

Tech's vice president for administration has had a major part in planning campus growth for the past 30-plus years.

Stuart K. Cassell: Tech's Superplanner

BY WILLIAM C. BURLESON

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STUART K. CASSELL doesn't look or talk like an institution. And yet the Virginia Tech vice president for administration, during his 30 years in Burruss Hall, has seen University enrollment grow from 738 to 17,740; he has seen the construction of 36 major buildings and renovations and additions to 15 others on the campus; in short, he has seen Virginia's land-grant college grow from a small military institution which stressed engineering and agriculture into a major coeducational university with seven colleges and a graduate school. It would be unfair to say that he has merely seen all of these changes take place; he participated in them. During the past three decades, the soft-spoken but direct Southwest Virginia native has been planning the future direction that Tech would take.

As Cassell points out, he has been busy planning the growth of two universities—one above ground and the other hidden beneath the sprawling campus in the Virginia highlands. Visitors to the University campus are impressed by the physical growth but rarely pause to think of the countless miles of telephone conduits, steam pipes, power lines, water and sewage pipes, and closed-circuit television cables crisscrossing the campus. The above ground growth is impressive, but the underground growth is almost impossible to conceive.

Cassell has been actively involved in these changes, first as finance and business manager and later as vice president. He has had more effect on the physical growth of Virginia Tech than any of the four University presidents he has served. Not only did he participate in the planning, but it has been up to him to see that the plans have been carried out. Cassell is quick to point out that no one foresaw the

tremendous growth of the University when he was named finance and business manager on March 1, 1945, by President John R. Hutcheson. However, the administration developed a plan which has been particularly reviewed every four or five years.

"You have to have basic plans," Cassell says. "They have to be carefully thought out and conceived. And once you have them, you find it takes a whole lot of tenacity and determination not to violate them. You have to take a very firm position once the plans are made and proceed accordingly. Admittedly, there are going to be changes in details but not in the original concept. I believe it is the planning and the ability to stick to it that has allowed VPI to maintain its distinctive look as a University. There aren't many institutions which have managed to preserve their appearance as a college or university. We have," he says with great satisfaction.



Despite his belief in planning, Cassell did not foresee on that fall day in 1928 when he arrived on the Tech campus as a "rat" in the Corps of Cadets that he would not be leaving after four years. But from that day, Blacksburg and Virginia Tech have been his "home."

"I was raised on a farm in Rural Retreat," Cassell recalls. "It seemed to always have been determined that I would go to college. My father and my brothers and sisters did. However, the family seemed to lean toward Roanoke College. My father, four sisters, and an older brother attended Roanoke or old Elizabeth College in Roanoke." Cassell, another brother, and three half-brothers broke the tradition by deciding to enroll at Virginia Tech.

His recollections of life in Rural Retreat are not too different from that of rural youth of today. There were 4-H and FFA. In fact, Cassell was a charter member in the Future Farmers of Virginia—fore-

runner of today's FFA. It might be considered ironic that Cassell, a charter member of FFA, would some day work for one of the men who founded that organization—Walter S. Newman. He smiles as he recalls the time when he won the livestock judging contest for the state and went to the national finals in Kansas City. Although he participated in various activities, that was a highlight.

Being raised on a farm and with his record in livestock judging, it was only natural that he should come to Tech and enroll in animal science. However, the rosy world of 1928 changed in the fall of 1929, and the Tech cadets found themselves caught up in the worries of the Great Depression. With the advent of the recession, the students became very job oriented. Cassell, who had played baseball and wrestled during his freshman year, decided to drop some of his activities and concentrate on his studies. In doing this, he followed

the doctrine that has governed him most of his life: "If you want to get ahead, you have to work a little harder than anybody else." The doctrine paid off. Cassell finished his coursework in 1932 and graduated near the top of his class. And in a year when many of the graduates had no offers, Cassell had two. He helped persuade an off-campus employer that his roommate would do as good a job as Cassell would have.

Cassell took an assistantship at Tech. "I liked and was good at economics. I decided to get a master's degree in agricultural economics. I believed there were opportunities in economics. A year later, I was fortunate enough to get my master's and an offer to teach in the department. I decided to take the job."

A few years later, he was called into the office of John R. Hutcheson, then director of the Cooperative Extension Service. "I thought I might get fired," Cassell recalls.