

DU ORAL HISTORY 1984-2014

Interviewee: Trygve Myhren

Interviewer: James R. Griesemer

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Transcriber: Terry L. Zdrale

James Griesemer: [00:21](#)

Welcome to the University of Denver's oral history. Our series begins back in the mid-1980s. When DU was on the brink of bankruptcy and continues to 2014 with the university, a regional academic leader poised for national prominence. The interviews in this series present a panorama of progress against steep odds stories told by men and women who were personally involved in saving the university and undertaking an extraordinary process of renewal. Their narratives are true renaissance tale. To continue our story, I'm joined by Trygve Myhren, former chair of the University of Denver Board Of Trustees. Welcome to DU's oral history. Trygve your background as an executive in the communication industry and as a community leader is so broad, we could spend the entire interview just listening to your accomplishments. President of Myhren Media, former CEO of the Providence Journal Companies, CEO chair of American TV and communications, founder of cable TVs, food network, co-founder of E! Entertainment, and for other networks. You're a member of the national cable television's hall of fame. You received the humanitarian award from the Korbel School and many, and I mean many more honors, including being an inductee into the Colorado Ski Hall of fame. That sounds like you would have no time for anything else yet. You've been very close to the University of Denver. First serving on the Daniels College of Business Advisory Board when I was dean and then joining the DU board of trustees and later serving as board chair. So how did you get connected to the University of Denver in the first place?

Trygve Myhren: [02:20](#)

Well, my wife, of course, is a DU grad, right.

And my son Eric, my older son, got his master's here and I a son in law, Bruce Rifkin, was Lacrosse player here, graduated too and, and he, he's been a quite a supporter of the DU Lacrosse team. and one of his daughters, is, currently here at DU. But that wasn't then, I mean, the, the current student at DU wasn't back in the period asked me about but it, but it just shows you the, the, the connection. But the, but the real connection to the board came when I was CEO of the Providence Journal and what happened there with the Dan Richie called me. And, the way it happened was that we had sold, we had made the deal to sell the company. We had the agreement, we hadn't signed all the papers, we hadn't completed the deal, but we'd made the agreement, therefore we had to announce it.

- Trygve Myhren: [03:34](#) And we announced it in the Wall Street Journal, carried a fairly substantial article at the end of the article. It happened that they, they, they said that I, when I completed all this would, would likely be returning to Denver. And Dan, it was really funny. I got this call it's 8:00 in the morning, pick up Dan Ritchie here. I said, oh, well, this is Trygve. Dan, where are you? Haven't seen you in a while. He said, Oh, I'm in Denver and a now remember it's 8:00 in Providence, 6:00 AM in Denver. Right? And Dan said Trygve, I'd like you to join the board at the University of Denver. I said, I'm going to be exhausted when this whole thing was over here. I need some time to rest, but maybe we could talk about it after I come back because I was intrigued immediately because I had enormous respect for Dan. We'd known each other for what at that point.
- Trygve Myhren: [04:32](#) That was 1995, late 95. We'd known each other since [inaudible] 75 in the business world. And both, I think had respect for each other. And I certainly respected him. And so there you are, so I, I said, well, you know, we'll get after that. And he promised me. He said, look, I know you're busy. You just have to be on one committee. So I went on the audit committee pretty soon the chairman left and I was the chairman. All right. And then it followed FEAC and athletics and finance and budget - chaired that for eight or nine years. And, and then, the executive committee, of course, during every time I was chairman, that, that was a. So Dan's promise of really doing a great job with the university, taking the right direction. That was good. The other one was going to say I was a false promise.
- James Griesemer: [05:30](#) You won't have anything to do.
- Trygve Myhren: [05:32](#) So in any event, that's when you,
- James Griesemer: [05:34](#) when you came on the board Trygve, in about 1995 DU was passing out of the worst of the financial crisis. There were still challenges but, but, but it was merely moving into the phase of, of renewal, of, of new directions as you first joined the board. What was your take on things? How did you see the university?
- Trygve Myhren: [06:00](#) I saw the university is having stabilized. Once I understood a little more, I, I saw it as having stabilized, but with some, some real opportunities, opportunities that would take discipline because we couldn't ape the Harvard's and the Stanford's right. They had more money, they had more prestige, had more history, even more history than we did. And we'd, you know, we'd been around for a while. And we couldn't go that route. We had to be more clever, more nimble. We had to be very careful with, with our, with our money. Right. And, you know, in that regard, interestingly enough, one of the things that I did when I became chair, actually before I became chair while I was heading the finance committee that's worked very closely with Craig Woody on trying to

protect our endowment by reducing the amount of operating funds we took out of it each year. Not a huge amount but enough to stabilize

- James Griesemer: [07:07](#) and Craig has talked about that.
- Trygve Myhren: [07:43](#) Well, that's, that, that, that I thought was important at the time. I think the endowment is, is, is, is a treasure for us and it's not as big as we need it to be, but in any event, but I saw an opportunity if we did it the right way and we're nimble and creative about it to, to get things done. I thought also that DU was better than its rankings. I really, I really did. And so I saw an opportunity if we could, could publicize the university, but uh,
- James Griesemer: [07:22](#) so after serving on the board for a number of years, you were invited to become, become chair and, and in that role and at that time a good deal happened. But one of the things that you did, it probably isn't as well known outside of the university are the, are the structural and procedural changes you made with the board, the governance changes. Could you talk about those?
- Trygve Myhren: [08:10](#) Sure. I, I, you know, I, I'd had a lot of experience but as, as a CEO of the three separate companies and on the boards of a whole bunch of things with corporate and pro bono, and I was concerned about DU's board. Not that we didn't have terrific people. We did, but a lot of the people had been around a long time on the board and they'd gone through hell and they'd worked very, very hard on it. Many of them had given a fair amount of their treasure to the university. And, and you know, I'd seen on other boards that, that, there are very few people who, who can sustain the energy, the vitality, the, the, the clearness of vision and the clarity of vision that you need to have if you're going to drive an organization to the next level. And I worried about that.
- Trygve Myhren: [09:07](#) I worried that we were a bit stagnant and I could tell from the energy in the board meetings that we were stagnant. And so I, I, I thought, you know, what we have to do here is we've got to put some term limits in.
- James Griesemer: [09:21](#) Now DU had never had term never had term limits.
- Trygve Myhren: [09:24](#) Never had term limits. And, and actually the way it happened was interesting because John Lowe was the chairman of the trustee affairs committee which selected the trustees at that point and, and, you know, with, with the ascent of the board, of course. And, and he was the one who I had been asked twice before to be chair and I had turned it down for personal reasons. Okay. I just couldn't do it. all of a sudden I was in an emergency situation. or I wasn't the university was, and so they came to me again and so John and I sat down and negotiated and I said, John, look, I'm not going to take this as a lifetime job, which is what it's been, right?

- Trygve Myhren: [10:06](#) So I will not do that. And he said, well, you know, let's talk about, about what you would do. And I said, well, if we have four year terms for the chair, I'd be willing to do that. And so he and I went back and forth and he said, I really want a five year term. And I said, well then what we must do is create a chair elect. All right? And, and I said, you know, I got dropped into the job. I was a trustee and I was going along at about 25, 30 miles an hour, comfortably trying to add value. And then all of a sudden I'm dropped into this job and there were a lot more challenges that I had been aware of. And it takes a lot more time. and I think it's a little bit unfair to drop somebody in like that, but I'm, you know, I'm, I'm, you know, going to, I'm going to, to do my best obviously, but I'm going to need an agreement whereby I have this chair elect who's elected one year ahead of me.
- Trygve Myhren: [11:12](#) So, after four years we'll have a chair elect who will understudy me for a year and then they'll start off knowing everything. Yeah, because I'm going to be completely open as any chair who's finishing up should be. And so we came to agreement on that and I said, well, okay, let's now go back to the trustees. And so that was, that was, that was a toughie because we had these people who had really worked hard. and as I say, given a lot of their treasure and they were reluctant to see trustee term limits put in. But Fred Waldeck, another trustee who eventually became the chair of the trustee affairs committee, which is now called a nominating and governance. Fred really, really helped me to reassure people about what this would mean. We weren't tossing anybody just off the board like that. They were going to have a reasonably long terms before probably would, would exceed their lifetime before they had to go off. And it was that kind of conversation and, and it, they, they became people became comfortable enough so that we were able to get it to, to, to actually took three years to make that happen. But it happened and frankly I'm a very happy with the whole thing
- James Griesemer: [12:43](#) well, and, and those of us in the board realize what a profound effect that's had not an, not just in terms of bringing new and younger people on the board, but also the preparation for the, of the chair elect for the position. I watched that happen with Doug Scribner and then we watched it happen with the Denise O'Leary. And in each case they came into the position very well grounded. It really, I think it was a wonderful success.
- Trygve Myhren: [13:13](#) Yeah, no, I, I, I had enough. I had had enough experience under other boards so that I knew there was some of these devices available and if, if you did them and Fred Waldeck was very helpful in constructing the way that the, the trustee terms would go in order for the reassurance that I talked about. So, you know, it, it, it, it worked.
- James Griesemer: [13:36](#) Yeah. Well it was very important change. You know in over the years as you and I have talked and you often refer to talented people saying

they're, they're critical and you've. And here, at DU, you've referred to superstars on the faculty and on the staff. Could you talk about why you think such individuals are so important and maybe give some illustrations from DU?

- Trygve Myhren: [14:05](#) Well, I mean, you, you, you have, you know, faculty superstars such as a Susan Schulten history for example, who's, who's internationally known and has published a real well, and, and does, does, is creative as well? And, and, and we have that throughout of the university, but people don't know who didn't then know about them. We're doing a better job of that now. We, we had to go outside, well, I'll take another faculty person, Marty Katz who had been a partner in a law firm came in as, as a professor in Sturm, a college of law, and became the dean when Sturm was in a lot of trouble, right? And it was really trending down rather than up. And and Marty looked at it and said, you know, I've been in, I've been in a law firm, I know what the clients want.
- Trygve Myhren: [15:09](#) They don't want somebody coming into our firm and having to get trained for a year. They want people can land on their feet and therefore, because the clients want that, the law firms are coming around to it. So we're on the cusp of a big change out there and why don't we be the first ones to get there. And among the other things that he did, he did that experiential learning, landing on your feet, and got enormous publicity for DU in the school law. Not only improve the performance at the school law overall because it was more exciting, but allowed the university to get some publicity that it would not have gotten otherwise
- James Griesemer: [15:54](#) and very well deserved. His handling of that whole thing was quite remarkable.
- Trygve Myhren: [15:59](#) Exactly
- James Griesemer: [16:01](#) the, when there are others, of course, in athletics,
- Trygve Myhren: [16:05](#) in athletics, of course there's, there's Bill Tierney, is a great example. I mean, had won six national championships at Princeton, was really generally regarded as the best lacrosse coach in the world. wasn't going anywhere, but he came here and without going through all the who shot Johns is about how that happened. He came here and it has taken us to the final four constantly, in Lacrosse, won a national championship for DU. so that we're now, I think up to 34 overall and all of our sports with quite remarkable. so yeah, he and the name, I mean sports illustrated, New York Times, you know, on and on and on, a video and magazine, publicity and so on and talking about video publicity, Ambassador Christopher Hill, who was the ambassador in Iraq, and had been ambassador overall including Iraq with four countries.

- Trygve Myhren: [17:07](#) Was the, was the fellow who was in charge of the whole us posture at the six party talks with North Korea, Undersecretary of State for Southeast Asia, you know, I could go on and on Chris his background, I mean this is somebody who was extraordinarily well known and respected and, and, we got him to come from Iraq and, and, and that, that, and the publicity that he's garnered for the university is fabulous and you got Otto Tschudi who has been here forever but never got enough publicity. And the university has won 23 national skiing championships, a more than a, I think we just won our 24th as a matter of fact.
- James Griesemer: [17:52](#) And we should talk about Otto. He's, he's champion skier, but then is and has been a board member for a long time.
- Trygve Myhren: [17:59](#) Absolutely right
- James Griesemer: [18:00](#) Otto was quite instrumental in, in the revival of the skiing program. Was he not?
- Trygve Myhren: [18:05](#) He absolutely was. I mean, he won, I think six individual national championships while he was here as a skier. Of course he had been on the Norwegian national team and he, was the leading skier for a while in the professional tour, went into the investment banking business. A went on the DU board has been there for forever. Okay. And but never enough publicity on him and, and we've tried to try to tie Otto to DU which we should be done and that's been helpful. And all of this, when you get, when you have superstars and you get that kind of publicity, it does a whole bunch of things. It helps. It's easier to raise money, because you're in national publications, national video and so on. International really in some cases, and you're able to recruit students, in a, in a, in a much more of a, well, put it this way, it's easier to recruit students
- James Griesemer: [19:09](#) and also faculty and staff, they're attracted to working with talent. To collaborate. Exactly. Well your focus on that has made a huge difference at DU and while we're on that, I think maybe I'd like to explore the academic side a little further.
- Trygve Myhren: [19:28](#) May I add one thing.
- James Griesemer: [19:28](#) Yeah, of course.
- Trygve Myhren: [19:29](#) Okay. The one thing would be back before I went on the board, became chair. There was a big hoorah over whether we should discontinue the alumni magazine during during hard times and so on. And it was not a particularly attractive magazine at that point and I and some others argued strongly against that and argue that we ought to spend more money on the magazine and I think it has proven itself. It's, it's really quite a magazine.

- James Griesemer: [19:57](#) It is very excellent.
- Trygve Myhren: [19:59](#) And I think it's very attractive to alumni and when people from outside the school read it as I've sent it to a number of friends who've gone to other schools.
- James Griesemer: [20:06](#) Sure.
- Trygve Myhren: [20:06](#) They say, wow, that's really good. So that's good stuff.
- James Griesemer: [20:11](#) Well, on the, on the academic side is we were starting to talk, you worked very closely with Chancellor Bob Coombe and, and I think you could provide some good backroom background. Bob came on as chancellor I think very interested in focusing on the academic side.
- Bob, he was a superb academician in his own right. But his partnership with you in that regard was, was quite significant. And, and I'd, I'd love to hear more about your interrelationship with Bob and your, just your whole view on that.
- Trygve Myhren: [20:53](#) Well, I, I, Bob was a superb academic leader. You know, he came up, he, he'd been in industry for a short while and then he came in and he was a professor and he was a, he was a department head and he was a dean and then he, then he was, he was provost, right. And then was selected as after four years as provost. He was selected as the Dean and we made a very conscious selection at that point. And I was quite involved in that, that we wanted an academician because for all of Dan's strengths, which were enormous, and without him, I think we would not be sitting across the table from each other. he was not a PhD and he was not an academic. He was a, he was a really rigorous intellectual broad-based I'm smarter than most people you'll ever meet.
- Trygve Myhren: [21:57](#) And I think you would agree with,
- James Griesemer: [21:58](#) I would agree,
- Trygve Myhren: [21:59](#) but he wasn't an academic and we needed someone who could come in and just burnish the, the, the credentials that we already had and add more on the academic side. And Bob survived a rigorous national search for chancellor.
- James Griesemer: [22:16](#) I know that.
- Trygve Myhren: [22:16](#) Then he came in and, but by the time he and I got together and then in the, in the chairman chancellor relationship, he had already had three years and there was some serious grumbling on the part of some people. Okay. And the, and I was aware of that. And so the beginning, probably

the first year of Bob's and my relationship was a bit testy because I told him that as great a job I thought he was doing on the academic side, there were some of the things he had to do. He was, didn't really enjoy fundraising, didn't have any enthusiasm for it. And of course some people think that's the, you know, that's the chancellor, the president's job. But we had viewed that differently. so the, I and a number of other trustees sort of held off. We kept the barbarians at the gate, right. And we went through Bob's tenure and he did what he, what he, he, we wanted him to do. He, he, he really raised this university. And, I think to the, you know, the greater good of all of us.

James Griesemer: [23:34](#)

I, I certainly would, would agree Another, another thing that occurred during your time as board chair, higher education as you and I both know is going through a period of very significant change. And it's challenging DU and other universities and colleges and an important event, I think was the work of what became the DU strategic issues panel and on higher education and that happened under your watch is as board chair. maybe you could describe that process and, and in your mind a whatever outcome value it might've had to the university, that whole process.

Trygve Myhren: [24:15](#)

Okay. I, you know, I think as you know, the university had never really quite wanted to take on a strategic panel that, that plumbed everything, including what was, I viewed us as within the tent and outside the tent. There was a lot of action. Okay. It was a big storm out there, sort of an electronic store and we were in there and, and it was a little hard to, to be in there and comfortable to look outside. So I thought that we just had to get to that point. Okay. And, you know, I came to this, I intuited that we, the, the higher education industry was going to run into a lot of trouble and that was basically because the experience that I'd had, I'd been in, I'd been in the cable television business, the broadcast business, the newspaper business, etc. And I understood how dramatically changed these institutions were in some cases, and we're going to be a because of the internet and digital communications.

Trygve Myhren: [25:22](#)

So I just said, you know, we've got to get there and we've got to look at this. and I evangelized my thinking with some of the, some board members and in my chairman's message each year and the annual report, I would, I would, try to articulate what I was thinking, with very little affection. Okay. It wasn't, wasn't much acceptance, and it appeared there might be fear on the part of certain faculty and certain administrators, against what they thought might be some ugly conclusions. Okay. So, I, I, so consequently I sat down with you and, you had lead DU's Strategic Issues, panels, over a fair period of time where you'd take a single issue each year, a really almost intractable issue, whether it was, election reform or immigration or, and you, you'd get a panel of maybe 20 people and they'd go from political views from the far left to the far right.

- Trygve Myhren: [26:35](#) and by the end of it, after people had really been educated on the issues, they were coming closer and closer together. and I'd watched that and I said, oh, this is good. And so I thought, you know, you would be clearly the guy to do it, you know, that a lot of places they go outside to find somebody whatever, which I think has a number of problems with it typically. And, so I, I sat down with you,
- James Griesemer: [27:04](#) we did
- Trygve Myhren: [27:05](#) and we talked. And one of the things I discovered was that you were, you were in that point where you were at your heaviest workload period because you were, were sort of finishing up one report where you're trying to get all of the bobbing heads together and write it up at the same time and then, and then get a, a consensus conclusion on it and not easy to do.
- Trygve Myhren: [27:31](#) And you were doing that. How could you take on something else? Well we talked about that for a while I told you how critical I really thought it was for the university. I could tell that you, you, if anybody understood how critical was you did. So I just kept after you and you finally said, okay, I'll double my workload, get this thing started and you did. And I thank you for that. I, I can't thank you enough frankly. And that, and then, of course, I realize that you don't execute something like this, which is such a sensitive topic over the chancellor's head or under the chancellor's right. So, the next step was approach Bob Coombe and Bob was very cautious on it, but as I had hoped he was quite intrigued by the idea and particularly by the idea that you had had a, because he knew the same things I knew.
- Trygve Myhren: [28:029](#) okay. So, he called you to discuss it?
- James Griesemer: [28:32](#) He did.
- Trygve Myhren: [28:33](#) And there was a conclusion. We went ahead and we set up a 20 person panel and it had five faculty in two deans, the CFO, the admissions vice chancellor, provost, and then we had five thoughtful community members, and the trustee and you, and as I remember at the time, you were a trustee, a professor, dean emeritus of the Daniel's school and a former CFO of the university.
- James Griesemer: [29:04](#) Couldn't hold a job.
- Trygve Myhren: [29:04](#) Yeah, you couldn't hold a job, but as I say, you did have some credentialing, so. Okay. So you know, that the whole darn thing worked out. I mean, it, it, it really worked well. And Bob Coombe and I attended every session.

- James Griesemer: [29:20](#) You sure did.
- Trygve Myhren: [29:21](#) Set side by side at every session,
- James Griesemer: [29:23](#) but you were not on the panel itself
- Trygve Myhren: [29:25](#) But we weren't on the panel. Right. We didn't speak. Well actually, I think you had me lead it off, but, but other than that,
- I never said a word. Bob didn't say a word and you brought in 17 speakers as I remember. And these people were all experts on various parts of the, higher education and competition and larger picture arena.
- James Griesemer: [29:50](#) Outside the tent,
- Trygve Myhren: [29:51](#) outside the tent. They were all outside the tent people. Exactly. And, and, that was really good because what happened and then you assign certain readings and so on. And so, so we got to a point where everybody understood the issues, their biases started to melt away because they understood a lot more about it and, you know, the same thing you had proven with your other issues. So there we were, and I would say that I, I thought that your handling of the group was masterful and I thought that the discussion, got, there were times when there was pretty heated debate, but it was always civil.
- Trygve Myhren: [30:33](#) And we got to the end and you led everybody to consensus on it. A remarkable achievement frankly. And it was called Unsettling Times, Higher education in an era of change
- and you know, it, it, and that report starting to leak out nationally. And it was, it was basically required reading and every, every significantly university in college, in the country. And it, it, got it, got rave reviews. and it was, it, it really raised DU's stature right there. Okay. Because we had done something thoughtful that a lot of them said, well, we should have done this, right. And so the, that, that was, that was good stuff, but, you know, I would say to you that, that was the beginning of the future because it was, it was setting a platform for a full blown strategic plan.
- James Griesemer: [31:31](#) Indeed. And, there, there are so many things to talk about, but following that report to keep, keep on that track for a moment after nine years is as a chancellor, after four years as provost, Bob Coombe decided he wanted to step down.
- Trygve Myhren: [31:55](#) Right.
- James Griesemer: [31:56](#) And so here you are, you're chair. We, we've identified the huge changes going on in the industry and now we need a new leader in a very difficult

time and, and it, it really fell on your shoulders to figure out how would we go about that and I'd love to have you talk about that because it was such an important decision.

- Trygve Myhren: [32:22](#) Yeah, it was, well, you know, Bob did, did come to me and say, you know, and, and it was in September, if I remember correctly, it was in early September and he said, look, we got a September board meeting at the end of September and I would like to announce it. I'm stepping down.
- James Griesemer: [32:41](#) That would've been 2013 I think.
- Trygve Myhren: [32:45](#) I think that would have been right. Yeah, I think that's right. Yeah. I like to step down. and I said, okay, when do you want to do that, and I, and, and, and as I say, he said, you know, like, right now, and I said, you know, I would really strongly urge you, almost plead with you not to do that right now because that's going to hurt the university. And it's going to be, it will, it will put us in limbo for a year, a very critical year, a while we search for someone, we can get this done and we'll get it done faster and better. I think if you're willing to wait until the middle of January and in the meantime I'm going to pull together a very small group of people they would call trustworthy trustees. People that aren't going to say anything to anybody else. And I'll meet with them. I'll go over this and we will, select a, an executive recruiter, which we need for this task. Okay. We just want people who are going to send resumes in over the transom, you know, that that doesn't work. We'd like their whole file, the digital file of everybody who's out there. Plus we want to identify people who are very satisfied in what they're doing right now, very successful. Don't want to move. Who can be convinced them who are really, really good. So I said, that's, that's the plan. And we have to get the recruiter, we have to get a job description together and given where the industry is going, that's going to be pretty broad job description, you know, we were going to need academic expertise, we're going to need fundraising expertise, we're going to need a series of, of, of, of other skills in this person and it's not going to be an easy job, but I want to do it in an organized non hurried fashion.
- Trygve Myhren: [34:55](#) and so if you'd wait and Bob thought on it for a day and he said, alright, you know, if it's good for the university, I'll do that. So I said, fine. And we went ahead and I chose our chair elect Fred, not Fred, but, Doug Scrivner, because Doug, of course would be the chair as soon as I stepped down, which was at the end of the year, right? And that was when this new person was coming in. I knew that the new person would want to get to know Doug and be comfortable with Doug would want to be comfortable with who the person was. So first person I selected was Doug, but also Cappy Shopneck and K.C. Gallagher and Fred Waldeck and we sat around and talked to this whole thing through and then, we agreed on the who, the recruiting firms, where that we could possibly work with, including a fellow named Alberto Pimentel at Storbeck

Pimentel, and he lived on the west coast. And an interesting guy because he's a, he's a Hispanic fellow, grew up in a very Hispanic town in the LA area. Went to Harvard, became a superstar recruiter and I'd seen him in action once before. So I went out to see him and spend four hours with him and we really bonded and I could tell that he understood, see normally what you do. He understood what I thought I understood, but I had to make sure which is that when you announce at the beginning of the, of your academic year that you know at the end you're going to try to, by the end you're going to try to find somebody. You get a certain pool of candidates at that point and you can get, get some very good people, but people would argue that if you wait till later to announce, which we weren't going to do until January, that you can really get squashed.

Trygve Myhren: [36:57](#)

And that was one of the arguments I knew I was going to go in to hear from the board. He said, no. He said, we can believe me on this part of getting people to pick up stakes even though they didn't think they wanted to. He said we're going to have a lot of people available there. So I went back with confidence and we started, we started and Doug Scrivner, I asked Doug to really take the reins on putting the whole search together from there. And he and Cappy Shopneck really took on the job of narrowing the list of candidates and then setting up all the meetings, with them secretly, secretive meetings obviously. And then getting the candidates list boil down even farther. I think we probably started out with, I don't know, 160 people or something. I can't remember the number of really.

Trygve Myhren: [37:57](#)

And eventually whittled it down to, I think maybe 14 or 15 that we had airport interview, what we call airport in with, and then eventually narrowed that one down so that we only had a three people that we brought to campus. And then, but Doug and Cappy then had to socialize the campus on this. I mean the faculty and students and so on. And the faculty didn't want to be hurried in, in, in anything. But we had gotten really intrigued with Rebecca Chopp. I mean, here, here's a woman during this process. And we decided to concentrate on her. And you know, here's a woman who was the president of Swarthmore number three rated liberal arts school in the country. Right. All right. She had been president of Colgate for seven years before Swarthmore talked her into going from cold upstate New York to Philadelphia.

Trygve Myhren: [38:49](#)

And then before that she had, she had been a provost at, at Emory, a dean at Yale. I mean, she had a heck of a background, but the question was, what kind of person was she? And we came to conclude she was really pretty terrific. And was a heck of an academic, I mean, really, really, very checked out. And so we said, you know, that this could work. And we knew she was, she was a monster fundraiser and, and, and really understood the future and she was really turned on by that, that report, I mean, one of the things that helped us to get her was she loved the

Unsettling Times report. She said you guys, you know you've got something. You guys are thinking out there. That was helpful.

- Trygve Myhren: [39:35](#) Also, she has a son in Fort Collins, her husband loves Denver. And, it turns out she has a sister in Denver. She got really sort of, oh I can't leave here, right near the end, near the end. We thought we had her and then we didn't think we had her. But, a final push was put on and she came. And, she's been here I think four and one-half years doing a heck of a job.
- James Griesemer 40:05 Remarkable job, really remarkable job. There were so many other things that happened during your tenure. There are just two, well maybe a couple more that I'd like to. One was the Presidential debate. Among the many things that were going on at the university, DU was selected to hold the first of the Presidential debates in 2012. You're the chair, what was it, how did that come about and what was your reaction to it all?
- Trygve Myhren: 40:39 Well, you know, we wanted to do something, you know, as part of the theme that I was talking about, getting DU's name out there and we competed. Went to the presidential debate commission, which is really a red tape place. But, in any event we went there, and you can imagine – the two parties are major parts of that and them agreeing on anything. So, you do get to go down a lot of blind allies. But the fact is, we stuck with it and over a period of time we got the debate.
- And, we got the first one. We said that we wouldn't take it unless we got the first one. Because the first one is by far the most watched, always. At least that had been the history. It turned out to be true again. And, we got the darn thing and then Bob and I were talking and we both said to each other what do we do now? Because this thing's going to be big.
- Trygve Myhren 41:41 And so, we recruited David Greenberg, who was the David had a long history of you know, White House Fellow, and a major public relations firm in town, was the founder and chairman of the Denver Schools for Science and Technology which are an enormous success. But, had sort of worn himself out on that and we thought maybe we could get him. So we proposed this Vice Chancellor job of external relations and various other things and partnerships and so on. And, so he came in and he handled this thing. And he had some other things he was going to do too, there was no chance he could do the other stuff. This is a huge job. He plowed through federal, state and local security concerns. I mean, it was the FBI and the CIA and the State Police and their terrorist people, and the local police and their terrorist people and SWAT people and I mean, it was unbelievable. The debate commission of course, and all the red tape there and we U.S. and International media concerns, significant. I mean we had a huge amount of international media here, which is showing up by the way in our recruitment. But, we had temporary construction here, remember that, all around the campus. I mean, NBC is over here

MBCSN is over here and Fox is over here and CNN is over there, I mean it was pretty wild. And there were a lot of intricate meal service requirements as you can imagine. There were so many complications it was unreal and David is a professional, he just plowed through all of that. He got the team working and everything fell into place. And, he had heroes working with him and one of them is Kathy Grief, OK and she is remarkable. She helped a huge amount on some of those issues. And there were many other people, you know, Campus Security and on and on.

David pulled it off and he did it splendidly. He really did. It went so far as suggesting to us, to me, that maybe the trustees should give up their passes for this thing and he would put on a television extravaganza at the Sturm School. And he did. And, I asked the trustees to give up their passes to the students. So, the students went which is really is what this school is all about.

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| Trygve Myhren | 44:48 | So, that happened and you know this is David. David in action. That was good stuff. Since then, David of course has gone on to a whole bunch of other challenges |
| James Griesemer | 44:58 | doing inter-government relations and so many things. |
| Trygve Myhren | 45:01 | well and this who DU District and all that stuff, yeah. |
| James Griesemer | 45:04 | The other thing, there's a couple other things, but I don't want to let this moment pass without talking about DU's Ascent Campaign. While you were chair and Bob was Chancellor, DU concluded the largest fundraising event in the university's history, bar far. |
| Trygve Myhren | 45:31 | Yes. |
| James Griesemer | 45:32 | What, could you talk about that and share your perspectives on that whole thing because it was an enormous accomplishment, ah, for the university. |
| Trygve Myhren | 45:45 | Well, I think it was an enormous accomplishment largely because, as I look at it, we were in troubled times. That campaign began really sort of got kicked off on a private basis back around must have been 2007, must have been late 2007-2008. And I came in as chair in 09 which is basically the summer of 08 and a lot of people really didn't want to do anything. Not just the donors, but people on the committee here. I mean, they just I can't go ask people for money, they're getting killed right now. Ah, so timing was real bad. But, I think to put it in ah, I'm looking for some names here who were involved there are some people that did a terrific job on that. We raised, by the time it was over 490 Million dollars from close to, I'm trying to think how many, 50,000, close to 50,000 donors, 490 million dollars. |

- James Griesemer 47:12 Astonishing
- Trygve Myhren 47:13 Yeah, I mean it was just, it was a blowout. It really, really was quite remarkable. Let me see if I can find anything. I'll tell you the people who really got the job done. Dog Scrivner, took as chair of it when I asked, he took over as chair of the campaign. I still had the yoke. And, Margo Frank and Scott Lumpkin, OK who was running the charitable side. And the kind of people who gave to this, were as I say, there were almost 50,000 of them. But some of the names you'll recognize I mean, like Ritchie, surprise, surprise and Sie, John and Anna and the Gates Foundation. And Nobel and Pardee and Morgridge and Taylor you know, Andy Taylor and Nagel and Moore and of course the Hamilton's and Anderson and so on and you recognize these names because they're on certain buildings around here and these people have all been, I think everybody I've mentioned with the exception of Pardee, Nobel and the Gates Foundation have been on this board. And, by the way, 100% of the trustees gave.
- James Griesemer: 48:51 And it always struck me that the campaign represented in a way a turning point, not just the funding which was very important and focused mostly on the academic side, but it was so much more successful than anything DU had done in the past in that regard. It was almost as if we had moved to a new plateau.
- Trygve Myhren: 49:16 Yes. And I think as we go into a new campaign, we would hope to move to another plateau. Because going on from that as we continue to refresh, I think we can do really, really well.
- James Griesemer 49:37 Well the Ascend Campaign was really a remarkable achievement. There were many things that happened during your term as chair. Is there anything that stands out as a particularly challenging and maybe a little unusual role? Among the many things you dealt with.
- Trygve Myhren 49:56 Well, there were a couple of those, but let me just take one. Metropolitan State College which was Metropolitan State College and they were trying to establish themselves as a university and creating some post-graduate courses and changing their name. And, we were very admiring of the university and supportive of what was both their public and legal mission of educating students in the seven county metropolitan area. They were providing a very valuable service, we thought to thousands of households, with a moderately priced education. However, their efforts took an ominous turn at one point, ominous in our view, of course. And that was they began offering items in their bookstore with basically the arch Denver logo and it was the arch form but with their new university name, a name that began with Denver. Alright, and this seemed to us an attempt to lift the logo and image that we'd spent 150 years building. And especially in the digital age where students are searching on the internet for schools, and out-of-state applications at our school were

growing dramatically and Metro didn't have a charter to really try to bring in out-of-state students. We viewed this as a threat, okay. We called a meeting with Metro leaders. They did not fully agree with our position but they had agreed to meet on it again and think it through and they would contact us as soon as they had.

Trygve Myhren

51:49

By then of course, by the time we had even met there was already public, we could tell there was public knowledge of the fact that we were having a little dispute. And, so a legislator became involved, because Metro of course, is public. And, we didn't particularly like that because, you know we are private and we didn't think that was necessarily going to go our way. But, it was what it was. But, because of all that, I asked them not to go to the editorial board of the Denver Post and I said we wouldn't either. We talked about that and I told them why, I thought that was inappropriate for either of us, while we hadn't reached an agreement yet. And, they agreed. We shook hands on it. We kept that agreement, it turns out Metro did not. And I discovered this on the Friday before a Sunday Christmas. Alright. And I was talking with Dean Singleton at the Denver Post about the DU basketball team which I think it won 21 games the year before and it was on a terror this year. Dean is the publisher of the Denver Post and of course, I'd been in the newspaper business at one time so we used to talk a lot. I was complaining about the fact that we weren't getting any coverage. And he said, Trygve you know you've got a bigger problem than that. I said well, what's that? He said, well Monday morning we are going to be running an editorial taking Metro's side on this little argument you are having. And, I said really, wow. I said how'd you get to that one? And he explained that the Metro people had come in and met with their editorial board. And, I said I'm surprised you didn't ask us in, do you want to hear our side? And he said I'd like to hear it but, it's really too late because our editorial page editor is on vacation with his family at a location that we don't even know. We promised him he could go away for this weekend.

Trygve Myhren

54:08

And I said I'd like to go away for this weekend with this thing! In any event, and so we were sort of at a standstill. So I quickly, and he said this thing is going to run on Monday. I quickly gave him our side of the story. I just boom, like that. And, he said wow to me and I said I recognize the Christmas hurdle but I thought they could find a way around that. And he said look, if you put this in an email to me I will at least have our editor in chief, Gregg Moore, who by the way, is now on the DU board, is a trustee, I'll have him read it. And he got that right away and read it and he was moved by it the same way Dean was. And I suggested they allow their, I said look, you've got to have an assistant editorial page editor, and he said, yes we do. Greg said, hey look I'll talk to him and I'll show it to him. He showed it to him and that fellow then called me, okay. And I went through it with him and he said oh boy. I'm going to get killed by my boss when he comes back. I said yeah but, your boss is going to see the same thing as you saw. So, we had that

discussion. Okay. That was Vincent Carrol, I think. So after that the paper ran on Monday and the editorial, instead of being very strongly in Metro's favor was stronger in our favor. Okay, which saved the day because we had some more wrestling with the legislature and we had a little bit of help out of that editorial. And through all of this frankly, because you know the people, I worked very closely with Paul Chan, our corporate counsel and now our chief legal counsel at the university. He was terrifically helpful and we just went back and forth, boom, boom, boom. And my long-time assistant Barb Dishmon.

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| Trygve Myhren | 56:30 | The only problem, when I look back on it, on this whole effort was that I blew up their Christmas weekend for they and their families, just blew them up, but we got the job done. My family wasn't really happy either, but in any event, that so that's that. |
| James Griesemer | 56:49 | That's an interesting story and it really highlights the complexity of the job of a board chair. That is that is beyond other duties as assigned. That's really, but that's what's required by anyone. |
| Trygve Myhren | 57:09 | I didn't expect that Bob Coombe as the chancellor, who really did not have any experience in the newspaper business, would be able to navigate that and I had found out about it through, in effect, through sort of a confidential conversation with Dean which I was arguing with him about one thing and he said well, you got a big problem, assuming that I'd just have to accept it. Well, it didn't work out that way. |
| James Griesemer | 57:35 | And I think it suggests another thing. One of the things that has struck me for many years, is the way in which the public and private higher education institutions in Colorado cooperate on many fronts and in many ways. But there are always moments of disagreement and seeing things differently. And, this is a good illustration of working through that and the university continues to work with all public universities, we have excellent relationships with CU and so on. But this gives some insight into the fact that there are problems to be solved. |
| Trygve Myhren | 58:14 | Oh absolutely. And, I think Rebecca has done just a terrific job of trying to reach out to the other universities and in large part it worked. You know. Back during my time, there was the idea that we might start a medical school. Remember that? |
| James Griesemer | 58:31 | I well do. |
| Trygve Myhren | 58:32 | And particularly to train doctors who were general practitioners and who could move out to rural areas and so on. And it was a very noble thing to think about and of course, the Denver Post ran a big banner headline saying DU to start medical school. And I immediately got a call at, I don't know, probably 7 o'clock in the morning the fellow who is chair at CU, |

Jim Griesemer	59:00	from Bruce Benson
Trygve Myhren	59:02	from Bruce Benson, yeah. I should remember his name because I see him a fair amount. But, Bruce called and said, Trygve I see you're starting a medical school. And I said, I think the paper jumped the gun because we haven't made that decision, and we may not, but we're looking at it. And he said, well if you're going to do that why don't you have a football team too! (Laughter). So pick two things that are just impossible.
James Griesemer	59:29	That's a great story. Let me switch to another dimension if I may Trygve, and that is, and these stories are a good illustration. During your time as chair, and certainly during the times in your private business background, but as chair of DU you and the administration, you had to deal with lots of complicated issues, some quite difficult. What were the, as chair and as an individual, what were the values that guided you and you know what was important to you from an ethical or a moral perspective as you dealt with this variety of tough issues.
Trygve Myhren	1:00:14	I think, you know, ethical values are very important. They've always been to me. But, I believe it was really important to the university because you can blow it as a university and tarnish your reputation terribly if you do the wrong thing. But, sometimes that's not easy to play out. I felt that you know, overall ethical, good conduct was important. Fairness, treating people with compassion, all of that, to me is part of that. OK.
James Griesemer	1:00:54	Right, very much so.
Trygve Myhren	1:00:56	In today's world, I'm not so sure it's accepted by all.
James Griesemer	1:00:01	But needed
Trygve Myhren	1:00:02	But really needed. And, I worried a lot about athletics because I know the athletic scene Okay. I know it at the college level, I know it at the professional level and the high school level, to a degree. And sort of what you might call the AAU level and I've always been concerned that it's very easy to do the wrong thing and it really tarnishes the reputation of the university. And particularly with digital communication these days. It's out there just like that. So, that's important to the university. And I felt other things that I felt strongly about were building quality, I really wanted to build quality. It's really part of the same package but it's a drive that has to do with hiring the best people you can get and afford at the same time because

you don't do well when you go broke. So, that was sort of where I come from and where I came from during that time.

James Griesemer 1:02:13

Well, that's really remarkable.

Trygve Myhren 1:02:16

You know, in talking about ethics, the complications that you have when you are trying to make ethical decisions, I think people, at least subconsciously understand how difficult these things can be. Let me give you something that happened that you're keenly aware of. I should tell this tale.

We had a long-term and very helpful trustee who was unjustly accused by the SEC of insider trading. When I was alerted by the trustee that he had been accused, it was on the web and, I was able to read it and I was troubled by it when I read it. I thought this just doesn't sound right. And I talked to the trustee's lawyer, he gave me permission to do that and I went over some of the relevant documents and I concluded that the charge was wrong. I talked to Bob Coombe, the trustee and Bob and I sat and talked and Bob agreed with me. I then talked to Doug Scrivner who was then the chair elect at that point, and he was the former general counsel of Accenture and after some pondering with it he agreed. However, all the press accounts were out and they were brutal they were basically parroting this SEC charge which was really pretty vehement and was misguided. We thought. Okay

And it was damaging. And our wealthy trustee envisioning five to six years which is the standard when you go against them, fight against the SEC and a big pocketbook. He paid a fine and pleaded nolo contendere, primarily to spare, he has a young family and he was trying to save them the grief and the pain over a protracted period of time. Awful situation for him. Once we understood that the event might tarnish DU's reputation, ethical reputation, we were faced with I would call a searing ethical dilemma. Was it our responsibility to the university, did that really dictate that we remove the trustee and publicly make sure that everybody knew that, okay, so that no mud on the university, or should we do what we deeply believed in which was that he was being unjustly accused. And there were some people really beating on us to do the former, just beating on us including some people in the financial industry, that later agreed with us, but at the time they were not agreeing.

And, we decided to do the latter. We said, you know, we recognize we got to go one way or the other here and we are going to choose what we think is right and just. And, we're not going to be as worried about the public relations side of this. And we recognized that there would be people who do not trust the university's ethical reputation the way they once did. We recognized that. And it kills us to do this, but we're going to do it. And people in the Daniels' school, incited by a professor there actually really got after us. Because Daniels has a much deserved

reputation for ethical conduct. And I went to two assemblies to answer them, okay. One was the faculty and one was the students and we had an interesting discussion. I explained that this is an extraordinarily tough ethical decision and we had decided to do what we thought was right.

- Trygve Myhren 1:06:28 And you know, I think there are a lot of people out there who believe that if a government entity decides something, they must be right. And that's a very dangerous thing to believe frankly. You got to make your own decision you've got to think it through. But in any event, these were not easy assemblies. I had Bob Coombe sat with me at these, I did the talking, okay. Fortunately for all of us, they reached a court decision in which the CEO of the company at issue was declared not guilty of anything. Declared as a sidebar, even though was not part of the trial, but there was information in there about the charges against, they had gone through it, the jury had gone through it and they decided that, unanimously, that was clearly not guilty. So that is public information. That was helpful. The SEC lost decisively in this case. But it just shows how heart wrenching, stomach churning, I would say, some of these things can be.
- James Griesemer 1:07:40 And, how difficult it is to take a path that is not the easy path on such a matter.
- Trygve Myhren 1:07:49 Yeah, yeah.
- James Griesemer 1:07:50 Well Trygve Myhren,
- thank you so much for contributing to our DU Oral History and sharing the insights drawn from the role you played in helping to transform the University of Denver. I hope you'll join us in the future as we continue the story of the University of Denver's remarkable renaissance. I'm Jim Griesemer, thank you for watching.