

A First-Class Upgrade

by Dr. David Daniel

A FIRST-CLASS PLACE INEVITABLY has a first-class feel and look about it—ineffable, impossible to define, maybe, but unmistakably present and obvious to all. That certainly is true of universities. The great ones exude excellence at every level, from the president to the vice presidents to the teachers to the academic advisers to the students to the record keepers to the campus maintenance staff. Quality is found everywhere.

UTD, virtually from its inception in 1969, has been a distinguished institution of higher learning. But for the moment I am not talking about the superb work that is being done each day in UTD's classrooms and labs. Nor am I talking about the kinds of statistics and ratings that appear in *U.S. News & World Report's* annual "Best Colleges Edition" or, for that matter, even the goals and aspirations outlined in a strategic plan developed under a new university administration (more on that later).



No, I am talking about the little things that the old song says mean a lot—for example, the five benches that have been installed in the grassy area just west of the Multi-Purpose Building. What was once a mere disconnected, undistinguished space whose sole function



photo by Lisa Means

seemed to be to keep several parking lots from bumping together, has begun to take on aspects of a park worthy of a Harold Altman lithograph. Assuming the weather is accommodating (rarely a given in Texas), students and staff members now have a place of serenity and beauty where they can go to study, meet with friends, indulge themselves with a soda and a sandwich, or steal a brief respite from the hectic pace of a busy academic workday.

I am talking about the greatly enhanced landscaping and burgeoning aesthetics of our fine university—the pampas grass



at the southern end of the mall at Drive A across from the Activity Center, the spruced-up entrance to Hoblitzelle Hall, the attractive new fence outside the Multi-Purpose Building that now hides the ugly trash bins that used to be the last thing many people saw each morning on their way to work or to class. Do I even need to mention the new tiles that are painstakingly being installed on the mall as part of a design intended to make the mall simultaneously safer and more attractive?

There is a point to all of this, one that you may have heard me make before: To achieve greatness, a university cannot just have pieces of excellence; it must demonstrate excellence across the board. It must have that first-class look and feel that I mentioned. A few points of beauty and inspiration, places where people meet and ideas blossom, characterize great universities—and will characterize ours.

Flower by flower and tile by tile, the ambiance and aesthetics are improving at UTD, and I hope you can see and feel that as you walk about the campus. I will admit that no one person is responsible for this transformation. But I also will counter that without the dedication, persistence, creativity, and intuition of a single man on a mission, Dr. Larry Terry, along with his fine team in the Office of Business Affairs, which Dr. Terry, a scholar by intellect and an academician by profession, is adminis-

trating on an “interim” basis, the changes you have begun seeing would not be occurring.

Meanwhile, as I proudly and enthusiastically announced in late October, we have received a wonderful boost to our beautification campaign in the form of a multi-million-dollar gift specifically to be used to improve the look and feel of our campus. This extremely generous gift from a private citizen will go a long way toward helping us elevate the aesthetics of UTD to the same high level of quality of the University’s people and programs.

By the time this winter issue of *UTD Network* magazine rolls off the presses, we either will have—or we will be applying the finishing touches to—UTD’s new strategic plan, which is intended to provide UTD with the roadmap it needs to ascend to the next level of excellence (I hope to “tier-one” status and eventual membership in the American Association of Universities, the prestigious “club” of the 62 top research universities in the United States). All of UTD’s stakeholders are playing a critical role in the development of the plan, and I think it is reasonable to assume that, given its critical importance to all of us who care so deeply about this university, the new strategic plan will be a major focus of the next issue of this magazine.

Again, it is all about excellence—an excellent strategic plan for an excellent university, one that increasingly, day-by-day, is developing a first-class feel and look about it. **UTD**

