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RODDY JONES
'58 A PIRATE REMEMBERS

"I had a fantastic mentor—his name was Leo Jenkins." This quote could be from any East Carolina alumnus/a of the late 1940s through late 1970s, but it's a heartfelt sentiment from a man who has truly left his mark on East Carolina University and across much of North Carolina. Robert "Roddy" Jones credits his East Carolina education for developing him into the decision-making thinker that he is today. And since his graduation 51 years ago, Jones has shared a familiar and supportive relationship with the University.

During his formative years, Jones grew up outside of Raleigh, near the State Fairgrounds. When Jones was in 7th grade, his father, Seby B. Jones, moved the family to Raleigh proper and Jones finished his education at Hayes Barton Elementary School, then Needham B. Broughton High School. While in high school, Jones played football and ran track. "Back then there weren't enough students at one school to make a team, so they combined two Raleigh high schools—Broughton and Hugh Morson—to make the team. We played in the 4-A League as 'Raleigh High,'" recalled Jones. "I had a terrific time in high school and those of us from my graduating class that are still in the Raleigh area get together quarterly."

It's not only with friends that Jones has maintained close relationships. His family and the family business Davidson and Jones Corporation have also always been close to his heart.

One of four children, Jones' father encouraged him to be philanthropic and mindful of civic affairs. Seby was a significant influence in Jones' life and also instilled in him the value of hard work and satisfaction of building something with his own hands—a tradition that Jones has passed on to his own children. Like father, like son, Jones works side-by-side with his sons Rob, who is partner/owner of Davidson and Jones Construction, and Russ, president of Davidson and Jones Corporation. Daughter Christi works with Davidson and Jones Hotel Corporation and manages the family's farm and horse ranch Triple R Ranch.

Jones' father was always supportive of his decisions. "When it came time for me to go to

college, my dad wanted me to go to NC State, but I thought that was a little too close to home. I only applied to two schools—East Carolina and Wake Forest. Well, I decided that Wake Forest was too close to home too, so I went to East Carolina. Appalachian State offered me a football scholarship, but I'm not fond of winter weather so I decided not to go there. I was a walk-on for the football team at East Carolina for one day. I was a strapping 155 pounds and those other boys were really big, so I decided to end my football career. To put it in perspective, some friends and I were at a hangout called Dora's one night and we watched as ONE football player turned over a Cadillac; I knew then I had made the right decision.

Jones found other ways to get involved on campus. Admittedly, he was a little mischievous as a young man and enjoyed having fun with his fellow classmates. But one aspect of college life that Jones felt was missing from East Carolina was social fraternities, which many of his UNC, Wake Forest, and NC State pals were involved in. "At the time, President John Messick disapproved of social fraternities, so we had to be creative and figure out how to get them approved on campus. Fortunately, we had an ally in Leo Jenkins who supported our cause and helped Jimmy Phelps '58, Charlie White '59, Johnny Hudson '59 and several others and me meet with several members of the Board of Trustees. In the fall of 1956 local fraternity groups were approved and I became a member of Kappa Sigma Nu, which later became Sigma Nu." Thanks to the efforts of Jones and his friends, East Carolina still offers social fraternities and sororities, many of which began as local groups in 1956.

With fraternities came the Interfraternity Council (IFC), the governing body of the social fraternities, and Jones was happy to serve as the group's first president. IFC became an influential student group on campus and even secured the first East Carolina appearance of the legendary Dave Brubeck Quartet, which Jones was present for although he had graduated. At that same time, his fraternity brother Jimmy Phelps became president of the SGA, which solidified social fraternities' commitment to school service.

There are many other memories that Jones has of his time at East Carolina—some might be a little scandalous, but are all in good fun. "I'll never forget one year when Kappa Sigma Nu's Homecoming float was a whale. We built it on a truck we borrowed from a nearby tobacco warehouse and the whale's mouth would open and close and it had steam coming



out of its blowhole. (Kappa Sigma Nu won the float contest three times while I was in school.) Later that night, after the parade, one of the guys was a little tipsy and wanted to drive the whale. He slowly made his way through several residential areas before we could catch him and return a very damaged whale back to the warehouse. But, since the whale was made of chicken wire and thousands of little paper napkins, many of them flew off and we had to follow the truck route and pick them up—we couldn't leave any evidence behind. And then of course there was the little rumor about a panty raid..."



Jones took his academic life just as seriously as his social life. Before graduating he was offered a position with a map making company, but family man that he is, turned it down because he didn't want to go so far from home. On graduation day, his father asked if he was going to come work for him or not. "I told him I would like to try it. I didn't know if I was going to like it, but I would try it. He said, 'I'll see you at 7 o'clock in the morning.' I replied, 'Dad, how about the following Monday—a bunch of us are going to the beach for a week.' And he said, 'You said you wanted to try it. I'll see you at 7 o'clock in the morning.' So I graduated on Sunday afternoon, and started work on Monday morning."

Despite having participated in what some may consider college antics, Jones graduated from East Carolina with an impeccable reputation and it wasn't long before the college's administration called on him to serve the

University. "I enjoyed a unique relationship with those who were teachers and administrators after I graduated." By 1972 Jones was a member of the University's Board of Trustees and succeeded Senator Robert Morgan '47 as chairman in 1973. Jones also

served on the Geography Advancement Council in 2005-2006 and is currently serving on the ECU Medical and Health Sciences Foundation as well as the Thomas Harriot College of Arts and Sciences Advancement Council.

Jones' support of the University doesn't stop with service—he is also committed financially. In April of 1972 Jones made the largest monetary pledge of any alumnus at that time to the Alumni Association, something that pleased his mentor Leo Jenkins. "I express my deep appreciation for your generous gift to the Alumni Loyalty Fund. This is indeed a significant step forward in the progress of our Alumni Association. Your gift is the largest single gift ever contributed to the Alumni Association at East Carolina University," read a letter to Jones from Jenkins. Jones also funds the Robert L. Jones Award for Outstanding Teaching, the Robert L. Jones Distinguished Professorship in the School of Music, the Robert L. Jones Nursing Scholarship, as well as other grants and scholarships. He is also a member of the Pirate Club. In fact, Jones and four other alumni (James Maynard '65, Sam Wornom '65, the late Pat Draughon '60, and Alvin Hutzler '65) established the Educational Foundation's Endowment Fund in 1983 to help provide student-athlete scholarship support.

It seems only fitting that a geography major who thoroughly enjoyed his college experience would spend his career adding to the landscape of North Carolina and to the heart of his alma mater.



East Carolina Alumni Association

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