While the nation plunged into the abyss of the Depression and the wheels of industry and commerce came to a standstill, a new and far-reaching project began in Boise, Idaho. As the *Capital News* reported:

"Because all communities and nearly all individuals were all but sunk in the slough of fear, gloom and inertia, the launching of this project seemed ultra-daring. Dire prophecies were made concerning the faith that inspired this undertaking. The project was Boise Junior College ..."

It was not an easy beginning for the school and its founder, Episcopal Bishop Middleton Barnwell, who had a difficult time convincing local citizens to support the college during this period of economic uncertainty. Just a few days before the college opened, one of Boise's largest banks collapsed from the weight of the Depression. But Barnwell stood by his belief that Boise needed a college to educate its youth. He spent the summer recruiting faculty, writing curriculum and remodeling classrooms. And on September 6, 1932, Barnwell and Dorothy Atkinson, the school's first dean, welcomed 78 students and eight full-time faculty to the first day of classes at Boise Junior College.

The school was located in St. Margaret's Hall, a Gothic-style three-story building near the current St. Luke's Regional Medical Center. St. Margaret's was a financially troubled Episcopal school for girls when Barnwell converted it to a college. Originally Barnwell had planned to limit enrollment to women, but several graduating high school seniors from Boise High School urged him to also admit young men. Led by class president Kenneth Robertson and student council president Dean Kloepfer, the students circulated two petitions supporting a coeducational institution and spoke to other high school seniors throughout the valley. In August, Barnwell granted their wishes, announcing that the school would be open to both young men and women.

From the beginning, Barnwell stressed the importance of a balanced curriculum that included physical education and sport. In the spring of 1932, before he decided in favor of a coeducational college, Barnwell had hired Ruth Payne to direct the women's physical educa-

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Above: A trio of presidents were present at BSU's 50th anniversary celebration in 1982 — Dr. John Keiser (1978-91), left, Dr. Eugene Chaffee, (1936-67) seated and Dr. John Barnes (1967-77), standing. Below: Bishop Middleton Barnwell, founder and first president of Boise Junior College, 1932.
tion program. That summer, the decision to admit men made it necessary to assign another teacher, Eugene Chaffee, to the sports program. Chaffee, home from graduate school for a summer visit, had already accepted Barnwell’s invitation to teach history.

That summer Barnwell also was hard at work building the school’s first recreational facility — Talbot Gym. Early in the school year students selected blue and orange as the school’s colors and the bronco as the mascot and organized a make-shift football team.

Enrollment grew to 125 students the next year, but the school was still hard-pressed for operating funds. By the spring of 1934, Barnwell announced that the Episcopal Church could no longer support the school and that he would resign as its president. By then, local businessmen recognized the importance of the school to the community. They organized a non-profit corporation, Boise Junior College, Inc., to raise the funds needed to keep the school open.

The college continued to operate in St. Margaret’s Hall, which the church leased to the college for $1 per year. The college was governed by a board of trustees from the community, but the administration was left to Dean Myron Clites, who was supervised by Boise Superintendent of Schools W.D. Vincent.

The athletic program became a regular part of campus life, but for
the most part, the teams competed close to home to minimize expenses. Enthusiasm for football grew to the point where free programs were printed for all home games.

By 1936, the trustees took action to gain more direct control over the campus by hiring a full-time president who reported directly to them. They called for Clites' resignation and offered Chaffee the college presidency. Chaffee, who had considered returning to school to pursue a doctorate degree in Latin American studies, eagerly accepted the challenge.

Chaffee remained in the classroom, and alumni from that era remember that "while he may have been president from one until midnight, in the morning he was all teacher ... tough but fascinating. Nobody ever went to sleep in his classes." He taught political science, contemporary civilization and history.

Chaffee, only 31 years old when he was named president, knew that the success of the college depended on support from the downtown business leaders, whose donations had been critical to the college's survival in the mid-1930s. Chaffee and his wife Lois worked hard to build ties with the community, often entertaining city leaders in their home. In 1938, Chaffee extended the school's schedule into the evening so working people could attend classes.

Early in his tenure, Chaffee orchestrated two key turning points in BJC's history. In 1939, the local Chamber of Commerce lobbied the Idaho Legislature to pass a law allowing communities to form junior college taxing districts. A short time later, local voters approved the Boise Junior College district by a 10-1 margin. With public tax support, funding for the college was assured. One year later, Chaffee convinced the city to donate the airport across the river from Julia Davis Park for BJC's new campus. Voters approved a $260,000 bond issue to construct a new Administration Building and by the 1940 fall semester, BJC had moved from St. Margaret's Hall to its present site, which had ample space to accommodate the projected growth of the junior college.

Over the next three decades, Chaffee's carefully nurtured ties with the community yielded big dividends for the college. Of the seven bond issues he presented to voters, only one failed. But it, too, passed a year later. By the time he retired in 1966, the tiny school Chaffee helped start in 1932 had grown into a four-year institution with an enrollment of more than 5,000.

First as a faculty member and then as president, Chaffee saw athletics at the college grow from a handful of students coached by volunteers to a program that attracted national attention. Chaffee himself coached the school's first track team.
As the college grew, its athletic program increased in stature. Football was especially successful. The team didn't have a losing season after Coach Lyle Smith arrived in 1946. Smith's teams played in seven post-season games and won the national championship in 1958. Chaffee worked hard to improve athletic facilities. In 1950, he led efforts to build a new football stadium that increased seating capacity ten-fold. A new gymnasium was built in 1956 after voters approved funding in a bond election.

For much of his tenure, Chaffee's right-hand man on campus was Bill Gottenberg, who came to BJC in 1947 to teach Spanish and English. Chaffee appointed him director of student affairs and public relations, a position that carried responsibility for stadium management. Gottenberg hired an assistant to write sports news releases and produce football and basketball programs. Bill Ames, Whiff Jensen, Dwight Dickey and Robert Baker were among those who held that position.

Gottenberg worked with the Utah junior colleges to create the Intermountain Collegiate Athletic Conference in 1947. He was BJC faculty representative to the conference until 1954, and served as conference president in 1949-50.

Gottenberg became vice president of BJC in 1956 and served as interim president after Chaffee retired in 1966. Gottenberg retired in 1969.

John Barnes, president at Arizona Western College in Yuma, became Boise College president in the summer of 1967, just in time to preside over the school's transition into the state system of higher education by 1969. Under Barnes' aggressive leadership, Boise State College began to catch up with its growing enrollment. New faculty were hired, new academic programs began and the campus grew in size as Barnes secured funding for new buildings. Barnes led the school to another milestone in 1974.
when the Legislature approved Boise State's new status as a full-fledged university. Shortly after that the school began to offer master's degrees.

From the outset, Barnes was committed to a strong athletic program. Shortly after arriving on campus in 1967, he created a Board of Athletic Control that acted as an advisory group to the president on athletic policies and budgets.

In the 1968-69 season, the Broncos upgraded their athletic program to four-year status and joined the National Collegiate Athletic Association. Barnes then worked with the State Board of Education and schools in the Big Sky Conference to smooth Boise State's entry into the conference for the 1970 season. Boise State's step up to a new level in athletics put the Broncos in conflict with their former athletic governing body, the National Association of Intercollegiate Athletics. The basketball team played more than 25 percent of its games against "major" schools and the team played in the NCAA regional playoff, both violations of NAIA rules. The NAIA put BSU on probation in 1970 — a moot point because by then Barnes had said that BSU athletics "will be under only the NCAA rules and regulations." 10

Seeing the need for improved facilities as the school upgraded its schedule, Barnes received approval from the State Board of Education to build a new 14,000-seat football stadium that opened in the fall of 1970. The addition of an upper deck expanded capacity to 20,000 in 1975.

While Bronco Stadium may be the most visible reminder of Barnes' contribution to the BSU athletic program, there were many other milestones during his 10-year tenure, including the establishment of the Bronco Athletic Association, the construction of the physical education building and swimming pool, construction of the University Club box in Bronco Stadium, and initiation of a feasibility study that was the first step in the eventual construction of the BSU Pavilion.
During the 1970s, the intercollegiate athletic program expanded to include women's teams. But despite success in sports like basketball and field hockey, little money was available to support the women and their coaches. In 1977, six female student-athletes cited several concerns in a complaint against the university: the athletic budget for women was one-tenth that of the men's; women played fewer games than men; women's per diem traveling allowance was less and travel accommodations were inferior; women had cramped locker facilities and no laundry; and women coaches also carried heavy teaching loads.

Barnes received the complaint just before he left the presidency in 1977. Resolution of the problems fell to Interim President Richard Bullington and Athletic Director Lyle Smith. Bullington created a 16-member Committee on Women's Athletics that recommended in its 1978 report that the school advance to Division I competition in two women's sports, provide proportionate funding, improve travel conditions and hire full-time coaches. The report guided the future of women's sports at BSU.

Bullington, hired by Barnes in 1968 to replace the retired Gottenberg, became the school's executive vice president, with responsibilities that ranged from budget matters to student, faculty and athletic issues. Bullington and his wife Pat became "mom and dad" to dozens of BSU football players and other student-athletes. Avid Bronco supporters, they nurtured players and welcomed them into their home and family circle on holidays. Bullington served as interim president until the arrival of John Keiser in 1978, and then returned to his previous post as executive vice president until his retirement in 1988. To honor his service to the university, the athletic department has named the first home game of each season the Richard Bullington Game.

Keiser came from Sangamon State in Illinois, where he was academic vice president. Like the presidents who preceded him, Keiser recognized the importance of a healthy town and gown relationship between the university and its surrounding community. Frequently stating that "there is no great city without a great university," Keiser effectively established coalitions that led to private funding of several facilities, such as the BSU Pavilion, Morrison Center, Simplot/Micron Instructional Technology Center and the Centennial Amphitheatre.

A former football and baseball player at Eastern Illinois University, Keiser was a strong supporter of athletics and believed in the importance of a winning program. Keiser had barely settled into his new job
when Northern Arizona University accused football coach Jim Criner of "live-scouting" a practice session, a violation of conference rules. Criner apologized to NAU coach Joe Salem for the incident and the Big Sky Conference penalized the Broncos by making them ineligible for the conference championship and prohibiting them from participating in the Division I-AA playoffs in 1979. Boise State cancelled Criner's football clinics, froze his salary and kept him off the recruiting trail for 1979 because of his participation in the incident. 13

In Keiser's first few years as president, the Broncos won a national football title, BSU produced two Rhodes Scholars (one of them a track student-athlete) and the university hired and fired athletic director Mike Mullally, who assumed the post after Lyle Smith retired in 1981.

Mullally caused a controversy in 1982 when he announced a plan to assign seats in Bronco Stadium based solely on Bronco Athletic Association membership levels. The community outcry was immediate and Keiser acted swiftly, calling for Mullally's resignation and appointing Gene Bleymaier as director. Aware of the importance of community relations, Keiser said of the incident, "I have always maintained that it is a privilege to be a Bronco, and that those who misinterpret that privilege are injuring the spirit which sustains Boise State University."14

Keiser arranged the complex financial package that funded the BSU Pavilion, which opened in 1982. The Pavilion, home to the BSU men's and women's basketball teams, has since hosted three NCAA basketball tournaments, professional basketball games and training camps, high school playoffs, gymnastics meets and a variety of public events.

Through Keiser's leadership, the Idaho Sports Medicine Institute and the Simplot Center for Athletic Excellence were built adjoining the Varsity Center, the Bronco Athletic Association expanded its activities and women's athletics received additional emphasis.

In the spring of 1991, Keiser explored the possibility of moving Boise State into Division I-A football by switching conference affiliation from the Big Sky to the Big West, a California-based conference that was looking for new members. But the Idaho Board of Education, concerned about maintaining interstate rivalries, ordered Keiser to withdraw the university from further consideration by the Big West.

Citing a lack of communication between Keiser and the Idaho Board of Education, the board dismissed Keiser as president in September of 1991. Executive Vice President Larry Selland was appointed interim president, a position he filled for 18 months until the arrival of Charles Ruch.

Selland came to BSU in 1986 after serving nine years as the director of the state's vocational-technical programs. He was first hired by BSU as dean of the School of Vocational-Technical Education. In 1988, Keiser appointed him Executive Vice President.

Selland kept BSU moving forward during his tenure as interim
president, a period when the university added its first doctorate degree and four new buildings were approved for construction. The *Idaho Statesman* named Selland its Idaho Citizen of the Year in 1992 for his leadership of BSU and past contributions to education in Idaho.

Ruch, the provost at Virginia Commonwealth University in Richmond, Virginia, arrived in January of 1993. During the first two years of his tenure the university received funds to build a new classroom building, adopted a new strategic plan and tightened admission standards. Only two months into Ruch's administration, the Big Sky presidents voted to reduce the number of football scholarships from 65 to 45. Ruch immediately appointed a task force led by Selland to investigate the future of BSU's football program.

The task force concluded that the football program should not reduce scholarships, that BSU could generate additional revenues by playing football at the Division I-A level, and that the university should seek permission from the Idaho Board of Education to join the Big West Conference.

Ruch accepted the findings of the task force and informed the board of the recommendations. In the meantime, Big Sky presidents decided to reduce scholarships to 63, rather than the earlier proposal of 45. Ruch reconvened the task force in the spring of 1994, and the group again recommended that a move to Division I-A in football would be best for the long-term future of football at BSU. Ruch took the recommendation to the board in September of 1994. The board approved the move, giving BSU the green light to join the Big West in time for the 1996 football season.

**Athletic Directors**

Boise State has had only three athletic directors. During the junior college years, the football coach also served as physical education instructor and athletic director. When Lyle Smith became the first full-time athletic director on January 1, 1968, he stepped into a job that he had actually held for 20 years.

During Smith's tenure as athletic director, Boise State's program made the transition to the university level. Smith played a key role in BSU's entry into the Big Sky Conference...
in 1970, upgraded schedules in all sports, supervised the construction of the current Bronco Stadium and assembled a coaching staff that won several conference championships, especially in football and wrestling.

Smith's "right-hand man" was assistant athletic director Ron Stephenson, who came to Boise State in 1970 after coaching tennis and wrestling at the University of Idaho. Stephenson, a Twin Falls native, played football for Smith at BJC in 1961-63. During his 10 years as assistant AD, Stephenson ran the day-to-day operation of the athletic department. He was in charge of the ticket office, budget, travel arrangements, purchasing and scheduling. Stephenson became the commissioner of the Big Sky Conference in 1981. He has served on the NCAA's Tennis Committee and is past president of the University Commissioners Association.

Connie Thorngren was Boise State's first athletic director for women's sports. As a coach, Thorngren built the women's program from the ground up. Hired as a physical education teacher in 1970, she introduced intercollegiate competition in basketball, volleyball, field hockey and track. By the mid-1970s, her teams were winning league championships and the basketball team qualified for national playoffs.

In addition to her coaching, Thorngren became women's athletic director in 1974. In 1975, the men's and women's programs were brought together under athletic director Lyle Smith and Thorngren was named assistant athletic director for women, a position she held until 1978.

Upon Smith's retirement in 1981, a national search took place for his replacement. Mike Mullally from Cal State-Fullerton was selected, but his tenure was short-lived because independent action regarding a priority seating plan in Bronco Stadium satisfied neither Keiser nor the Bronco fans, and Mullally was dismissed.

Gene Bleymaier, a graduate of Borah High School, assumed the directorship in February 1982 and since that time has guided the destiny of Bronco athletics. Bleymaier, a graduate of Loyola Law School and a member of the State Bar Association of California, served as an assistant athletic director at UCLA for five years before coming to BSU. During his undergraduate days at UCLA, Bleymaier played four years of football with the Bruins, being named to the All-Pac-8 team in 1974.

**New BSU A.D. Set for Challenge**

*By Jim Poore*

*Idaho Statesman, March 2, 1982*

There are four framed documents hanging on the wall in Gene Bleymaier's cramped office in the Boise State ticket office. One shows a Pyramid of Success signed by former UCLA basketball Coach John Wooden; the second is Bleymaier's college degree from UCLA; the third is his law degree from Loyola Law School in Los Angeles; and the fourth is from the California State Bar giving him the right to practice law there. Monday, however, the 28-year-old Bleymaier — the Southern Idaho Conference's lineman of the year in 1971 for Borah High School and a one-time starting tight end for UCLA — took another giant step away from practicing law when he was named Boise State's athletic director. Bleymaier sat in his old office Monday, slowly absorbing the fact that he was suddenly in charge of an athletic department with a $2 million budget. Bleymaier realizes he's got a lot of work ahead. Besides learning the intricacies of the athletic director's job, he'll be responsible for his old job until he can hire someone. "I look forward to it, to learning a lot of new things," Bleymaier said. "Hopefully, I can fulfill the expectations Boise State and the administration have put in me."
Bleymaier led construction of several new facilities, including the Boas Tennis Center, the Simplot Center for Athletic Excellence, the Idaho Sports Medicine Institute and a gymnastics practice area. He also has brought national NCAA competitions to Boise, including four NCAA basketball playoffs and the NCAA outdoor track and field meet. Bleymaier also was instrumental in BSU’s move to Division I-A competition and membership in the Big West Conference.

Under Bleymaier’s guidance, the university now sponsors 16 collegiate sports: 14 in the Big Sky, with wrestling in the Pac-10 and women’s gymnastics as an independent. Bleymaier has built a strong women’s program, and in 1990, ’93 and ’94 BSU won the Big Sky Women’s All-Sports Championship. In 1989, ’93 and ’94, the university took the combined men’s and women’s Big Sky All-Sports trophies. Men’s basketball has prospered, with six postseason national appearances between 1986-94.

The athletic program continues to make progress, and the goal to see that all student-athletes graduate has gained momentum with the opening of the Peterson/Preco Learning Center and the SUCCEED program (Students Under Contract Committed to Ending Education with a Diploma).

Bleymaier’s first assistant athletic director was Lou Onofrio, who came to BSU in 1982 after working as an enforcement representative for the NCAA. Onofrio returned to the NCAA in 1988.

Bob Madden, Jr., is an assistant athletic director and executive director of the Bronco Athletic Association. Since coming to BSU in 1980, Madden has steadily increased BAA memberships and donations. He directed the fund drive to construct the Pavilion and founded the biennial auction that has raised more than $2 million for scholarships and library holdings. In the spring of 1993, Madden was named the best fund raiser in the nation at the annual Conference for Athletic Fund Raising in Orlando, Florida.

Herb Criner, assistant athletic director for operations, left a highly successful career as a high school football coach to become an assistant coach for the Broncos in 1985. In 1988, he moved to his administrative position, where he is responsible for facilities and game management.

The marketing of Bronco athletic programs is the responsibility of Dave Jerome, who came to Boise State University in 1984. Previously, he was an assistant athletic director for business and served as director of the ticket office. Jerome arranges game sponsorships, promotional events and other special public relations activities for the Broncos.

Carol Ladwig is assistant athletic director in charge of student services and has served as women’s athletic director since 1978. Before coming to Boise State University, Ladwig earned an M.A. at Western Illinois University. She was women’s athletic director and supervisor of physical education at the University of Illinois-Chicago Circle campus before taking the position at BSU. Ladwig has seen the women’s program mushroom at Boise State. The women’s budget has grown rapidly and the coaching staff has gone from six part-time coaches in 1978 to 12 full-time coaches in 1994.

2 Idaho Statesman, Aug. 25, 1926, in President’s Scrapbook, 1933-1945, BSU Archives.
5 “Barnwell Unable to Continue,” Boise Capital News, April 21, 1934, President’s Scrapbook, 1933-1945, BSU Archives.
6 BSC Alumni Bulletin, Chaffee Biography, RG 5.3, Box 10.
9 Barnes Papers, Athletic Correspondence, Dec. 1, 1969. RG 5.3, Box 4, 1966-72, BSU Archives.