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3-16-2015

## Interview with Doug Echols

Doug Echols

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**LOUISE PETTUS ARCHIVES AND SPECIAL COLLECTIONS  
ORAL HISTORY PROJECT**

**Interview #198  
ECHOLS, Doug**

**ECHOLS, Doug**  
Mayor of Rock Hill

*Interviewed:* March 16, 2015

*Interviewer:* Rebecca Masters

*Index by:* Michelle Dubert-Bellrichard and Rebecca Masters

*Length:* 00:50:25

Abstract: In his March 16, 2015 interview with Rebecca Masters, Doug Echols comments on the transitions that took place at Winthrop from 1982- present. In particular, Echols provides detail on the efforts of the DiGiorgio Administration to build Winthrop as a brand and the struggles that Winthrop faced in this transition. Echols concludes his interview with ideas for bridging the gap between Winthrop and Rock Hill and his perceptions of the eleventh President's role in the Rock Hill community. This interview was conducted for inclusion into the Louise Pettus Archives and Special Collections Oral History Program.

Keywords: Winthrop History, athletics, Winthrop Coliseum, Presidents, DiGiorgio Administration , Rock Hill, Knowledge Park, College Town, economic development, trolley, Jamie Comstock, Debra Boyd.

**Interview Session (March 16, 2015): Digital File**

**Time      Keywords**

00:00:00    *Start of Interview*/Interviewer's Introduction

00:00:28    *Question:* What role(s) have you had at Winthrop and Rock Hill, and what years were you active in those roles? *Answer:* DE employed at Winthrop from 1982-1989 shortly after Winthrop became affiliated with NAIA. Winthrop Coliseum was under construction. DE hired to work with intercollegiate athletics and orchestrate the final steps associated with the construction of the Coliseum, e.g. staffing, programming, concessions, etc. Phil Lader was President during that time. DE describes the personality of Lader and his ideas on how to make money at the Coliseum through rentals. Amway Conventions came to the Coliseum. DE recalls being approached by a gun and knife show – Lader didn't think that kept with the mission of Winthrop. Harlem Globe Trotters made an appearance. All athletic events kept DE very busy – describes setting up and taking down events.

- 00:05:40 *Question:* Conference? *Answer:* DE talks about booking in a series of professional wrestling events. Drew large crowds. Recalls Winthrop transition from NAIA to NCAA. Winthrop was going to help create the Big South. In 1989, DE left Winthrop and became the commissioner of the South Atlantic Conference, which was an NCAA division II school. Experience at Winthrop prepared DE for South Atlantic Conference. Elected mayor in 1998. DE started working more with Winthrop University. Dr. DiGiorgio came to the University in the Summer of 1989 – DE knows this, because DE left in the Spring of 1989.
- 00:08:55 *Question:* What were some of Winthrop’s strengths and weaknesses? *Answer:* Greatest strength was the tremendous intellectual capacity of the University as seen in its well-educated faculty, staff, and student body. DE refers to Winthrop as “self-contained.” There was more outreach in the community then there had been ever before. Winthrop needed to extend its reach. DE talks about the business of branding and Dr. DiGiorgio getting recognition from third-party endorsers. All of this spread the word of Winthrop. DE says that people had false notions of Winthrop: still an all-girls school and a private institution.
- 00:13:05 *Question:* First impressions of Anthony DiGiorgio? *Answer:* DE attention was focused other places – the Conference. DE on the road daily. DE didn’t have the chance to interact with DiGiorgio as DiGiorgio started his administration. When DE became mayor, DiGiorgio was inclusive and embracing a relationship with Rock Hill. In later years, DE and DiGiorgio started thinking of joint projects.
- 00:15:30 *Question:* What was Winthrop’s biggest challenge when you became mayor? *Answer:* DE knew there was an “internal squabble” happening at Winthrop – referring to faculty/staff unrest. DE expresses sympathy towards DiGiorgio. DE says faculty/staff have a view of the role of administration, but they may not understand the importance of maintaining buildings and increasing enrollment.
- 00:19:15 *Question:* How did Winthrop’s reputation change over the years? *Answer:* Increasing influence and impact. Winthrop used to be self-contained, but it began to expand and gain a reputation in the Southeast.
- 00:20:40 *Question:* Did Winthrop’s beginning as an all-girls school help or hurt contemporary Winthrop? *Answer:* DE says it’s “what kept the brakes on Winthrop.”
- 00:22:28 *Question:* How did politics affect Winthrop’s development? *Answer:* Higher education has always struggled for support and respect in South Carolina.
- 00:24:20 *Question:* How has your role as mayor impacted Winthrop? *Answer:* Intercollegiate athletic experience and background in the South Atlantic Conference – DE knows the importance of athletics at Winthrop. DE says DiGiorgio and he thought alike. DE

- talks about supporting softball in Rock Hill and Winthrop. Softball and subsequent softball tournaments has financially benefitted Rock Hill and Winthrop. Baseball and soccer tournaments/events. Manchester Meadows (Rock Hill soccer complex). Sharing facilities and ideas, and an appreciation for sports tourism created a mutual support. College Town action plan for the surrounding neighborhoods of campus. Knowledge Park. Rock Hill in the process of redeveloping the area.
- 00:30:55 *Question:* Media questioning public support for Knowledge Park and public transportation? *Answer:* DE stresses the importance of a connection between Winthrop and Rock Hill. Street car terminology. Evolving technologies – electric cars. DE refers to Charlotte’s experience with street cars.
- 00:35:44 *Question:* How has Winthrop’s Board been involved in these changes? *Answer:* DiGiorgio always kept the Board informed. DE talks about Acting President Debra Boyd and her desire to keep up the momentum.
- 00:37:40 *Question:* Did you have any interactions with tenth President Comstock? *Answer:* The city reached out to Comstock. DE found her to be engaging. DE talks about Comstock’s husband’s role.
- 00:39:25 *Question:* Did the Board reach out during the end of Comstock’s administration? *Answer:* There was no formal discussion with the Board.
- 00:40:10 *Question:* Football issue? *Answer:* DE participated in a year-long study to see if Winthrop should get a football team during DiGiorgio’s administration. The conclusions the committee came to in terms of costs were on target. DE commends DiGiorgio’s decision not to proceed unless donor(s) came forward with financial support.
- 00:42:25 *Question:* What would Rock Hill be without Winthrop? *Answer:* The city of Rock Hill was a “sleepy Southern town that depended on the textile industry.” As the textile industry faded in Rock Hill and the country, Winthrop could have been described as a small, liberal arts college. Now there is a community and university in transition. Rock Hill’s population is growing. Winthrop has to assess its mission and relationship to technology. Meshing of community, education, and economic opportunity is the future of Rock Hill.
- 00:47:25 *Question:* What does Rock Hill want from the new President? *Answer:* Rock Hill leaders had an opportunity to meet with three Presidential candidates and address this question. DE was impressed with Mahony’s response.
- 00:48:55 *Question:* How will history view the DiGiorgio administration? *Answer:* DE says DiGiorgio “did an outstanding job.”

00:49:25 *Question:* Any other events to take note of? *Answer:* No. DE is very glad that Winthrop came to Rock Hill. “We would be less of a place without Winthrop University.”

00:50:25 *End of interview*