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Temple president's plan for the decade

By Susan Snyder

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Entering her fourth year as Temple University's president, Ann Weaver Hart soon will unveil what could become her signature project: making Broad Street the focal point of the university.

She envisions an eye-catching flagship library - a new academic soul for Temple that would be accessible to both neighborhood residents and students. Also in the plan, soon to be unveiled as part of the university's recognition of its 125th anniversary, are a high-rise residence hall and a spacious student center that may or may not be part of the library, both along the Broad Street corridor.

The campus center then would get a "big green space."

"We want to bring our students out of the neighborhood and onto Broad Street," Hart said one afternoon last month during a tour of the North Philadelphia school she has led since July 2006.

"So, over the next 10 years, you will see us focusing on student life, on recreation and development, on study centers, and on these buildings right on Broad Street. That's where I believe we can advance the vision of Philadelphia and its recovery and development."

University officials declined to reveal the price tag, how they planned to pay for it, or other details of the plan, dubbed Temple 2020, which has been endorsed by the Board of Trustees. Hart's administration will release the blueprint after the state budget is passed and current financing is clearer.

During a recent interview, Hart described how she would like to make the school more visible from the city's main artery and reflected on the challenges she has faced running the nearly 37,000-student college.

In the last year, there have been several.

Her administration recently secured a tentative agreement with its 1,280 faculty union after 14 months of negotiation, but the talks left union leaders feeling bruised.

Some state lawmakers were miffed when Temple Health System moved to close Northeastern Hospital. When they threatened to hold up \$175 million in funding, Temple launched an aggressive campaign, including a Web site petition signed by 9,000.

But the dustup, recently resolved, has raised questions from some about the Hart administration's political acumen, and the board chairman wants her to have a stronger voice in the state Capitol.

And even as her administration proceeds with plans for Broad Street, the university continues to contend with concerns from some community leaders over parking and student housing.

Add to those the challenges of running a public higher-education institution buffeted by diminishing state funding, a teetering economy, and the growing needs of a diversified student body.

"This is probably one of the most horrible times to be a university president," said Ralph Taylor, a professor of criminal justice, "and she's done an awful lot of good stuff. Anyone you could talk to would have a long list of things that haven't been done. But in this time, you've got to be realistic."

Sen. Michael Stack 3d (D., Phila.), a trustee for six years, said some people thought Hart would get "eaten alive" in Philadelphia's tough, politically charged environment, having grown up in Salt Lake City and having worked previously at a largely white, bucolic New England campus. Not to mention her being the university's first female president.

"She has surprised a lot of people," he said. "The board is still somewhat of an old boys' network, and she's done quite well with them."

Others say she hasn't been as accessible as they would like, and union leaders, in particular, felt she didn't do enough to bring about a settlement more quickly.

"When Ann Hart came, we really had high hopes, but we became disillusioned," said Arthur Hochner, president of the Temple Association of University Professionals. "But right now, my goal is to get the contract ratified by labor and management and to try to repair the relationship."

A teacher at heart

Hart, 60, well-polished, with stylishly cut short hair, started her career as a public school teacher and later became a junior high principal.

She didn't enter graduate school until she was already the mother of four children. While juggling family responsibilities, she attended night school and got her master's in history, and later a doctorate in educational administration from the University of Utah. Her husband, Randy, a lawyer, helped at home.

Despite the hectic pace, she loved school. She recalled sitting at a stoplight on a snowy night overcome with joy over a seminar she had attended.

"I was thinking, 'Oh, I love this. Nobody should love this this much,' " Hart recalled, tearing at the memory. "That excitement about my own studies is now the environment in which I work."

She was a professor in organizational administration and theory before holding senior administrative posts at Utah, and then became provost at Claremont Graduate University in Los Angeles.

Before coming to Temple, she led the University of New Hampshire for four years.

She's an avid reader and a Meryl Streep fan, and prefers modern decor. Hart is proud of her four daughters: a medical doctor, a toxicologist, an architect, and a health administrator about to start her own business. She keeps lots of photos of her grandchildren, although she no longer runs a slide show of them on her office computer - it uses too much energy. (The university is conducting a power audit, which started in the president's office.)

She and her husband, now retired, live in a condo in Rittenhouse Square - the official Temple president's residence. They have soaked up city life.

"We have never lived in the heart of a great city before," she said. "We so embedded ourselves in Philadelphia our first year that we only put 1,600 miles on our car."

A school in transition

When she arrived at Temple, she found a school that had grown from a commuter campus into a more academically selective university, becoming increasingly whiter (black enrollment dropped from 30 percent in 1996 to 16.8 percent last year), wealthier, and more suburban. Yet, it was a university still committed to serving its urban city and students.

The political landscape was daunting, especially figuring out how local and state leaders interact.

"I've stumbled," she said, referring to her first year.

Pressed to give herself a grade in that area, she said: "Within the first year and a half, I give myself a B, and I'm doing A-minus work now."

New board chairman Patrick O'Connor said he would like Hart to establish a stronger presence for Temple in the halls of Harrisburg and at the governor's office to help secure more funding.

"We have to get a better dialogue with public officials as to the uniqueness of Temple, and get them to understand in a more critical way who we are and what we need to continue to survive and fulfill our mission," O'Connor said. "Ann has to be the voice of Temple. . . . That's one area I'd like her to be more involved with, and I think she is."

Both O'Connor and Daniel Polett, former board chair who led the search committee that hired Hart, backed the decision to close Northeastern, which was facing a \$15.5 million deficit this year. Temple has agreed to talk with community officials about future uses for the property.

In a move to improve interaction among her staff, Hart early on moved her core executive team into one building.

She also set out to increase the size of the tenured faculty. Over the last three years, 224 have been hired.

However, more than a third of the faculty remain on a nontenured track.

"Like the national trend, reliance on part-time faculty has become an issue," she said. "But for me as president, we have been focusing on hiring tenure-track and tenure faculty."

She is credited with responding to concerns of faculty, such as installing wet labs in addition to digital labs at the Tyler School of Art.

"We need to let our faculty and their expertise guide our decisions," she said.

Faculty like that she is an educator.

"It's thrilling to have someone who has that perspective," said Steven Jay Gross, a professor of educational administration.

He also admired her for agreeing to pay for students' passports in an effort to encourage more international travel. Since 2007, she has underwritten 159 student passports, at close to \$100 apiece.

Polett said he has not always agreed with her, but described their relationship as "one of great cooperation and enormous respect.

"In fact, I stayed as chairman an extra year because I liked her," he asserted.

He said he had admired her work ethic - at times, he'd get e-mails from her at 2 a.m. - her academic vision, and her ability to raise funding. The school is about to close a successful \$350 million, 7 1/2-year capital campaign.

The Broad Street Plan

The Broad Street area near Temple has been undergoing a revitalization. There are a movie theater and plans for a major supermarket.

The university is remodeling the Baptist Temple into a performance center, a \$26.4 million project. It's part of more than \$500 million in improvements at Temple over the last several years, including a seven-story addition to the Fox School of Business; a 250,000-square-foot technology center; a 13-story, just-opened medical school building; and the relocation of Tyler from Elkins Park to the main campus.

Under the plan, the size of the 105-acre campus, home to 27,000 students, would not change. It would grow vertically, with taller buildings and converted existing space.

The plan includes a science building in the center of campus, with Barton Hall, bordered by Norris, 13th and Montgomery Streets, converted into green space. Renovations to Pearson-McGonigle halls on Broad, largely athletic facilities, are on tap, too.

A high-rise student residence would go up on Broad.

The new library, across from the Baptist Temple, would replace a parking lot. A parking terrace would be built elsewhere on campus to replace those spaces.

Some community leaders are enthusiastic.

"As long as they have a working relationship with the community, I don't have a problem with that plan," said State Rep. Jewell Williams (D., Phila.), chair of the Philadelphia legislative delegation.

In an effort to be more inviting to the neighborhood, the university is removing iron fencing around its boundaries.

City Councilman Darrell Clarke, who represents the area, said he was concerned about parking and students living off campus. He's proposing a city law to penalize landlords if they have unruly tenants. He said he held off last year at Temple's request.

"Somebody has to be responsible," he said.

In general, Hart said, the university will look to be "a good neighbor.

"The more Temple can be visible there," she said, "the more we can have signature buildings on Broad Street, the more we can contribute to the physical attractiveness, the more we can get our students shopping at commercial space there and living there and studying there, the more we will be able to create that environment that we envision over the next 10 to 15 years and do it as good neighbors."

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