

ANOTHER DAY IN JUNE

Brent Kinghorn—Community Services Vice President

In June of 1976, the Teton Dam collapsed, inundating Rexburg and many surrounding communities. Ricks College, the college on the hill, became a haven to thousands of refugees, including many of its own employees. Overnight, the college and its resources became headline news because of that day in June. Now, nearly a quarter-century later, another day in June has occurred that has placed Ricks College back in the headlines.

On June 21, 2000, President Gordon B. Hinckley announced that Ricks College would expand from its two-year junior college status to that of a four-year institution. Ricks College President, David A. Bednar, had known about President Hinckley's decision to make Ricks a four-year school for a short time. He had shared this with the members of President's Council. What wasn't known was when the announcement would be made.

Then on Tuesday, June 20, 2000, at about 4:30 PM, President Bednar received a phone call from Elder Henry B. Eyring, Commissioner of Education. He had just met with President Hinckley, who had arrived home the night before from a ten-day tour of the Orient where he'd dedicated four new temples. President Hinckley had indicated that he would be holding a press conference the next morning in Salt Lake City and, at the end of it, he wanted to make the announcement concerning Ricks College.

President Bednar immediately called a meeting of the President's Council to discuss what we needed to do to be prepared for it. It was a flurry of activity. It reminded me of the WWII war room strategy sessions I had seen in old John Wayne movies. Ideas were discussed, options were presented, and eventually a plan for the announcement was conceived of how best to inform our many publics. By the time this was accomplished, however, it was well past 5:00 PM, and all our classes had ended and all our employees had gone home.

President Bednar suggested we all needed to go home and get a bite to eat and then come back at 7:00 PM to follow through on our assignments. For the past few days, the members of President's Council had all been waiting for this day, knowing it was coming, but not being able to tell anybody about it. Now the time was here and we were excited to be able to share what so many people at Ricks had hoped for, for such a long time.

My assignment was to first call each member of my own Community Services Council and then have them call their own staffs, inviting them

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all to be in the Hart Building the next morning for an 8:00 AM meeting. Everyone wanted to know what was happening. All we could tell them, we had determined, was that there would be a special announcement the next morning by President Gordon B. Hinckley concerning Ricks College and that we wanted everyone to be there. Finding all of these people wasn't easy either. I finally found out from one of Dave Richards' employees that Dave was on his way to Heber City, Utah, to take two of his grandsons home to their parents and then to stay down for meetings in Provo. When I reached him at about 8:30 PM on his cell phone, he was just south of Malad, Idaho. Dave called his son; they met in Morgan, Utah, and then Dave turned around and came back, getting here in the wee hours of the morning but in time for the 8:00 AM meeting that day.

My assignment also included calling several members of the Thomas E. Ricks family, several key community officials, the Rexburg Chamber of Commerce, and several retirees. While I was making my calls, the other vice presidents were doing the same with their lists. Additionally, academic deans were called and asked to call their department chairmen who, in turn, were to call their summer faculty and tell them to dismiss their early morning classes and to take their students to the Hart Building for the special announcement,

Finally, at about 11:00 PM the last phone call was made and we all went home, tired but keyed up and very excited about what had happened and what was going to happen. We were all back in the President's conference room by 7:00 the next morning to review the next steps of the plan and to cover any loose ends. Then we went together to the Hart Auditorium. It was buzzing with excitement. What would the announcement be? Were we getting a new President? Was the school going to be phased out? Was the school going to go four years? What did the Prophet want to tell us?

The feed from Salt Lake was audio only. President Bednar began the meeting by announcing that President Hinckley would conduct a regular press conference concerning his recent ten-day trip to the Orient that would last about 30 minutes, and then he would make an announcement relative to the college. The 30 minutes by audio feed seemed to drag on forever. People listened patiently and respectfully, but it was very evident that their thoughts were elsewhere.

As President Hinckley finished his report and indicated that he then wanted to make an announcement relative to Ricks College, we lost the audio feed from Salt Lake. Tense moments followed. We all wondered if he had made the announcement and we had missed it. Fortunately, however, he was made aware of the technical problem and he waited with us. Following almost five tense minutes, the feed was restored and

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President Hinckley announced to us and the Salt Lake media that Ricks College would become a four-year school. Immediately a burst of applause broke out in the Hart Auditorium. A near half-century of speculation on the subject of whether Ricks would ever again become a four-year institution had ended.

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President Hinckley then began laying out several details: Ricks' name would change to BYU-Idaho; BYU-Idaho would grant baccalaureate degrees, but not graduate degrees; BYU-Idaho would be teaching oriented and student focused; at BYU-Idaho, faculty would not have faculty rank; BYU-Idaho would operate on an expanded year-round basis; and at BYU-Idaho, the intercollegiate athletic program and predictably other long standing and beneficial programs would be eliminated and phased out. As this last item was expressed, excitement was suddenly dampened. This change we had all looked forward to for such a long time would bring with it different directions, and some of that change would have a difficult impact on some of our programs and employees. I felt immediate compassion for many of my friends who have devoted their lives to intercollegiate athletics. I could only imagine the feelings they were experiencing. And I knew there might be others, in similar circumstances, who would face the same challenge.

Then it was over. President Bednar thanked everyone for coming and announced that there would be a follow-up question and answer meeting at 5:00 PM that day for all who would like to attend. At that time, he said, we would be happy to respond to whatever questions anyone might have. And then we were off, back to our offices to carry out the next details of our plan.

Our next step was for each vice president to meet with his respective council to explain more fully what we knew (which was very little) and to answer their questions so that they could talk to their people. In almost every case, this meeting was short, as we really had very little to add to the information already given. Then it was back to our offices to call special interest parties, hopefully before they heard the word from someone else. These calls went to college presidents at our sister institutions in Idaho and Utah; to the State Board of Education and the Governor's Office, to Brigham Young University-Provo and Hawaii, to former Ricks College presidents; to CES officials, to local stake presidents, to the LDS Foundation, to the Alumni Council and to key donors to the college. We were all very busy.

It was during this time that the media began to call. President Bednar had assigned me to coordinate and handle these calls. I must say that I had never enjoyed talking to the media. In fact, in some ways I had always

dreaded calls from the media. It was a frightening thought to me. Would I say the right things? Would I say too much? What comments would I make that might be taken out of context and appear in print that might not be what the administration or the Church would want said? What 30 second video/audio clip might be selected to be shown on TV or aired over the radio that might put the announcement in a poor light? These were my concerns.

The calls came from everywhere. I'd finish one and my secretary would have two or three more lined up for me to call back. During the day I spoke with reporters from such TV stations as Channel 6 of Pocatello, Channels 3 and 8 of Idaho Falls, and Channel 13 of Salt lake. I was interviewed live by such radio stations as our own KRIC, KBOI of Boise, KSL of Salt Lake, and Metro Radio of Utah. I also spoke with many newspapers, including the *Ogden Standard Examiner*, the *Deseret News*, the *Provo Herald*, and the *Salt Lake Tribune*. Ofttimes these newspaper interviews were with both the news editor and the sports editor. I was also interviewed by the Ensign magazine. By the end of the day, however, my fears of the media were a thing of the past. Now, when a call came through, I was telling my secretary, to bring 'em on. I no longer worried about the media; in fact, I had began to look forward to talking to them.

As the calls came in, many questions were asked that we had never considered. What will the college do with the "R" on the butte? What will it do with the advertising already paid for on college scoreboards? Can students who graduated in April be readmitted as juniors this fall? etc., etc.

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Other issues also began to circulate. Local real estate offices reported record calls regarding property availability surrounding the college or elsewhere in the city or county. Cyber squatters began gobbling up potential BYU-Idaho URLs. In addition, rumors began to surface almost immediately: BYU-Idaho would be adding several new buildings; BYU-Idaho enrollments would grow to 22,000, 25,000 or even 28,000. All of these and dozens more issues came up during the day and the rest of the week.

Shortly before 5:00 p.m. we all assembled in the Taylor Chapel for the President's promised question and answer session. As things turned out, I missed the first part of the Q&A in order to do an interview with Channel 8 TV anchorman, Jay Hildebrandt. This occurred in the back of the Taylor Cultural Hall with the Q&A as a backdrop.

The question and answer session was conducted by President Bednar. He fielded every question, answering most himself and occasionally asking one of the vice presidents to respond. He was a master. We all answered the best we could with the limited information that we

had. Most people seemed to still be excited and supportive, but some really had difficult feelings to work through regarding the name change and the discontinuance of athletics. We listened, we responded, and we listened some more. President Bednar became expert in responding, “I don’t know.”

The meeting finally ended at about 6:30 that evening. We then visited with those who wanted to stay a little longer and ask a few more questions, and then we called it a day. Outside, on my way back to the office, I found I had one more interview. Channel 13 from Salt Lake had arrived just as the meeting was ending, and so there in front of the Taylor Building I rehearsed what I knew one last time that day before heading home. The day was over. It was a day to be remembered—but in reality, I decided, it was *not just another day in June*.

Since that other day in June, much has happened as the entire school has been involved in trying to adjust to our new change. Later in the summer President Bednar gave us all a book, *Who Moved My Cheese?* He wanted us all to know that things won’t be the same at Ricks anymore. Oh, we’ll still perpetuate the Spirit of Ricks. After all, that is what has made Ricks College what it is today. But truly, as President Bednar has taught us all so many times, it is now new wine in new bottles, and the future will be ours to shape.

In the October 1999 General Conference, President Gordon B. Hinckley commented, “What an exciting and wonderful thing it is to step across the threshold of the centuries....Even more exciting is our opportunity to bridge the millennium that is drawing to a close and greet a new thousand years.” In the October 2000 General Conference, President Hinckley spoke about three singular events that happened this year to ring in this new millennium. Of all the things that he could have mentioned, one of those concerned the announcement to expand Ricks College to a four-year school and carry the name of BYU-Idaho. He said, “It will make of what has been a great school an even greater one.” It is an effort on the part of the Church to extend the opportunity of secular education within the framework of a Church school, where is taught faith in the living God and in His divine Son, our Lord. What a great time to be a part of history in the making.

Many things have been occurring over the past several years that have helped us be ready for these momentous happenings. In 1997, just a little over three years ago, President David A. Bednar was appointed to lead Ricks College. His administration was destined to take the college into the next century and the next millennium.

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Almost from day one, he began talking of constructing a ship of curious workmanship that we would sail into uncharted waters. He taught that we needed to be able to look around corners; and to plan to be where the puck would be. He taught that we needed to go where the cheese is and be able to adjust to change.

Working with President Bednar has been a rich and stretching experience. He's taught us all that we are going to—and can—work with new wine in new bottles and that Ricks College, soon to be BYU-Idaho, will become an institution of higher learning that will be different than any other, and that it will be a model that many will seek to follow. I look forward to the next chapters in the rich history of this great school. I feel privileged to be a small part of it. I truly believe that all the events that shall transpire as Ricks College becomes BYU-Idaho will one day be linked to the key events that precede the second coming of the Savior. I believe June 21, 2000, was *not just another day in June* in Rexburg, at the college on the hill. ☺