



Name Gain

Twenty-five years ago, Boise State stepped into its future

By Janelle Brown

A sense of history in the making hung in the air on a wintry afternoon nearly 25 years ago when Boise State College officially became a university.

The date was Feb. 22, 1974. Gov. Cecil Andrus, seated in front of legislators and college officials and flanked by college President John Barnes and student body President Douglas Shanholtz, flashed his trademark grin and signed the bill that granted university status to Boise State. Then the crowd of about 700 students, faculty and business leaders that filled the Student Union for the ceremony erupted into applause.

It was an emotional moment, according to press accounts and the recollections of several of those present. The long, sometimes bitter battle for Boise State's future was finally won. But even as the cheers died down and the crowd trickled away, no one was sure exactly how the future of Idaho's newest university would unfold.

After all, the school founded in 1932 as a church-supported junior college had already undergone profound change. In



The 1974 Homecoming poster used an altered title of a Carpenters' song to reflect Boise State's new status.

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— Student body President Doug Shanholtz

1965, Boise State College became a four-year institution. Two years later, the Idaho Legislature approved its transfer from a local taxing district to the state, effective in 1969.

Now, just five years after joining the state system, Boise State had become a university.

In some respects, the name change was symbolic. In other ways, it was the key to opening some very real doors.

“I knew that becoming a university would mean tremendous things for Boise State, though not much immediately,” says Barnes, during a recent interview in his Boise home. “It would put us in the same ball game as other regional universities. It would enhance our ability to attract top faculty and students and develop graduate and research programs.”

Andrus also envisioned a bright future for Boise State when he signed the historic bill, although he knew the specifics would depend on how the Treasure Valley developed.

“It was important to establish a university

where the hub of business was located,” says the former governor, who now heads the Andrus Center for Public Policy located at Boise State.

But had Boise State moved too far, too fast?

True, the Legislature had overwhelmingly approved the bill to grant university status, by a margin of 32-2 in the Senate and 54-15 in the House.

But the measure also drew considerable resentment. In some parts of Idaho, Boise State was viewed as a brash, ill-mannered youngster, one that had already gained too much size and strength.

“We already had two universities. Based on the state’s limited resources, we couldn’t afford it,” says former legislator Pat McDermott of Pocatello, who voted no. McDermott, who still practices law in Pocatello, had Idaho State University in her backyard, and she feared that funding and programs at ISU would suffer if the bill was approved.

A quarter of a century later, McDermott looks back and says those fears were well-

founded. “My constituents were hanging off the trees opposed,” she remembers.

A similar sentiment prevailed in Moscow, home of the University of Idaho.

During a heated debate on the Senate floor, Orval Snow of Moscow rose to declare that “unless the term ‘university’ has been completely emasculated,” the name change was completely unwarranted.

“It is naive to think that this would only be a status symbol and not require any money,” Snow added, according to a story in *The Arbiter*, Boise State’s student newspaper.

But those were minority views. By 1974, the tide had turned in favor of Boise State. Reapportionment had increased the number of legislative seats in Ada County, which boomed with new businesses and a burgeoning population.

There was a growing clamor for educational offerings to support that growth. Boise State supporters had the votes to get things done.

“The tough battles were already behind us. We’d crossed the critical barriers by becoming a four-year school and part of the



Student body President Doug Shanholtz, seated left, Boise State President John Barnes, seated right, and the Ada County legislative delegation joined Gov. Cecil Andrus as he signed the bill granting Boise State university status.

Where are they now?



John Elliott

John Elliott, who was editor of *The Arbiter* student newspaper in 1974 and active in theatre, now owns J. Elliott's Old Town Gallery at 10th and Main. After graduating in 1976 in theatre arts, Elliott remained active in Northwest theater. In 1991, he wrote, produced and starred in a one-man production at the Morrison Center about playwright Tennessee Williams. He's also worked with the Idaho Shakespeare Festival, Stagecoach Theater, Knock 'Em Dead and other troupes. Elliott has owned and operated antique and used decor shops in the Boise area for 16 years.

Facts & Figures

1974 enrollment: 9,350
1998 enrollment: 15,744

1974 budget: \$9.1 million
1998 budget: \$70.6 million

1974 student fees: \$178
1998 student fees: \$1,066

state system," says former Sen. Dean Summers of Boise, an outspoken spokesman for the pro-university contingent and the owner of a Boise insurance company.

The bill to grant university status to Boise State was, in Summers' colorful vernacular, "the last pin in the doll, the icing on the cake, the coup de grace."

But it still didn't go down easily with legislators who were smarting from Boise State's earlier victories. According to Summers, it also didn't help that Boise State had emerged as a football power that year, walloping teams from Moscow and Pocatello and winning the Big Sky conference championship.

"Our rise to athletic competence hurt us," Summers says.

But the battle over Boise State wasn't just fought in the Legislature. Long before a bill was even drafted, supporters were laying the groundwork.

One of Barnes' first efforts was a "quiet study" to compare Boise with universities in the region.

When Barnes found that Boise State compared favorably but needed library development, he helped secure corporate funds to add more books. He also traveled around the state to meet with key legislators and politicians. "I sat at their kitchen tables. I wore cowboy boots. In a state like this, things aren't done on the telephone," Barnes says.

While Barnes found some politicians receptive to the idea of a university in Boise,



Anxious students waited at the Statehouse for news about the university bill.

that wasn't the case with the members of the State Board of Education he gingerly approached. In fact, Barnes says one or two members privately told him that he would be fired if he pursued the issue.

The state board eventually backed university status for Boise State. "I don't recall that we were reluctant to do that," remembers former board Chairman A.L. "Butch" Alford of Lewiston, publisher of the *Lewiston Morning Tribune*. "But the move

for a university was driven by the school and by Barnes, as it should have been."

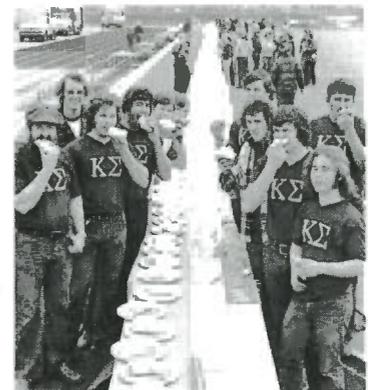
The momentum continued to build as the Legislature convened in January 1974. Lyle Cobbs of Boise filed Senate Bill 1280, granting Boise State university status.

Boise State students spent long hours at the Capitol, talking to hometown legislators and attending hearings. Student body president Shanholtz, fresh-faced and idealistic, appeared in local TV interviews and ap-



Christa Bax Swan

The world's largest sandwich, sharing an office with Fred Norman and an Evil Kneivel-like tricycle leap over a ditch are some of the happy memories Christa Bax Swan has of her years working in the Student Union at Boise State. Assistant director of Student Activities from 1973-1980, she moved to Long Boat Key, Florida, after leaving Boise State. In 1976, she became part owner of Fuel West in Boise, moved back to Boise in the early 1980s, and has been running the business since 1984.



The world's largest sandwich, 1975.



Susan Rinard

When Susan Rinard was crowned Miss BSU in 1975, her dream was to graduate and travel. She did just that, spending 12 years in Paris, Tokyo, Istanbul, Hong Kong and other cities, working as an international model. Rinard then moved to San Francisco and owned a professional actors' studio for 10 years. She now lives in Atlanta. Rinard, a '76 graduate in fine arts, is preparing for an exhibition of her photography and constructing an art studio. She wants to enroll in Georgia Tech to study multimedia productions and open her own business.

Blue Streak

Just before noon, a lone streaker, thought to be a BSU Fratter, took off all his clothes except his socks, donned a black hood to hide his identity and dashed through the Student Union Building.

When asked why he streaked the SUB, he replied, "I had heard of other people planning on streaking here at the university, and I just wanted to be the first."

The Arbiter
March 14, 1974

pealed to legislators' sense of truth, right and justice.

With impeachment hearings for President Richard Nixon dominating the headlines and the Vietnam War still a fresh memory, it was an era when student activism was flourishing, says Shanholtz.

"We tried to make the issue as public as possible," Shanholtz says. "We said, anybody who voted against Boise State University didn't take pride in the state."

On Feb. 1 a gallery packed with students watched nervously as the Senate considered S.B. 1280.

After a lively debate, the bill passed 32-2 and was sent to the House, where it was approved the following week 54-15. An emergency resolution was attached so that the name change would go into effect immediately.

Shanholtz was among those who appreciated that last touch. It meant his 1974 diploma would bear the name "Boise State University" instead of Boise State College.

But even after surviving the battle in the Legislature, the future of the bill was far from certain. Once on Andrus' desk, the bill was used as a bargaining chip in a game of good old-fashioned power politics.

Everyone assumed the governor would sign the bill. Instead, Andrus made a private phone call and threatened to veto.

"You have Lyle Cobbs to thank that we're marking the 25th anniversary this

year instead of next," says Andrus with a chuckle.

Andrus tells the story this way: The day the Boise State bill landed on his desk, he was trying to round up enough Senate votes to get a controversial appointee confirmed to the Public Utilities Commission. Andrus, a Democrat, was one vote short on what was a bitterly partisan issue.

So Andrus called Cobbs, a Republican, and said if Cobbs didn't vote for his appointee, he'd veto the Boise State bill and make Cobbs introduce it again the following year, when he could be assured of the governor's full support.

"I changed my vote to yes," remembers Cobbs, who now owns a Boise investment firm. "The Republican leadership was upset about that, but I decided the university was worth more than one individual."

Andrus' appointee was confirmed by a single vote. He signed the bill. A sense of jubilation pervaded the campus. A new era at Boise State was about to begin.

Like many others who were involved in Boise State's transition to a university, Andrus says he's pleased with how the university has developed in the past 25 years.

Much of the regionalism that fueled resentment to a university in Boise has dissipated over the years as the state has become more cosmopolitan and homogenized, Andrus adds.

Barnes, who resigned as president in 1977, lists Boise State's new engineering college, doctoral program and research centers as accomplishments that wouldn't have happened if Boise State had remained a state college.

"I think Boise State is in its adulthood now and that we're seeing the results of all those earlier efforts," he says. "It's been a great joy for me to see how well the university has done."

Shanholtz still recalls the sense of pride and accomplishment he felt 25 years ago as he sat just to the right of Andrus and watched him sign the Boise State bill.

Shanholtz gave Andrus a present after the ceremony — a giant rubber stamp with the word "veto" on it. Andrus used the stamp on many of the 114 bills he vetoed during his four terms as governor. It's now on display as part of the Andrus Archives in the Albertsons Library.

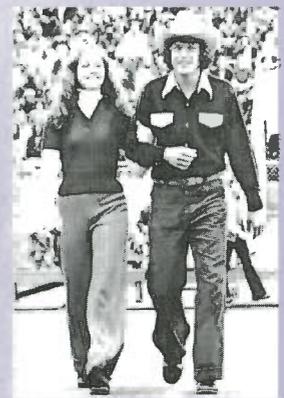
Shanholtz also came away with a souvenir from the ceremony — one of the pens Andrus used to sign the bill. It's a keepsake he may donate back to Boise State during the upcoming 25th anniversary celebration, which he is helping to organize.

"It was one of the most exciting times in my life," says Shanholtz, who went on to become an international businessman who built construction camps in remote locations around the globe. "It made me realize that if I worked hard, I could make a difference." □



Jim McMillan

After breaking nearly every Bronco and Big Sky passing record, 1972-74 Bronco quarterback Jim McMillan played in Canada, then joined former Boise State coach Tony Knap at UNLV. After a brief real estate career, he returned to coach at Vallivue High School and then landed a teaching job at Homedale. In his 12 years as football coach at Homedale, his team played in Idaho's A-3 state championship game 10 times and won five of them. His girls' softball teams have won the state championship the past three years. McMillan's No. 14 jersey, the only one ever retired, hangs in the Boise State Hall of Fame.



1973 Homecoming royalty Linda Hurd and Allen Dykman.