than that. I think maybe 450 acres was done. Later on some more came along. And then, of course, near the end of my fourth term, I looked around at all the rest of the land I could get my hands on and we conveyed another 128 acres to the University. My whole idea was to put industry, the research and development people of industry, along with those people who were thinking about those ideas and those technologies. To put the University and the public sector together. Have those people have offices very close together. Let them park together in the parking lot. Let them have lunch together. Let them share ideas and come up with the best thoughts about how we can do things, how we can create new technologies, new companies and new jobs. I think it is happening in a rare way.

Q: Did you have a role in the continuing development of what is now Centennial Campus after you left office for the first two terms that you served? Were you involved when you came back?

Hunt: I was a strong champion of it. Everybody knew that I had conveyed the first land and I was constantly talking to University people and encouraging them. I was talking to the Martin Administration people to encourage this idea to keep going forward. We could get all the land that we could get. I didn't have any responsibility during the time I was out of office, but I was an active citizen encouraging it.

Q: How is Centennial Campus different from Research Triangle Park?

Hunt: The Centennial Campus is a University Campus where we let private industry establish facilities and operate. The Research Triangle Park is a place where we have primarily private industry. We have the Research Triangle Institute which is a very fine operation and some other things that involve a lot of thinking and research and so fourth. But the Centennial Campus is a place that is primarily about studying, learning and doing research. It is not primarily about manufacturing things. It also is a place where we are developing in a very compact way. That campus is going to be jam-packed with both the University facilities and with private facilities. In fact I think today there about 17 buildings out there right now, one and a half million square feet of space. Ten more are being developed and actually being built. There are five more in the planning stage. It is really going to be a very compact, just really... It isn't going to be congested because we are planning it carefully but in the Research Triangle it is

all spread out. You can only build on 10 or 15% of the land. That is wonderful for that place, but this is more of an urban setting where we use every square foot but still keep some nice space and green space and so on. I would say this is a place where we are working very intensively to use every foot and to use all of our brainpower and where we are working collaboratively with private industry and working day and night—they are working day and night alongside the University and public researchers.

Q: Particularly during your first two terms, and other times as well, did you ever face opposition or pressure from groups who were opposed to what was being done at Centennial Campus? If so, how did you address those concerns?

Hunt: I would say that when we initially gave that land to the university there was great opposition. Many of the people in the private sector wanted the land. They wanted to make money off of the land. There was no, you know, groundswell to give this land to the University. The groundswell was to do something else with it. I thought it was the right thing to do. I convinced a number of people that way and I just did it. It was the right thing to do and my administration, of course, stood behind me. It wouldn't have passed a vote here in Raleigh. We did have opposition then and we still have... I think now people appreciate it and approve of it. They are glad we have it. They've heard something about it. Not enough of them have gone to see it actually. But even today we still have... Some more of the Dix property is up for consideration and there are a lot of people who just want to use it for housing or something like that. It is nice stuff, but I've always believed that that whole area ought to first and foremost be available to the

Centennial Campus. Not that the ___ around it isn't compatible with that, it is.

But in time, I would hope that the Farmer's Market would become a part of the Centennial Campus and that we would use all of that area now, from 1300 or 1400 acres to generate jobs for North Carolina. It is the kind of research and technology and jobs that will help us compete with the world.

Q: You've touched on that with my next question. We ask how has the Centennial Campus benefited NC State, the local and regional community and the state of North Carolina?

Hunt: NC State has benefited for North Carolina State University first of all by providing additional space. There literally wasn't room on the old campus for a big new fine Textile School, a big new find School of Engineering, a new Nanotechnology Building and so fourth. So it provided the space, but more importantly it brought to the campus some of the great minds that are in the public and the governmental sector that are doing important things and creating a lot of jobs. Our University has benefited by the interaction with the private sector, with the employment sector. Our people know more about the problems that folks are trying to deal with today be they in technology or in some engineering area or some medical area. Nanotechnology is a great new area that we've got to be focusing on. We have a new building going up. But interacting with the people in textiles, engineering and so fourth. The University has benefited by being alongside of industry and having a better idea of what the problems that their students need to be able to deal with are. And then of course there is the whole community and the state that has benefited because we now have dozens of

companies that have come there and have created jobs and are doing good work that is going to result in more jobs for the future. In that way it is very similar to the Research Triangle Park. A final thing I would say is that the Centennial Campus and the collaboration there with some of the best companies and thinkers in the world means that North Carolina is far more competitive. We can bring in the best industries and the best jobs. A lot of your states can do that. They just don't have these kinds of things that make them attractive. For that reason, we aren't talking just about jobs, but we are talking about the best jobs. It is always a matter of how do we have jobs that require us to think for a living that are going to be high value and mean that our people can make high salaries and high wages and have a good life for their families.

Q: Has the Centennial Campus made North Carolina State University a more competitive university?

Hunt: I think the Centennial Campus has made NC State a far more competitive university. How much it has raised up in the ranks or it will raise us in the ranks in the future I don't know. But I would say that having that Centennial Campus there has meant that we've attracted a lot of people who would not have ever come to teach and to do research. It means that we can have lab space and we've simply got the room to do things that we never could have done before. I believe North Carolina State University has an all together brighter future because of the Centennial Campus than it would have without it.

Q: Are you aware of any other research parks that have adopted our model? Have others copied or tried to copy what we've done at NC State?

Hunt: I'm not sure where all the universities are. I do know this. When I was about to go out of office, the president of the University of Oklahoma came to see me. He was a former United States Senator and a former governor. David Boring [ph] is his name. He is a good friend. He brought with him a very well-to-do oil man in Oklahoma who was the chairman of his Board of Trustees. They told me that they had gone around the world looking at the best examples of University/private sector partnership and as he came in the door and we started to talk he said, "We have found it. It is the Centennial Campus at North Carolina State University." He indicated that they would plan to do something like that. My belief is that no other campus is doing this to the extent that we are, but I suspect many have learned about the idea and are beginning to do it. And indeed I think it is a smart thing for them to do. We just want to run harder and stay ahead.

Q: There was a time when people were saying the campus was kind of getting off to a slow start. Obviously now it is a success. When do you think people in general began to see Centennial Campus as a successful project?

Hunt: I'm not sure exactly what year that began to happen, but I sure want to pay tribute to all the people who were behind it. Bruce Poulton early on was a real believer in this. He helped us get it under way. Larry Montieth came along as a great chancellor who gave it his strongest leadership as a former Dean of Engineering. He knew what it was going to take and what it could mean. Claude McKinney. Thank goodness for Claude McKinney. He was the Dean of Design and then resigned from that to lead the Centennial Campus. He did a marvelous job. It wouldn't be there today without him. He had worked very hard as did many other

people. I know that for a while we sort of floundered because we didn't know how to finance stuff. Again, George Worsely helped figure that out and many other people. And the trustees of course were always in there trying to find a way to do it and being totally supportive. Now we've found a way and it primarily involves private financing. Thank goodness for the bond issues that came along. Many of us worked very hard for those and they made possible, first of all, the Graduate School of Engineering, the Textile School, the new School of Engineering. It has been a matter of finding money wherever you could. But now I think we have a head of steam and that people have seen that these building will fill up with 95% occupancy or whatever it is. And I think that is why people want to go there. I think it is going to be a very hot place for the future.

Q: Speaking of the future, down the road, 25 or 50 years from now what do you see? What will Centennial Campus be then?

Hunt: I think in 25 or 50 years from now that campus will have shown the kind of growth that the Research Triangle did. I can see 25 to 30,000 people working there in high value jobs. Out of those jobs will come all kinds of companies that will be spread all over everywhere. Certainly there is the Research Triangle area, but I hope __ __. I think half of those will be private sector and half will be university folks. They'll all be sort of mixed up. I think you'll have some very fine housing on that property. Again, most of them will be University people. A lot of students will be taking classes there, particularly graduate students. Great research will be being done there. I think it will become just a real center of Raleigh. When you think about Raleigh you'll think about that Centennial

Campus will have very efficient transportation from downtown Raleigh straight out to the Centennial Campus. And we'll continue to work on the roadways. One of the things I did in my last two terms was to put the four-lane highway or roadway around the Centennial Campus. We've got to keep working on that to facilitate students getting from the main campus there and so fourth. But I think in the future it is going to... I suspect it is going to be the hottest place in North Carolina for development and for jobs. And again, I think it is going to be responsible for our University just continuing to climb up the ranks of the outstanding public Universities in America.

Q: You touched on this, but let me ask it the way she has it here. What do you see as the future of NC State? Where do you see NC State going in the future?

Hunt: I think NC State has an unlimited future. Engineering, of course, is critical to everything we do in industry nowadays, building the infrastructures, roads, highways, bridges and everything else. Agriculture and Forestry are so critical and those are one of the best schools in America there. Textiles, while it has changed in nature continues to be very important and the new technologies that we develop like we are doing right now, for example, with the nanotechnology, has enormous value in the world. So in a sense we'll be doing a lot of the developing of ideas. We'll sell that to, say, the Chinas and Indias and so fourth where they'll do the actual manufacturing work. But I think NC State has a tremendous future. You've got to of course tend to the full range of needs of learning of our students. We must not have engineers and agriculturalists who are narrow. They've got to understand the world in which they work. They have got

to be able to communicate and they've got to be worthy citizens. So the Liberal Arts are certainly very important. But I believe that NC State has a fantastic future. We have over 1,000 acres and I want it to grow to be 1,500 or maybe more that is going to be the place that we can do things that most campuses can't dream of.

Q: That is the last of her questions. Is there anything else that we didn't touch on that we need to cover about Centennial Campus?

Hunt: Um... I believe you've about done it.

Q: Thank you very much.

Hunt: You are certainly welcome.

[END OF INTERVIEW]