

# The Davidsonian

A L E N D A L U X U B I O R T A L I B E R T A S

DAVIDSON COLLEGE

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## Bobby Vagt named president

BY JESSICA GOODSON  
Guest Writer

Robert F. Vagt was announced as Davidson's 16th president on Friday. He will succeed John W. Kuykendall on July 1.

Renowned for his leadership, diligence, vision, and creativity, Bobby Vagt promises to embody the Davidson spirit as its future president.

Vagt, a student from Connecticut, arrived at Davidson in 1965 and became active on- and off-campus immediately. Working an assortment of jobs throughout his four years to pay his tuition, he also managed to swim on the varsity swim team, hold an ROTC scholarship, win the Agnes Sentelle Brown Award, participate as a brother in Pi Kappa Alpha, serve as a hall counselor and become elected president of the Interfraternity Council. In 1969, he graduated with a major in psychology and was later clinically certified.

Vagt has diligently maintained his affiliation with Davidson in the years since his graduation. In 1996 he received Davidson's Alumni Service Award for numerous volunteer leadership roles in college fundraising, including two years as national leader of the Annual Fund from 1993-1995. He has been a member of the college's Board of Visitors since 1992 and is a member of the Ne Ultra Society. Vagt has also served as a regional committee member for the Houston Regional Campaign and on the committee for his 25th reunion.

Bobby Vagt's dynamic career has included social service work as the director of clinical programs in the Northwest Alabama Mental Health Center and in the departments

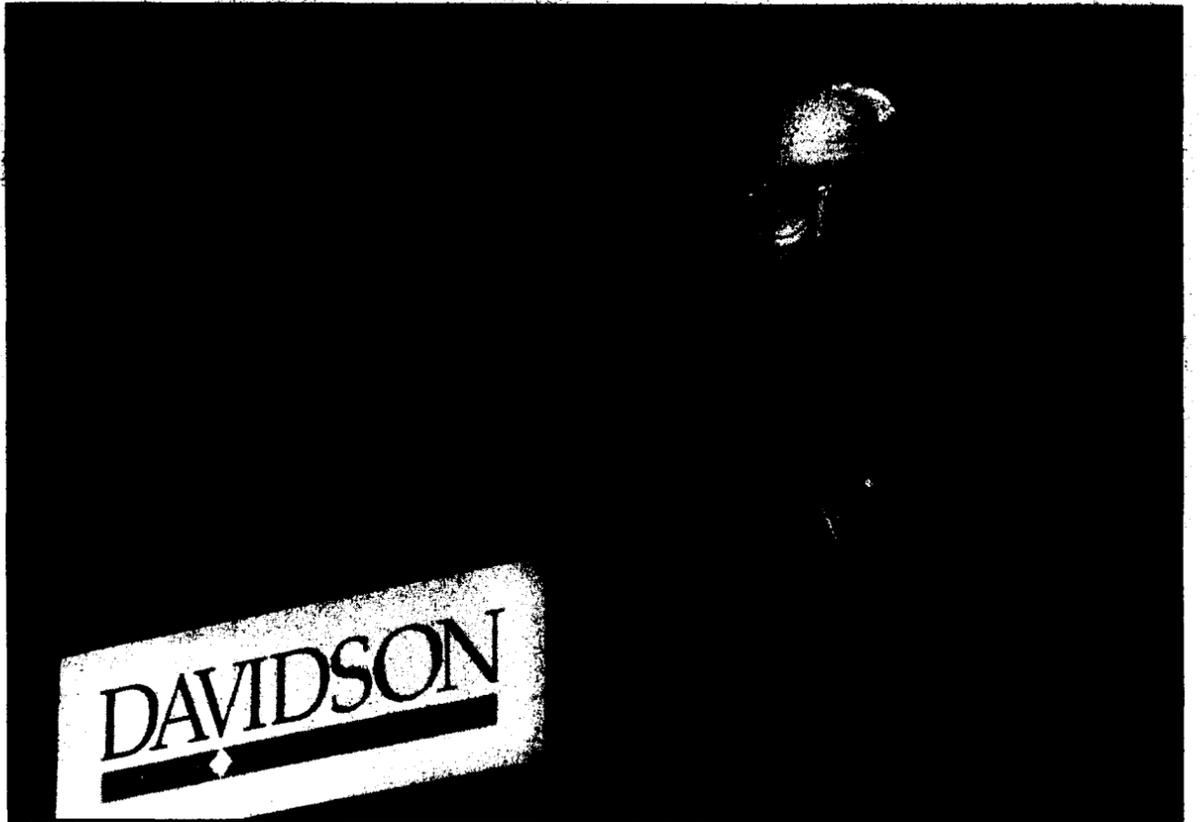
of corrections in Massachusetts and North Carolina. Introduced in his field as psychologist at Raleigh's Central Prison, he continued to serve North Carolina as warden of

the minimum-security McLeansville Correctional Facility from 1969-1973.

From 1975-1979 he worked in New York State's Division of the Budget and its Housing, Medical Care Facilities, and Project finance agencies to help the City avert a series of financial crises and potential bankruptcy. He furthered this career in public finance through 1980 as executive director for the Municipal Assistance Corporation, the state agency designed to keep New York City afloat during the mid-1970s when the City was in dire economic straits.

Since 1980 Vagt has directed operations for three international oil and gas companies in New York City and Houston. Initially he helped to create Adobe Resources, where he served as president and chief operating officer. When that company was sold in 1992, he joined Global Natural Resources as president and chief executive officer. His experience with Global includes piloting international ventures, regional management, and consorting with major stockholders and their entourage of Wall Street Brokers. In October of 1996, Global was purchased and merged into Seagull Energy Corporation, which Vagt most recently served as president and chief operating officer.

Houston-based Seagull is a publicly traded international oil and gas company engaged in exploration and development in the United States, Egypt, Canada, the Ivory Coast, Indonesia and the Russian Republic of Tatarstan. It also transports, distributes and markets natural gas, liquids and petrochemicals in the U.S. and Canada. Seagull, which is currently traded on the New York Stock



After he was announced as the next president, Vagt spoke in Love Auditorium on Friday.

Bill Giduz



Q&C

The young underclassman



Vagt, middle, is in deep now.

Quips & Cranks

Exchange, has \$1.5 billion in assets, and net earnings in the first three months of 1997 total \$17.3 million on revenues of \$159 million.

"Bobby is admired and respected by our employees," says Janet Hughes, his Executive Assistant of the past five years. "He is always approachable, honest and down to earth. Many of us have leaned on him as a mentor. His management style is the kind which inspires loyalty and a desire to excel. Bobby provides goals and objectives for his people, and apart from periodic informal meetings to 'touch base,' one is trusted to do the job in a self-paced environment."

Vagt, during his enrollment at Davidson, taught Sunday school at DCPC and decided during his junior year to study for the ministry. He carried out this plan initially as pastor of a church in Wilkesboro for \$20 a week. Vagt went on to earn a Master's of Divinity degree from Duke University and was subsequently ordained by Concord Presbytery.

Though he chose not to pastor a church he has maintained his ordination and consistently ministered to the Presbyterian churches where he lived as a parish associate, with a primary responsibility for youth programs. He also gives occasional sermons and regularly presides over weddings and funerals. As a parish associate he holds a full-time secular position, but spends countless volunteer hours leading youth groups and teaching Sunday school.

Dr. Fair, "Fairfax," pastor of St. Phillip Church in Houston where Vagt attends, says she has "never known a kid who didn't like him immediately. He interacts great with all age groups, making everything relevant and insightful." As a testament to his warmth and vigor,



Quips & Cranks

Vagt served as President of the Interfraternity Council.

she relates the story of how Vagt once phoned a youngster in his congregation long distance from Russia to remind her to come to youth group. "He comes with a great eagerness to pitch in any way he can." His wife Ruth Anne and daughter Lindsey are also known for their participation with the missions committee and missions to Merida, Mexico each year.

Vagt married Ruth Anne Maxwell midway through his senior year at Davidson, and the couple has remained happily married for twenty-nine years. They have two daughters. Ashley is a 1995 graduate of Davidson College working at

Lynchburg College for her master's degree in education. Lindsey is a high school senior who will enroll at Davidson in the fall.

When Vagt was a student at Davidson, he promised to "work until I find the very best job that exists in this world. Here I am."

Trustees, faculty, administration, and students solicited thousands of nominations, reviewing about 150 of them and then interviewing around 12.

The biggest task is still ahead, according to Presidential Search Committee chair Larry Dagenhart. "After selecting a president, we've got to nurture a president," he says.

# Diverse committee makes unanimous decision

By ANN CULP  
News Editor

The task of finding a new president was formidable. Twenty trustees, five students, five faculty, and three administrators worked 18 months to find the right person.

"One of the amazing things about the Search Committee given how diverse it was, given the many constituencies of the College and the strength of personalities represented, was that there was absolute enthusiasm for Bobby Vagt," said Math Professor and member of the Presidential Search Committee Ben Klein.

The committee voted unanimously to approve Vagt.

"For me, as a member of the Presidential Search Committee, I wanted to find somebody who I was sure was going to ensure that teaching and learning are the absolute core of what we do at Davidson," said French Professor Homer Sutton who was also a member of the Search Committee. "Someone whose leadership, vision, compassion, spirituality, and spirit of service would allow us to continue our tradition in the areas of service and compassion. I think I was also looking for someone who had a good sense of humor, someone who loved Davidson."

During Vagt's weekend visit, Chairman of the Presidential Search Committee Larry Dagenhart said,

was committed body and soul to perpetuating and improving what the College is and what it stands for," said Klein.

In evaluating the "doing" requirements for the position, Klein and the rest of the committee looked at a variety of skills such as fundraising, management, acquaintance of trends in education, knowledge of what is happening in the Presbyterian Church (USA), and other issues.

"No one person was going to satisfy every single one of these criteria, so we were willing to compromise on some of these," said Klein. "We realized that this was sort of an idealized check list and there wasn't any candidate who satisfied every single criteria."

Vagt's eclectic positions in the private and public sectors and his religious background combined to make him the most outstanding candidate. Not that there were not reservations about his lack of experience with higher education: "Although he is coming from outside



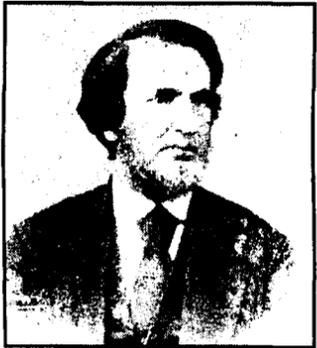
Robert Hall Morrison  
1836-1840



Samuel Williamson  
1840-1854



Drury Lacy  
1855-1860



John L. Kirkpatrick  
1860-1866



John Rennie Blake  
1871-1877



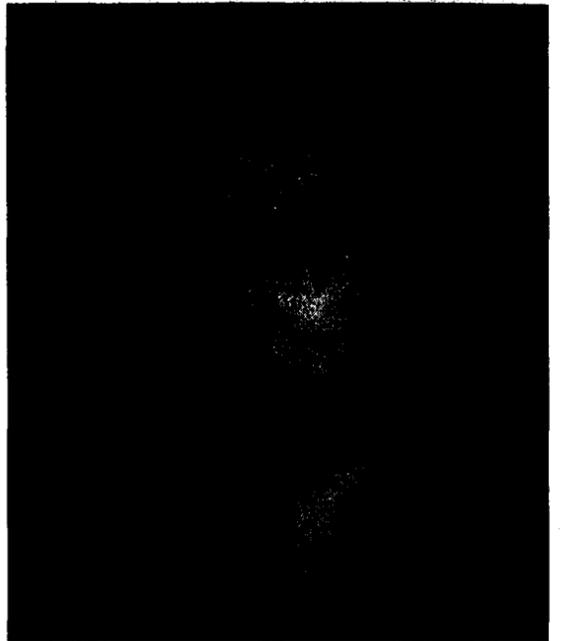
Andrew Hepburn  
1877-1885



John Bunyan Shearer  
1886-1901



Vagt regularly teaches Sunday School in Houston.



Robert F. Vagt

the academy without a Ph.D., he has such appreciation for Davidson's heritage, for teaching, and learning that he will devote his energies to ensuring that liberal arts education remains absolutely the primary function of this college," said Sutton.\*

Klein warns that the hardest part of the job is still ahead. "A lot of people have been coming up to me to congratulate me on all of the work we [the Presidential Search Committee] did," he said. "I want people to come up to me two years from now and say, 'You've done a good job.'"



## Vagt's family prepares to live in 'the Davidson'

By ANN CULP  
News Editor

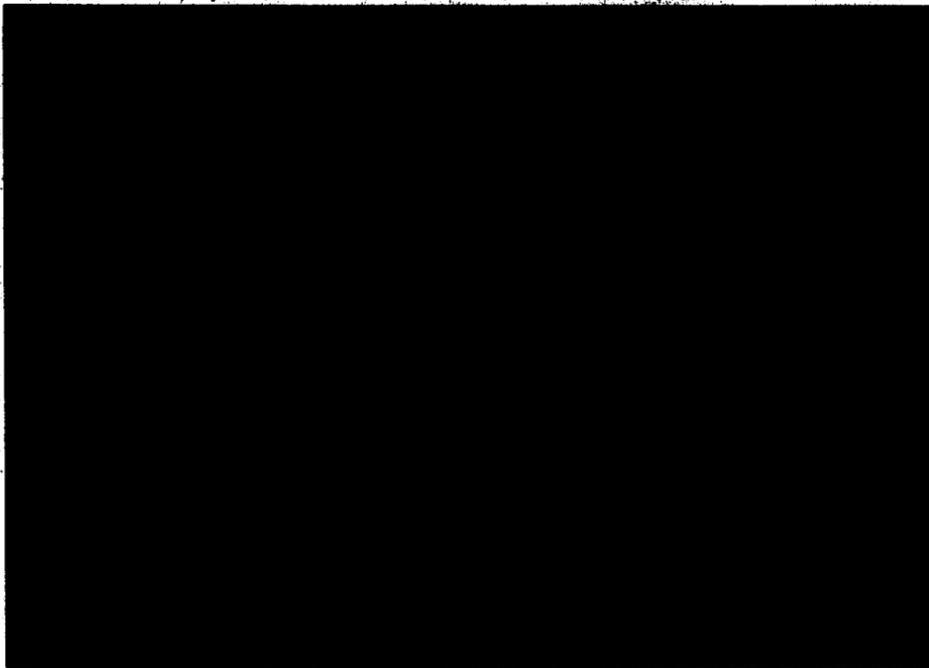
Costs after that... This [the position for the...]

# Student members describe search experience

BY WARREN BUFORD, DAVID WICK, CARRIE BLACKBURN, LIZ SALE & JOHN BELL  
*Guest Writers*

Amen. And with that, Larry Dagenhart, the Chair of the Presidential Search Committee, closed his prayer, and opened the search process for Davidson's 16th college president. The prayer itself was typical Dagenhart: humorous and uplifting, and as we learned later, much needed. All 18 members of the committee realized the formidable task of replacing the beloved John Kuykendall and of selecting a leader for an institution so dear to so many. We also realized that anyone who was to follow Dr. Kuykendall would need to be a person of great courage, faith, and character. Unrealistically, we began this process with the intention of identifying a person who could be, from day one, the president John Kuykendall had become over the last twelve years. As you can imagine, the process was not easy. After screening over 100 applicants, we narrowed the

field considerably before deciding whom we would bring to Charlotte for interviews. The two days we spent at the Charlotte Airport interviewing candidates were eventful and enlightening. Candidates were constantly grilled about their employment and personal experiences. As a committee, we were trying to identify the level of energy and commitment that one of these extraordinary people could bring to a very demanding job. In short, we were looking for a unique blend of personality and vision. We met Bobby Vagt for the first time as a committee in Charlotte last October. While we ate our



*Spanish professor Magdalena Maiz-Pena and her daughter, Ashley Vagt, and Dean of Students Tom Shandley enjoy some free time with Vagt.*

Bill Giduz

lunch, we reviewed Bobby's resume, and remarked over what an interesting choice a former prison warden would be. Although extremely impressive, his resume was not that of the prototypical college president. Then again, Davidson is not your prototypical college. So with an open mind, we welcomed this Davidson alumnus and immediately realized what makes him so successful. We saw a man short in stature but big in heart, full of enthusiasm, humor and an unquestionable love for his alma mater. Over the next hour and a half, we learned of Bobby Vagt's business acumen, his dedication to the Presbyterian Church, and his unwavering support of Davidson as a fundraiser, parent and alumnus. After sharing many good laughs, we bid him farewell. Many months later, as the Search Committee focused their thoughts on who would be the best person for Davidson College, Bobby Vagt's name surfaced again. After meeting with and discussing candidates with stronger academic records, we came to a decision. This was the defining moment, and it is what makes Davidson so special. We decided that we could not proceed with any of our other candidates because they did not have a strong enough connection to Davidson College. We wanted someone who knows and loves Davidson. We wanted someone with an appreciation for our heri-

tage, and someone who possessed the ability to lead us into the 21st century. We found these things in Bobby Vagt. As students, we admired Bobby's willingness to listen and his genuine concern for student life on campus. We were convinced that Bobby, just as his predecessor, would be a students' president. Moments before the decisive vote, a member of the committee summarized that quality all of us deemed vital. "Through his life of leadership and service, Bobby Vagt represents what Davidson College seeks to produce." By entrusting Davidson College to Bobby Vagt's leadership, we are not only affirming our pride in our tradition, we are displaying our belief in ourselves, and in our own futures. During his visit to campus Friday, we hope that the rest of the student body was able to see the special individual we students helped to select to lead Davidson. He not only toured every corner of the campus to meet people, but he also took off his shirt to play basketball with a group of students, and he stayed at the ice cream social until the last students finished eating. We are proud to have fulfilled our responsibility of bringing a new president to Davidson College. We hope that you will fulfill yours by joining the community to help make his transition a smooth one. Now, in typical Larry Dagenhart fashion, we wish the Davidson community and the Vagt family godspeed. Amen.



Bill Giduz

*Vagt quickly learned that offering food gets students' attention.*



*SGA President Buster Burk loves Bobby Vagt*

Bill Giduz



*Henry Louis Smith  
1901-1912*



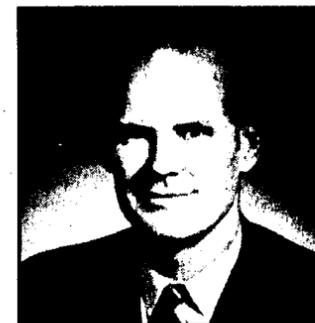
*William Joseph Martin  
1912-1927*



*Walter L. Lingle  
1929-1941*



*John R. Cunningham  
1941-1957*



*D. Grier Martin  
1958-1968*



*Sam Spencer  
1968-1983*



*John W. Kuykendall  
1984-1997*

DON'T MISS THE DAVIDSONIAN'S WEB SITE FOR NEWS UPDATES ON THE HONOR COUNCIL'S PROPOSED CHANGES TO THE HONOR CODE AND THE LATEST SPORTS ACTION FROM THE CREW AND LACROSSE TEAMS.

<http://www.davidson.edu/student/organizations/davidsonian/davidsonian.html>

# Just steps from the house that will be his on July 1, Bobby Vagt outlines plans for his alma mater and shows that business and education meet...

May 3, 1997

Liz Sale: What contact have you had with trustees, administration, students and professors so far?

BV: In terms of just recently, or over time?

LS: Both.

BV: Over time, I've had a varying amount of contact with students and faculty. The faculty I've had contact with were involved in campus events I was participated in, Ashley's professors and the few the few faculty members that were teaching while I was here. Students, staff and trustees I've met individually, but not as organized groups.

Ann Culp: What do you intend to do in the first 100 hundred days?

BV: One of the things I will tell you is I find it impossible to say, 'Here's a list of things I plan to do.' ... To answer your question, in the first 90 days, I am going to be 'Bobby the Sponge.' One of the things I've found that you absolutely have to do is go to each and every group and find every person that will talk to you and just absorb everything they have to say.

I will tell you, I have 20 pages of questions and none of them are in any particular order or category. I would just think about things and write them down. To be honest with you, that's what that book [a folder from Vice-President for Business and Finance Robert Norfleet] is all about, some answers to questions I had. What I'll do is absorb this and come back with more questions and so on. And when I come in July, I'll sit down and start putting all the pieces of the institution together. I think the hardest work has to come in the first 100 days, but students won't be here that first part, so I'll have to play catch-up when you get back. So I will tell you getting to know the people and the process is what I will be doing from this point on. I wish I could make this more romantic, but I've done this before, and this has to happen.

You have to find what it is you are trying to do, figure out what the resources are and what's the most effective way to do it. It can't be done alone. If you isolate all the people that are going to a part of what's going to happen, you've shot yourself in the foot. If you are asking what are the key areas, the central issue of insuring the highest quality education has the most importance. Not losing sight of that, the issue of the cost of an education, and how do you balance it? Strategic planning, which means asking what are the priorities? The financial element, resources to carry out programs, is always controversial with people. Because they think in this day and age, you're talking about cutting finances.

Sometimes it does involve that, but, on the other hand, what you're really doing is trying to identify what it is you're really trying to do and what's available to best get it done and making sure that the people that are going to have to actually make it work are on board.

AC: You spoke about getting to know students, and you're going to have to do that quickly. How do you plan to get to know students when we get back here?

BV: With 1600 students, it's not going to be easy. I hope to set-up events like ice cream-socials, etc., and that is just one level. I would also like to wander the campus finding students in everyday situations, see them at speakers, campus events, sporting events, cultural events, art exhibits, whatever I have to do. I'm really going to have to work at it.

AC: Do you think not having an academic background, teaching, is going to a barrier in getting to know students?

LS: Will you be teaching?

BV: The classroom is clearly an avenue for student contact. Unfortunately, there is not a lot of time to have that kind of interaction. So, whether you're from an academic background or not, you can't rely on that insuring student contact. So no, I don't see that as a barrier in getting to know students. However, the idea has been brought up of me teaching a business ethics course through the Center. There might be one or two things I have knowledge on and could pass on in a class.

LS: Do you think it's going to be a barrier for faculty?

BV: Let me say this, and I say it because this was brought up the first time I met your committee [Presidential Search Committee]: there are a lot of things happening and will continue to happen down the road that, to an extent, require the services of someone with a Ph.D. Now, we have a lot of great Ph.D.s around here.

We've got the best, cream of the crop. There's no shortage of those folks around here. To the extent of faculty and staff, we are all working towards one end. We want to provide you all with the best possible opportunities to grow in every way. My not having a Ph.D. is absolutely no impediment, in my opinion, on how we as a commu-

nity are going to provide the best possible academic atmosphere for you.

LS: Do you see your role with the faculty as highly interactive or distant?

BV: You can see this as a strength or a weakness, but if I'm involved with a group, my only style is highly interactive. I can't get to know someone from a distance. I

don't read minds very well. The only way I can know what makes them happy, what makes them sad, what they feel strongly about, where they think I'm goofing up, where they want to make suggestions is to interact with them in a pro-active way.

LS: How did you go from prison warden to the CEO of a natural resources company?

BV: I can tell you the answer, but then I'd have to kill you. ... If you look at how I have evolved from job to job, besides interest, the chain of connection has been people.

LS: What will your role be with Seagull come July?

BV: I will be a director of Seagull Corporation. International business relationships are especially sensitive, and there will be some period

## STEPPING UP TO THE MIC



Bill Giduz

After meeting the media at his introductory press conference, Vagt answered our pressing questions about Davidson's and his future. Within five minutes of our interview, Bobby Vagt was sharing his affinity for Pepsi and stories of how he married PIKA's Dream Girl. Beyond being a corporate giant, ordained minister, and past prison warden, he is extremely personable.

of time when those folks may call over here and ask my opinion, and I will be advising them as a director. An outside directorship can help the Davidson community by putting us out further in the world, and I also can meet people that might be able to do things for the College periodically. I also feel it will help me keep a broadened vision of things. Periodically, I may have to go to Egypt or someplace for business, but it will never take precedence over the College.

AC: What kind of wisdom will you bring from the business world to

LS: What is your opinion on a provost at Davidson?

BV: There are some schools where they have tried provosts, and they have worked. Other schools have had a very tough time with it. You don't mend administrative problems by adding another layer of management. It doesn't make people coordinate. Forty to fifty percent is the maximum amount of time I will be away from campus, and I want to know everything that's going on. That doesn't mean I make all of the decisions, but only if I know everything that's going on will I have all the data.

AC: What are your strategies to nurture diversity at Davidson?

BV: First, there has to be a climate and atmosphere that welcomes diversity from students and staff. Secondly, there must be financial resources that insure that anybody who wants to come to Davidson has the opportunity. I think the College has the strategies for diversity, some just need to be developed and refined.

LS: What do think about the 13.5% financial aid cap?

BV: It would be better if there were no cap, but that kind of cap can only be broken by outside money or the rearrangement of current finances.

LS: What principals do you use to govern horrible things like budget cuts?

BV: There are no magic cures for budget cuts. They can be anticipated and planned by a process that everyone gets involved in so that the decision can be understood by everybody. I look at it more like defining priorities. We come to an understanding of what we think is important than plan the necessary steps to make it happen.