For 34 years Dr. John F. Kucia served Xavier University, first as the Director of Alumni Relations from 1984 to 1986, then as Assistant to the President from 1986 to 1990, and finally as Administrative Vice President from 1990 to 2018. During these years, he worked closely with five different Xavier presidents and played a key role in transforming Xavier’s campus. In addition, Kucia oversaw Xavier’s intercollegiate athletic program through a period of growth. In this interview, he discusses the five Xavier presidents with whom he worked, identifying the challenges and achievements of each. He talks about the land acquisitions, building projects, and facilities development that occurred during his tenure, including the Cintas Center, the University Station and the Health United Building. He also discusses the success of Xavier’s athletic programs and the vital role that sports play in university life. Kucia earned a doctorate in higher education management from the University of Pennsylvania and is co-author of the book Leadership in Balance: New Habits of the Mind, which he talks about in the interview. He currently serves as Xavier’s Vice President Emeritus.
First of all, John, welcome and thank you for your willingness to share your memories of Xavier with us today. We might as well begin at the beginning. Why don’t you tell us something about where you were born and raised and your early education.

JFK: Thank you, Fr. Kennealy. I do want to say - even before I get that part in - I really appreciate this opportunity. When you asked me to participate in this conversation, I thought, ‘sure,’ and then the more we got into it and the more opportunity I took to reflect on my 34 years here at Xavier, it gave me an opportunity to appreciate and to feel even more deeply the gratitude that I have. Xavier is a very resilient organization—resilient like a family. I would say as an over-arching statement about my years here. I know we’re going to key on the presidents and some critical events but I think, by and large, we had the right president at the right time—you know, at each stage, at each juncture. As I say, Xavier has been a very resilient organization, I think these past 25 to 30 years—call it 1990ish on ‘til today, are the ‘golden years’ of Xavier University. Now, you and your associate here need to prove or disprove that sometime as you hold that up against other periods of time. But that’s my take.

TK: Well, we’ll do our best.

JFK: Yeah. So as far as where did I come from—

TK: Yeah. Where did you get started?

JFK: I came from here. Where so many people ask the question, ‘where did you come from?’ I was born here and I lived there and I moved there and my dad had a business and they transferred us here and there—wherever. I was born in Cincinnati—Hyde Park, St. Mary’s grade school, Purcell High School, Xavier University; lived on a street named St. Charles, which is right across from St. Mary’s, so that they could always count on me to serve the early 6:00 o’clock Mass; moved from one street to the next in Hyde Park. Now we live—my wife, Mary, and I live on a street named Kendall, which we call “Kendallbunkport”—the Kucia compound—because it just is the family home. We’ve raised our five children and we now have 12 grandchildren, and they all come back and this is the homestead. It is a Kucia compound—“Kendallbunkport.”

TK: And if I’m not mistaken, you and Mary celebrated your 50th wedding anniversary just a few months ago.

JFK: We did.
TK: Congratulations!

JFK: Yes, thank you. It lined right up with the retirement, and all of this—the retirement, the 50th anniversary, and then this opportunity has just caused me to give a lot of thought –

TK: To do some reminiscing.

JFK: Yeah.

TK: Good. Prior to your employment at Xavier, you worked in the healthcare profession for a number of years. What positions did you hold?

JFK: I was completing my master’s degree at Xavier in guidance and counseling. This was in 1971. That was back when the first drug epidemic occurred, and so there were programs that were being funded and operated funded by federal and state drug-abuse dollars—drug-prevention dollars—and then being operated by programs intown like Talbert House, which is a really well-known organization now. The Health Department was another one. While I was working on my master’s degree, I taught for two years at St. John’s in Deer Park. As I was completing that program, I became involved with Talbert House. I began working with them in the first place. They hired me since I had an education/teaching background to set up an adult basic-education program in a therapeutic community on Vine Street. I was the only square in the operation. Either they were ex-addicts who were the counselors, or they were the current patients or clients who were seeking treatment. I got quite an education there. From that, I moved on to directing a program. I had enough experience in the counseling background and the like to direct a program that was called “Treatment Alternatives to Street Crime.” We did diagnostic work for local courts. It was really at a point along that time—and I had been working—I say I was working for 11 years in total in mental health, substance abuse, and criminal justice, which I kiddingly like to say prepared me well for my first job at Xavier as alumni director. Now, some people don’t get it, then I have to say, “That’s a joke!”

TK: I did laugh.

JFK: You did. You were on board.

TK: Since you returned to Xavier in ’84, you worked very closely with a number of the presidents as you mentioned. Beginning with Fr. Charles Curry, tell us about Fr. Curry and what was your work with him?
JFK: Yeah. I was hired by Xavier to be the alumni director. I think Fr. Curry—he interviewed me and so, in a way, I believe between Curry and Jim Sasson, they are the ones who hired me.

TK: Jim Sasson being the –

JFK: He was the vice president for university relations back then. I think I caught Curry’s attention because I started as alumni director, which usually is—the role of that back then was to throw parties with open bars and just keep people happy. I came in and, just based on my background with programs and program development and strategic planning, I told the alumni board and Fr. Curry that the first thing we’re going to do is a strategic plan for the alumni association. Well, that raised a lot of eyes and tension, and there were people who were scheduled to revolve off the board who asked if they could stay on the board. They wanted to see what in the hell this was gonna –

TK: Ah! How this would work out.

JFK: What this was going to look like. So, I, and my wife, Mary, had an opportunity to travel with Fr. Curry to alumni events, but he also was interested in sort of how I was going about this. Curry, for me, was a very good man, a smart and talented man, but very strong-willed. I think he had ideas that he wanted to bring to Xavier. I think things like continuous improvement back then was a popular sort of bong phrase of management gurus, and Curry brought one—that I recall—one of the Jesuit values out, and it was “Magis” to be heard from him.

TK: He really used the word often.

JFK: He did. But he didn’t bring the rest of it—cura personalis or discernment or any of the other six or so that there are. So people were hearing continuous improvement and Magis as ‘we can’t please that guy.’ He just keeps wanting something else; he keeps wanting something more. I think he had a vision of making Xavier better, but he said, “People at Xavier think of Xavier as a candle under a basket and we need to change that.” He was right. He wanted to do strategic planning, but Xavier as an organization was not mature enough—

TK: Was not ready.

JFK: They had never done it; they weren’t ready. I think that was really part of his difficulty. He, as president, wanted to make things better. He would create events that were really very high-end but didn’t have a great eye on the budget. Not saying that that was the one thing but,
ultimately, we, at Xavier, got into budget problems. Richard Hirte, who was our chief financial officer, was doing his best to kind of keep things afloat, but there was a year that there were no raises, and that really was just kind of the final straw. I think he lost faith with the faculty; I think he didn’t—I mean personally—didn’t have exactly the people he needed in his vice president areas, except for Hirte, to help him be successful; I think he lost faith with the board and with the Jesuit community is the way I understand it. But I think he gave us a good foundation and just got our ears perked and maybe a vision to being something better.

TK: For moving on.

JFK: Yeah.

TK: From 1986 to 1990, Fr. Albert J. DiUlio, was our president, and I know you worked very closely with him. Tell us about those four years or so.

JFK: Yeah. Fr. DiUlio was really a neat guy. He was a lot of fun; he was both a priest and a bon vivant.

TK: A French expression.

JFK: Yeah, that’s right. He loved investments, and so in addition to—he loved finances and he loved investments; he loved investments so much that I think just about every day he was into the Wall Street Journal and was calling his agent and making buys and sells and that was an important part of his life. Because he was into finances and worked really closely with Hirte, he gave the perception, for sure, of stability. We had come from a Curry time where we didn’t make our budget and we couldn’t pay a raise and now there was just a feeling that we were going to be in good hands because he was a financially-minded person and so was Hirte. I say the ‘perception of stability’ because he made it clear to those of us who were working directly with him. He hired me.

TK: Oh, okay.

JFK: Yeah, so he is the one who hired me, I should say.

TK: As executive vice president?

JFK: Yeah. Well, no, as his assistant.

TK: Assistant? Okay.
JFK: Yeah, right. So there was question of ‘well, Kucia, why do you want to move from being director of alumni to assistant to the president?’ I mean this is that sort of entry-level position. I thought, ‘no. I thought in terms of proximity I’d rather be in the president’s office than over in alumni which is all externally oriented.’ So I went and—Nick Vehr was Curry’s assistant. Nick, with Curry leaving, decided to run for City Council, and so Nick is the one who invited me over to meet Fr. DiUlio. DiUlio was looking for someone who knew Xavier a bit and I had grown up at Xavier. My dad played football and basketball here, so we were a Xavier family on and on, and then my couple of years in alumni, so DiUlio said, “Yeah, I’ll hire you; come on to work.” I started on a Monday; it was just that quick. But I say ‘stability’ because DiUlio made it clear to those of us who were working closely with him—and I don’t think that others—that the apple of his eye was Marquette University.

TK: Okay, yes. I don’t think that was commonly known.

JFK: No. I think right off the bat it was ‘I am here; I am going to do a good job, but where I want to be is at Marquette.’ It did happen pretty—that was were his heart was. It happened, in terms of longevity, about four years in--

TK: That’s right.

JFK: That that position became available; he was a candidate; he had loads of people in Milwaukee and at Marquette who were pitching for him. He got the job and really didn’t wait ‘til June to go and fill the position. Probably it might have been March or April, he was off and running to Marquette.

TK: Yes. And then in August of 1990 as a result, Mr. Michael Conaton became interim president and served in that capacity for a number of months. Tell us about Mike Conaton and his tenure as interim president. You worked with him also very closely.

JFK: Right, yeah. We had vice presidents and, in some circumstance, one of the sitting vice presidents might have been selected to be the interim president. It could have been Jim Connell, who was the academic vice president; it could have been Richard Hirte; both of them had been there for enough time. Joan candidly—I didn’t mention this to you—Joan candidly said, “If my name was John Connell, I would be the interim president,” so she had a bit of an issue, which would be a continuing issue today. But I think based upon who all was there. Albert really thought long and hard, and as he and I talked it over, and he talked it over with
others, approaching Mike Conaton to be the interim was really the best and most, again, stabilizing.

TK: Uh-huh. And Mike was, of course, chairman of the board at the time.

JFK: He was chair of our board.

TK: Had been for a number of years, I believe.

JFK: Yeah. I mean Mike has been a member of the board for—chair of the board, as of today’s date, for 19 or 20 years, but he’s been on the board since the early ‘80s.

TK: I think so, yes.

JFK: Yeah—some of the first lay members.

TK: That’s right—maybe even back into the ‘70s for a while under Fr. Mulligan.

JFK: Mulligan, yes. Mike was a very good and stabilizing factor; just exactly what we needed. He didn’t spend a lot of time at Xavier, but he would be there at strategic—

TK: He really couldn’t because he had another job.

JFK: He had another job. He was really relying on all of us—the vice presidents—to do their job. I listened to his interview, and the story he likes to tell about me is that through that 9-month period or so—10-month period when he was president—there was only one presidential executive decision that he had to make. It was when the BASF building exploded.

TK: Ohhh, summer of ’90.

JFK: Yes, summer of 1990. The building exploded and it sent burning pieces and embers on the Cohen, it blew out windows at the back of the library, there was smoke all over the place, and I called Mike and I told him about it. He said, “E-va-cu-ate the campus!” That was the way it said it, if you can hear Mike. I said, “Mike, I already have.” He rubs my nose in that as often as possible.

TK: Reminds you of it.

JFK: Yeah.
Then, of course, Fr. Jim Hoff came. I think that probably would have been in 1991, and he remained president until 2000, certainly memorable years for Xavier. What are your fondest memories of Fr. Jim Hoff, and what do you think he achieved as president?

Yeah.

It’s a big question.

Sure. I have plenty of things. I think perhaps he and Mike Graham are two people who really began and then continued those golden years. From what I’ve learned from my research and studies about leadership, leaders setting the tone for what’s valued and what it is done in building trust really began with Jim Hoff. His way of thinking really was to focus on students. He said, “I gave the same speech for 10 years.” The ‘same speech’ was really all about his vision for graduates of Xavier. He wanted them to say, “I had a great experience because I know I’m intellectually, morally and spiritually prepared to take my place in an ever-changing global society.”

And everyone on campus had memorized that formula.

Yes. Everybody knew it. Follow the words; follow the bouncing ball.

That’s right—we knew what was coming next?

Right. He concentrated on all things inside of Xavier because I think he knew that we needed to start, and he needed to start, creating a firm foundation at Xavier. To the question of how does Xavier serve society, he would say it’s through our graduates, meaning it’s not through something we the institution does or I, the president, but it’s through the students who graduate. Our academic vice president back then essentially said that reaching out to the community is really social work and we don’t do social work. Hoff, as a person, I would say, was a simply complex individual.

Simply complex?

That’s right.

Uh-huh.

He was pastoral and charming with his students, and he was all command and control with the people who worked directly for him. One of his favorite references that he learned from a
fundraiser at Notre Dame was the ‘whip on the back.’ It’s how he felt people got motivated; it was either it or the threat of it. But I do remember that the first time that I met him, being the assistant to the president, I was picking him up at the airport. The very first time I picked him up—I’m known for not being great on directions in the first place. I made sure I got there, parked the car quickly, headed in to make certain that when he got off the plane I was right there. We were walking and talking and we got outside the airport terminal, and the first thing that came to my mind was ‘where in the hell did I park the car?!’

TK: That wasn’t propitious.

JFK: No. I didn’t feel I was getting off—it was a bit of a risky start. But I always drove him each time that he came to visit campus. I always drove him to—we would get off and go through town, come through Columbia Parkway and up through Eden Park, and then Victory Parkway, and so Jim Hoff always thought that Xavier was located in the middle of a park. It was only after he took the job and needed to go and buy some toothpaste and aftershave, that he got up on Montgomery Rd.—Dana and Montgomery Rd. and realized we weren’t exactly in the middle of a park.

TK: Yes, there’s a little bit more to the city than that, yes.

JFK: Right. It took us some to recruit him to Xavier and we were so proud to have him as our president. The first opportunity as timing presented—it was right around Christmas—so there was this annual Christmas Commonwealth Club dinner, and Mike Conaton, who was an important figure in that group, said, “I’d really like to have Fr. Jim Hoff take that opportunity to be introduced and to make a first impression of him and all about Xavier.” So they set that up. This was during that time that Mike was our president still or, actually I guess, it was still kind of in a transition period, so Mike was still kind of staying in touch with me. They had that dinner and about 10:00 o’clock that night, my phone rang and I answered it, and it’s Mike Conaton. He says, “John, the wheels are off the wagon!” I said, “Mike, what are you talking about?” He said, “Jim Hoff—he gave the Christmas Commonwealth dinner speech and he chose the topic; he chose the topic on death and dying!” I said, “Mike, I don’t know what to say. I just don’t know what to say.” He said, “I don’t either. I’m going to have to clean this up!” Kind of thinking about it, I mean that was a topic that was dear to Jim Hoff, and it’s how he spent a lot of his time really in his pastoral time.
TK: And toward the end of his career before his own death.

JFK: Yeah, right.

TK: He had quite a bit of work in death and dying. He was very interested in that subject.

JFK: Maybe he thought that taking people’s minds off Christmas gifts and all of the material things. I know his story was, or his point was that, at that point in your life, you’re not thinking about all of the material things—your job and all of that—you’re thinking about your body, you’re thinking about yourself, you’re thinking about your family and where you spent your time, but it sure didn’t come off that way.

TK: It certainly didn’t impress Mike Conaton.

JFK: Yeah.

TK: As Jim Hoff came toward the end of his presidency, we were all very impressed by the fact that he very clearly prepared his successor very carefully. How did that come about? Whose idea was that?

JFK: Yeah. You know, when you and I talked even you said, “Gee, I didn’t know that.” And it was that Mike Conaton really took some opportunity—I don’t know exactly when it was—and just told Jim, “It’s time to prepare for a successor.” He had been president, really, for only—at that time it might have been maybe—in the full, say nine plus years, so it might have been in maybe year seven or something—just thinking ahead. There wasn’t a big announcement at all, but there was just then a move to begin to pick someone and very quickly. There still needed to be this election process, but Mike Graham was just a person that was an obvious, so that’s how it all began.

TK: I think he was also vice president for university relations at the time, wasn’t he? Fr. Graham?

JFK: Well, my thought is that that’s when they started moving him—

TK: Grooming him.

JFK: Yeah, so he would begin to be vice president just for development, then he took on the rest of university relations, then really moved over as assistant to the president, and went on from there.
TK: Well, then, in 1996, during Hoff’s presidency, the then-President of the United States, Bill Clinton, paid us a visit. I remember that well. His visit turned out to be both eventful, but also very controversial. What are your recollections of that visit from Bill Clinton in March, 1996?

JFK: Yeah. You know, I think about it in a couple of ways. I first think about it in terms of Jim Hoff and Mike Conaton and their relationship because I would say it may have been one of the first times that it was tested and could have been strained. Mike and Jim—Mike was a key relationship right from the beginning; Mike recruited Jim to Xavier, and they became brothers. They spoke of each other as brothers.

TK: Yeah, that’s right, they did, always.

JFK: And Hoff always consulted Mike on big decisions. When this topic of the president would like to come and speak at Xavier, this was a case where Jim knew where Mike stood, and he consulted around other trustees as well. I would say that the majority were ‘why would we want to do that and give him a forum to say things that we have no interest in?’ It was even pre-Lewinsky, so it wasn’t even muddied by that topic. Jim made the decision and we put Xavier out in its finest and turned what’s today the Conation Board Room into a small conference session with the president.

TK: The president of the United States.

JFK: And John Pepper.

TK: Who was CEO of Procter & Gamble at the time.

JFK: Procter & Gamble, right. And then turned Schmidt Fieldhouse into a beautiful arena and forum for the president, so it was a big deal, and Mike honored and supported Jim’s decision.

TK: But there were pickets right across the street as well—just opposite—

JFK: There were pickets across the street.

TK: And why was that?

JFK: There were long gunmen on rooftops across campus. There were pickets across the street because they didn’t think that we should have the president of the United States speaking. If you can imagine we are an academic institution, and so to not allow the president of the United States to speak at your university—the faculty—Jim totally leaned in the direction of the faculty.
TK: Uh-huh. I think another issue was the right to life and that whole issue, too.

JFK: Right.

TK: Abortion probably played a part, too.

JFK: Yes, yes, you’re right.

TK: But it was an event we’ll all remember.

JFK: Right.

TK: The Cintas Center—I’d like to talk about that for awhile. It has been called by some people ‘the house that Hoff built.’ Is that a fair statement in your opinion? Certainly, there are other people involved in that massive undertaking. Who were they and what was their influence?

JFK: Yeah. You can see me shuffling around here.

TK: I see you shuffling your papers there.

JFK: Yeah, because I really feel a responsibility to try to do this right.

TK: Sure, sure.

JFK: There are those people like Jim Hoff and like Bob Kohlhepp and Bob Castellini who were really critical, and Mike Conaton, who were very critical in that decision process.

TK: To create, to build it.

JFK: To build it, yeah, but then I’m going to mention people like Bob Sheeran, who really built it.

TK: In what way? Explain who he is.

JFK: Yeah, so Bob Sheeran, today, is our vice president for all of our physical plant but, back then, Bob was really just hired on to be a construction manager—

TK: I see.

JFK: To help guide us through the design and construction because we needed that help.

TK: Sure.

JFK: People like Joe Feldhaus and Richard Hirte—
TK: What is Joe Feldhaus’—

JFK: Joe was private counsel for many years, but essentially was right there with us, and today is our general counsel, but was right there with us as we were preparing to build Cintas. We’ll get to this, but closing Ledgewood—vacating Ledgewood. Liz Blume was someone who really helped us as we had to engage with the community to be able to do all of this. Those are some people whose names will never see the light of day, but they are people who were very critical.

TK: Played key roles.

JFK: Yeah, very critical.

TK: Yes, yes, but it was a massive undertaking; there’s no doubt about that and a very successful one. John, I’d like to add a P.S. to our discussion if I may, and I’d like to go back to the building of the Cintas Center because I think that was a crucial event in Xavier’s history. I’d like you to talk about how it came about and its significance.

JFK: Yeah. I’m glad we’re circling back on it because it was a big deal and a critical event. It was our first strategic planning process; it was during that time, so XU 2000. This was an initiative of Jim Hoff. We were following the IBM model of strategic planning where we identified the critical success factors for Xavier. In accomplishing those success factors, you would accomplish the mission of Xavier University. We went to IBM for a week to learn how to do this and then came back. At that time, the athletic department had been moved from student development to report in to the president’s office to me because the Knight Commission back in 1990 essentially said they wanted presidents to pay more attention and take more control of their athletic programs. That was kind of the backdrop for that. As we got into the process and now athletics was reporting to me, I said to Jim Hoff that as we’re trying to create critical success factors, they were lining up like academic excellence and Jesuit identity and student development. Athletics kept falling into that student development.

TK: The strategic plan you’re describing?

JFK: Yeah. Into this category or this critical success factor. I just said, “What would you think of calling it ‘mission-driven intercollegiate athletics’ and making it its own critical success factor? He said, “Yeah, let’s do that.” It was a bodacious—I call it a bodacious move to call it a critical success factor, especially lining it with up things like academic excellence and Jesuit identity.
But it was really that decision. Then, the next decision was if we are going to do that, if we’re really going to grow that and make that an important factor for Xavier, we need to do something about facilities; we need to do something about the conference that we play in. Putting all of those together in the decision—this was all a part of that planning process that Bob Kohlhepp and Joe Rippe—young Joe Rippe—were the two trustees who were part of the process. Bob Kohlhepp laughs and tells that he told Jim Hoff, “I’ll give the first million dollars.” Then, he gave the first, the second, the middle part and the last part, so he ended up being a big-time investor, along with others. One that I should mention as well is Jack Schiff and the Schiff family.

TK: That’s right.

JFK: Because those gifts-

TK: The conference center is named after him I believe. The Schiff Family Conference Center

JFK: Bob Kohlhepp and the Schiff family were the two big, big donors. There were other million-dollar donors, but any more a million wasn’t big enough, and so we really needed more of that, but that decision was such a critical decision, and the building of Cintas engendered this new, collective, enhanced corporate ego and can-do attitude at Xavier that they never had before and it really just launched us from there. It was no more ‘little Xavier.’ We used to be “Xavier, Ohio,” and as we moved from the MCC finally to the Big East, they don’t need the Ohio anymore; it’s just one “X”; we own the X. Then, all of the things we have done since then, people who now come on campus, even if they haven’t been here in five years, they’re amazed. But the ones who haven’t been here in 25 years, need a map. They can’t even recognize the place, and they can’t recognize it with great pride. They just feel so good about they graduated from Xavier and now they feel really good.

TK: But the building wasn’t without controversy at the time, isn’t that correct?

JFK: Well, in order to build it right, yeah. We looked at a variety of locations for it on campus, and they were all over campus. Where we finally decided to build it was down in the pit. Where the basketball floor is today was where the varsity tennis courts were; that really was the best place. We didn’t want a building as big as it was going to be—300,000 sq. ft. and many stories high—we didn’t want it to be towering over the whole university, and so building it into the side of the hill was really the wise thing to do; it was wise for us, but it irritated the mayor of Norwood.
When I went to meet with him to talk about Cintas Center and what we were going to do, he said, “Well, yeah, I think this is good. I know where I would like it to be built.” It’s on the parking lot that’s in Norwood. He wanted it to be built in Norwood. I said, “Well, Mayor Hochbein, that really isn’t going to be possible because it’s been identified.” He said, “Well, what Xavier’s going to build is going to benefit the City of Cincinnati, but it’s going to hurt the City of Norwood because you get the buildings—Cincinnati gets the buildings; we get the parking, the traffic, all the noise to our neighborhood.” We had probably a couple of years struggle to get things moving along and just lots of conversations. Jim got into some of those but his temper didn’t really work too well in an across-the-table negotiation with anybody; we had to handle that in other manners, but we prevailed.

TK: But eventually worked out a solution that seems to have satisfied everybody.

JFK: It did, and it brought us closer, again, to an understanding of the impact. Even if we built something on the campus that has an impact off the campus, we need to know that; we need to be aware of that, so I think it really helped us in the long run.

TK: Well, sensitivity is involved.

JFK: I mentioned plenty of other people, but as I—I even have some notes here—about the Cintas building. The first design of it had a budget and a look, and I would say that it was somewhat like a cabin in the woods; it was very stark. ‘Would you like windows in this building?’ It was Phil Jones who said, “You know, the banquet room—what we’re calling the banquet room looks like a big Kmart to me.” He said, “We need to make this appealing and it needs to be able to compete with facilities out in the community.” It was really Phil who put a lot of the touches, the energy, the look of the Duff Banquet Room, to the Schiff Family Conference Center, and to the technology that’s in the building, and that’s really what has made that part of the building successful.

TK: And very attractive.

JFK: Yeah, and very attractive. Mike Bobinski, on the other hand, really owned everything else—what does the arena look like; what are the colors; what did the floor look like; the locker rooms; all of the facilities for the athletes. At that time, we needed to make certain because of Title IX that we were equal men and women, the size of the rooms, what we spent on their locker rooms, what we spent on them, and all of that. Those are two people who won’t get a shout-out
anywhere but here. If nobody hears—if this is a recording that is a tree falling in the forest, I hope not, because the people that I’m mentioning really are the way and the reason that we have been able to get so many things done.

TK: But it was a massive undertaking; there’s no doubt about that, but I think a very successful one. Then, of course, in 2001, Fr. Michael Graham became our president. How would you characterize Fr. Graham’s years and what stands out to you over those years?

JFK: As really kind of finishing out Jim’s time—

TK: Sure.

JFK: Just kind of finishing that out—because what I know is that as we were trying to do things like close Ledgewood so that we could build Cintas and create a campus and really prepare a building like Cintas Center for the future students that we anticipated, both what they wanted, which was to live on campus, and how many there were, and to have a full university campus life, but we really bumped into the community and had to appeal to City Council just to be able to close that street. For us, that was the first step.

TK: Oh, okay.

JFK: We had to do that if we were going to build Cintas. If we can’t close Ledgewood and create a campus, we can’t get onto the next real thing.

TK: I see, I see. Now, explain where exactly Ledgewood Ave. was. What section are you talking about?

JFK: Yeah. It was a street bordered by Dana Ave. and Victory Parkway, and so it basically really cut our campus, or our property, right in half. Cars would zip back and forth every day and use that as a cut-through either to get to Victory, or to get up to Dana, and so we needed to do that.

TK: Which is where the residence mall at the moment at least one section of it.

JFK: Right, correct.

TK: So closing that was crucial?

JFK: A crucial step. If we couldn’t do that, we couldn’t do the next thing that we wanted to do.
TK: And that was controversial, too, wasn’t it—closing Ledgewood Ave., especially the lower section from the Bellarmine Chapel down to Victory Parkway?

JFK: Right. Making any kind of change would be controversial, but doing that without engaging with the community made it even worse; it made it even more difficult. That really caused us to be in some very difficult conversations with the community, with Evanston, North Avondale and Norwood, so all three of our contiguous [communities]—and had us needing to appeal to the City of Cincinnati City Council for approval to vacate that. It also required us to get Judge Wayne Wilke and Professor John Hart—

TK: Their homes were right on there, yeah.

JFK: There were a lot of moving parts that Joe Feldhaus and I worked on to do that. But it was Roxanne Qualls who delivered a really important message.

TK: Now, who was she?

JFK: Roxanne was the mayor at the time.

TK: Okay.

JFK: And there were nine council members and we needed at least five people to approve and Roxanne voted no against us. When I went and was talking with her, she said, “You know, John, I have never seen a university with so much to offer that does so little for the community.” I brought that message back. I brought it back to Jim Hoff; I brought it back to all our people. I think that caught our attention, and I think that caught Mike Graham’s attention.

TK: In other words, we had to be ‘good neighbors.’

JFK: And good neighbors all the time, not just when we needed something.

TK: An important lesson to learn.

JFK: Yeah. As I say about the leaders setting the tone, there was really a major shift from Jim Hoff to Mike Graham from a command and control kind of approach to Graham, who is really all about collaboration and engaging with folks. Honestly, I think it was welcomed by the faculty because I think there were sufficient tensions about faculty governance and faculty involvement in what we’re doing and where we’re headed, and Jim was not of that nature—that Mike Graham being one of them.
TK: That’s right. He kind of came up through the ranks. He was tenured here at Xavier in the history department. That’s correct.

JFK: Right. I think that was the major shift that just has launched us. When I say ‘launch,’ I know that Mike really thought of Jim Hoff’s era as creating a very firm foundation and what Mike Graham called a ‘launch pad’ for his tenure as president.

TK: And Fr. Hoff was certainly immensely successful in raising money.

JFK: Right.

TK: And that’s crucial, too. You’re not going to build a good university unless you have the funds with which to do it.

JFK: Right. As I was kind of thinking about all of this, and recently I read the book *The Devil and the White City*, which is about the 1892 or ’93 or ’94 [it was 1893] World Fair in Chicago, and Daniel Burnham was the person who was key to that. He was the one leading that process, and so it reminded me of his mantra of ‘make no little plans; they have no magic to stir men’s blood and probably themselves will not be realized. Instead make big plans, aim high, and hope and work.’ I think that was probably Jim Hoff’s thought because he became president, and at his inaugural speech, the first thing that caused people to lose their breath was that he wanted to build a $100 million endowment.

TK: I remember it well.

JFK: At the time, we were probably at $30 million because we had done one or so small campaigns. I think that has carried on with Mike Graham in a very, very big and tangible way.

TK: Early years of his presidency, Fr. Mike Graham took all of you folks—the key leaders of the university—to the University of Pennsylvania for a Wharton strategic planning week. What happened then? What was the purpose of that?

JFK: Yeah. Mike had his beginning leadership staff, his beginning vice presidents and, at least from his standpoint, he thought getting us all together and doing something that would both create some common bond but also some strategic planning in the process. Somehow—I don’t know exactly where he found this University of Pennsylvania Wharton program, but it was a week-long, very intensive, very high-quality. Right at the end of that, we were all in a big room. There
were ten universities that were all doing the same thing by themselves, and so they announced that we have this program that’s a doctorate in higher education management and the first year is happening right now, and we’ll essentially be taking applicants for the second cohort. Mike looked across this big round table to me and he said, “Why don’t you do that, John?” I gave it about 30 seconds of thought, left the room because the person, a fellow by the name of Doug Toma, was the head of that program and he was also the person who was working with our Xavier group. I went to find him immediately and say, “I am in!” Then I went home and asked Mary Kucia, “What do you think?”

TK: You needed permission.

JFK: I did. I had, for years and years, been looking for the doctoral program that I could do without leaving work, without losing my job, and this program just lined right up; it was just the most exciting intellectual and professional opportunity and challenge of my life. Mike Graham is the only person in the world who would have thought about that and would have offered that to me. It turned out to be almost kind of a, if I said a ‘sabbatical of sorts’ after working for 10 years with Jim Hoff, a shift of gears, and just an opportunity to really give some deep thought, which lead to a dissertation that was Leadership in Balance: the Role of Collaboration for Leading Change in a Living Organization. He and A.G. Lafley opened the doors for me to have access to everybody at Xavier and a whole host of people at Procter & Gamble.

TK: Who was Lafley at the time?

JFK: Lafley was the chairman and CEO of Procter & Gamble.

TK: Okay.

JFK: And then it came back around, and this was really the kind of thing that Mike Graham—not only for me, but the way he interacted and supported the growth and development of many people and programs at Xavier during his time, releasing creativity and energy throughout Xavier. I’ll give you just one other key example. It’s really the robust development of mission and identity at Xavier. From my take, Leo Klein was really the first person to get things rolling; George Traub was the other Jesuit who supported right along, but it’s Debra Mooney—Dr. Debra Mooney, who has really taken it to a level of being a model among the Jesuit schools, and it’s a hub and a center for materials and how to do mission and identity in the Ignatian way, and that’s a big deal.
TK: Fr. Leo Klein was really the founder of the Mission and Identity program at Xavier.

JFK: Right.

TK: I think he was a vice president at the time.

JFK: That’s right.

TK: And George Traub was really his right-hand man, and Debra really took over.

JFK: Yeah, yeah.

TK: Okay.

JFK: All three of them in that sequence. Jim Hoff put Leo in that first role, and then needed the time and needed Deb Mooney to really let this thing blossom, and it’s a big, big deal.

TK: A ‘model,’ as they say.

JFK: Yeah. All of the Jesuit universities do Ignatian; Xavier does it best.

TK: That’s high praise.

JFK: It is, yeah.

TK: Moving on, and I know that you remember as well as I do, Fr. Graham’s inaugural address entitled *Scholars, Saints and Citizen Servants*. Tell us about that. What was it like and how do you think it set the tone of his presidency?

JFK: Yeah. So back sort of at that time, and it’s where we were kind of leaning in the direction of needing to be more involved with our community, there was a book and a concept that came out called *University as Citizen*. On campus, there was some reading of that, and there was a lot of controversy. I could name people who thought ‘what is this all about!’ But I think when Mike came out with his inaugural speech, and Mike being the orator that he is, and he doesn’t do things quickly--if you’re looking for a short sermon, go somewhere else, right?

TK: Yep.

JFK: But *Scholars, Saints and Citizen Servants* really became that launch pad. What Jim Hoff did was give a foundation and Mike followed that. As a launch pad, it just began to offer some new thinking, and that’s where the health and vitality of the university and the surrounding
community are interdependent really gave us license to begin to reach out and to spread. Really, as we've said a little bit earlier, the engagement was authentic; it was real and it wasn't just when we needed something. A couple of examples just right on the heels of Mike starting his presidency, shortly after - It was 9/11; it was on the morning, so we were prepared for University Convocation. Had people in Cintas and the Duff Banquet Room all really just getting ready. Mike Graham was there; I was still back in our office—in the president’s office—and I got a call and I have to even think where it came from--it came from security—to say that a plane has just run into one of the Twin Towers in New York. Kelly Leon was with Mike, so I sent a first message to her and to him and, from that point on, whatever was planned for that day we spun—what do they call it?

TK: A U-turn.

JFK: Did a U-turn or turned on a dime. Mike took the lead and first gathered some of us around—some of his key folks around and said, “How do you want to do this? What do you want to do and how should we do it?” Within just a short period of time, nobody left; everybody who was there was there, and we just began—he began—a whole change in what we’re doing today. Then the next plane hit, so there was just all of this but the body of Xavier was in that room and they were in Mike Graham’s hands and everybody was fine.

TK: It was an academic convocation to which all the faculty, all the administrators and students were invited; I remember being there.

JFK: Yeah.

TK: I think he even called off class, which was strange.

JFK: Right, right.

TK: That was the day of 9/11.

JFK: Yeah, so welcome Mr. President.

TK: That’s right. I think it concluded in the afternoon with a prayer service in Bellarmine Chapel at which Fr. Graham presided.

JFK: Yeah, and so whatever happened, it shifted; there was an adaptability and a way of leading that brought people together to say ‘what are we going to do and how are do you want to do it,’ and
then to execute it. That was just a tone setter of a new presidency; it was so well done. The other example, and then I’ll end—I promise—was shortly thereafter were the riots in Cincinnati in 2001—both in that same year.

TK: In Fr. Graham’s first year.

JFK: In that same year. When you think again where Mike was saying that engagement with the community is not just through our graduates; we don’t just serve our society through graduates, but it’s through the university and through the university people and our personal engagement and investment. When the Cincinnati riots occurred, actually Mary and I were in Rome; we were there visiting our daughter, Ellen, who was doing a semester in Rome - with her twin sister, Emily, and we go to a hotel and we turn on the TV, and you can’t find too many things on the news and, all of a sudden, there is a news story that there are riots in a city in the United States. Then they showed Fountain Square, and it’s like ‘what in the hell is going on?’ I immediately got on the phone to call back to find out what is going on in Cincinnati; what’s going on at Xavier. Mike Graham, on the other hand—we came back shortly—and it’s at that time as things were beginning to just kind settle—not even settle down but just kind of get a little bit organized, there was really a need on campus. Mike, right away, created, in the Conaton Board Room, a gathering of students and anybody at Xavier, anybody in the community, so there was a major conversation about what had taken place. That set a stake in the ground in terms of our response and investment on the part, not just of Xavier, but of the president of Xavier, which was a big stake. From that point, there was created, or decided, a need for a collaborative process to bring the community, to bring all of the key people of the city together, to work something out that’s going to help us and enable us to move forward. Mike, personally, said, “I’m in and Xavier’s in.” So for the next many, many weeks and—I don’t even remember the time frame, but every week there were meetings in the Conaton Board Room with all of these people that eventually resulted in what’s called “The Collaborative,” which is still operational today, and as a point of reference today, and even when there are things that jump off—recently, about how police are handling their work and their behavior in the community, that there’s reference to The Collaborative and we need to revisit it and make sure we’re sticking to it. I just think that these are things that belong in this conversation; they tell you a lot about Jim Hoff and Mike Graham, the two people who have really led the way to the ‘golden years’ of Xavier University.
TK: And may there be many more golden years.

JFK: Yes.

TK: In addition to the presidents that you worked with, there are certainly many other individuals who serve Xavier very well and it would be impossible to mention all of them, but maybe there are a few people who stand out, who have served Xavier very well and should be mentioned in a very special way.

JFK: Yeah. I probably jumped ahead and mentioned people like Sheeran.

TK: That’s fine.

JFK: And Feldhaus, Hirte, Beth Amyot, Liz Blume, but, you know, the trustees that Jim recruited and the trustees that Mike has brought in, none of us could have done any of this without them. From a Hoff standpoint, it is those people—in fact they are—where are they? (referring to something)—because they are all Emeritus people now, so I have this list. Obviously, Mike Conaton, who is still onboard.

TK: Who we mentioned before.

JFK: Bob Castellini.

TK: Yes.

JFK: Gordon Brunner, Tom Cody, Charlie Gallagher, Jim Duff—these are people who just played extremely—

TK: Crucial roles.

JFK: Right. And John Pepper was still involved during those times, and so that group.

TK: And, of course, Sr. Rose Ann Fleming.

JFK: Rose Ann Fleming belongs—the next one you should be interviewing.

TK: We’ll keep that in mind because she has played a key role.

JFK: And I would say, from a Mike Graham standpoint, while we’re on a roll, in no particular order—Rodney McMullen, Mike Michaels, David Joyce, Barbara Howard, Vince Caponi, Steve Smith, Tim
Schroeder, John Maydonovich, and a couple of people who—John Prout and Rob Heider (sp?) are a couple of people who are very instrumental in some things that jumped off with TriHealth.

TK: One of our more recent ventures.

JFK: Right.

TK: Which maybe we can talk about a little bit later on.

JFK: And, I would say, what Mike did, where Jim Hoff, his board meetings, I would say felt much more corporate; they were reports to the board and not a lot of discussion, except, I guess, when they would go into their executive sessions. Mike opened up those meetings and really created opportunities for the board to have strategic conversations with the vice presidents and with others and invited people in. I think this was really exemplary of his—

TK: Style.

JFK: His new way of thinking and his style.

TK: Of all your responsibilities at Xavier over the last 28 years, you’ve overseen Xavier’s intercollegiate athletic program. Of all that you and the athletic department have achieved over these years, what do you find the most gratifying and the most satisfying?

JFK: I will say, and I know that this is it and it’s important. I feel really good about the evolution of Xavier athletics. Over the years we have had good coaches, we’ve had good teams, we’ve had good players, we’ve had good seasons. But, today, we have a very, very good program—a program that has traditions and expectations that have been sustained not just about men’s basketball, which is what we were focusing on back in, call it, the middle-’80s with Bob Stack and Pete Gillen, but now we really have it focusing across all of the sports—men and women’s sports. We’ve changed coaches and teams and conferences. When Bob Stack left, there was this concern ‘oh, now we’re in trouble.’ And then came Pete Gillen and Skip Prosser and Thad Matta and Sean Miller and Chris Mack and, now, Travis Steele, and we moved from the MCC to the A10 to the Big East. There is this correlation, and I don’t want to say it’s cause and effect, but there’s definitely a correlation between the growth of our athletic program through conferences to the Big East where we’re in an elite academic and athletic conference, and the growth and enrollment and the expansion of the program and the diversity of our student body, both geographically and, then, with Mike Graham, in every other ethnic and the like; that was
something that was really important to Mike. But I think the athletic program that has become a strong semblance of the brand of Xavier is really what I feel very good about.

TK: That’s good, and I think that’s certainly very true. Certainly, we’ve enjoyed success and I think we’ve done it in a classy manner.

JFK: And it’s in an atmosphere where there are those people essentially saying that there’s a major problem in the culture of athletics in higher education, but it was back in 1990 that we really made that move. That was Mike Conaton moving athletics out from under student development as if it was one of another student activity and, essentially, making it something that reported directly to the president or to me in the president’s office and ultimately became a critical success factor, mission-driven, intercollegiate athletics.

TK: In the area of women’s sports, what progress have we made over the last 25 years?

JFK: Basically, we have put them right along with the men’s program, so the combination of the Knight Commission and what’s Title IX. Back then, Title IX was really focusing on making certain that there are equal playing opportunities, scholarships, dollars to support the program. We have made significant progress on that from Jeff Fogelson to Mike Bobinski, Bobinski to, now, Greg Christopher.

TK: Names of various athletic directors.

JFK: Yeah. These became higher priorities. Back with Jeff, he was really just trying to get men’s basketball going. With Mike Bobinski, it was important—we have been doing what’s called ‘plans for improvement’ so that we can pump more dollars into the women’s sports, so we’ve been doing that. To the question ‘will we ever get it equalized?’ The one place where it just never matches up is what you need to pay a men’s basketball coach, which throws everything out of balance. If you can imagine, if we had football, there would be the same problem, but also it would be playing opportunities, and we studied that. Mike Conaton and I studied that and we didn’t say ‘no’; we just said, ‘not at this time.’

TK: It’s interesting because you stole my next question.

JFK: Oh.
TK: Which was going to be this. It’s something I’m interested in. Xavier dropped football in 1973. Has there ever been a serious talk of reintroducing it at any level? We would hear rumors from time to time.

JFK: Yeah.

TK: What’s the truth of the story? You began to touch on it.

JFK: The truth of the story is that back when we were doing XU 2000—this was the strategic plan process that Jim Hoff initiated. He asked me to coordinate it and one part of that was looking at the student body of the future. A part of that was would we bring football back and would that bring more men onto campus and would that be good for enrollment? So all of that. There was a separate feasibility that Mike and I did. He and I were the perfect pair. Mike, because of his history as a football player here at Xavier and all of that; for me, because my dad, Frank Kucia, played football and basketball at Xavier. If there were any two people who could find a way to bring it back, it would be the two of us. Basically, we just reviewed it. It wouldn’t be the Division 1 football that everybody remembers; it would be Division 1-3A, which is non-scholarship football. We would have to have 75 new male participants, so we had to come up with new female sports for 75 athletes. We said, “Well, you could have a softball team.” Well, a softball field is different than a baseball field, so we needed a new facility, and so we just continued to look at it from every perspective and, as I say, Mike did not want us to say, ‘no,’ so he attributes it to me, but it was Mike Conaton’s words, ‘not at this time.’ Maybe it will be reopened, but I don’t think so.

TK: No, I don’t think so either. In 2011, John, the annual Crosstown Shootout basketball game between Xavier and the University of Cincinnati was marred by a very unfortunate altercation on the floor of the Cintas Center. What actually happened on that occasion and what were the repercussions?

JFK: Yeah. I’ll tell you that whole episode was one of the most difficult, emotional low points for me at Xavier. We were always the good guys; UC was always the bad guys. In that particular game, we were winning and we won, and we were down to the last few seconds of the game. Without naming names, somebody pushed one of our guys; one of our guys pushed somebody else. A fight broke out; there weren’t more than a few seconds left in the game. With that, punches were thrown; one of our guys got hit so hard—sucker punched so hard that his eye was
bleeding. We didn’t manage the event right there on the floor; we let the players back out on
the floor, so the guy who had the bloody eye could stand on a table and be photographed, and
then, if that wasn’t bad enough, the post-game, we allowed the two players who were in the
middle of the whole thing to be interviewed live by the media. What they said and how they
expressed themselves, which just got taken in a very negative manner, as if it wasn’t negative
enough already, just became something that went wild and wide through the internet and just
all over. For me, I felt like the last 25 years of trying to build a strong Xavier athletic program
was just ruined—just went down the tubes all at once. I think we learned a lot and it’ll never
happen again, but it was a very difficult time.

TK: A painful one for you personally.

JFK: Yeah, for me, definitely personally.

TK: On a happier note, as we speak, Xavier’s future Health United Building, the so-called HUB, is
under construction. This is a rather unique undertaking. How did this collaborative effort
between TriState Health Guarantee come about and what will it mean for Xavier?

JFK: Let me correct you. It’s TriHealth, not TriState.

TK: TriHealth, yeah.

JFK: So TriHealth, which really is a very large healthcare organization with, I think, six hospitals and
hundreds of outlets and the like. I’ll just kind of harken back just a little bit to John Prout
because really John Prout and Jim Hoff wondered a long time ago what the two organizations
could do together, and nothing really ever materialized. Honestly, because I believe, again, Jim
was really concentrating on inside Xavier, so it was when Mike Graham got together with John
Prout. Where Mike Graham would be a person who would bring more people together, and so
Mike Graham with John Prout brought all of Xavier’s vice presidents and a range of TriHealth’s
vice presidents, put us in a room, and just gave us a charge. The charge was ‘what can we do
together to take advantage of the talents and the skills and the resources of both
organizations—something that we can’t by ourselves?’ They left and, then, it was really up to us
to work that out. Over a period of time, as it turned out, Mercy Health expressed an interest in
getting into the conversation, so we actually had to do an RFP process that enabled us to
esentially get the feedback. We had a series of questions that we asked them to answer and
then they would come and propose to us. Because of my collaborative role in a lot of things, I
ended up being the facilitator of that collaborative process. Ultimately, we chose TriHealth. Then we needed to work out ‘what are we going to do and how do we put all of this together?’ It was Mark Clement, who is now the new president and CEO of TriHealth who replaced John Prout. Mark Clement asked me and asked Mike Graham, “What do you want this relationship to be? Do you want it to be just a contract for services or some kind of a long-term relationship?” We both said, “We want this to be a long-term relationship and not just a contract.” So, based on that, we spent a lot of time and now what Mark Clement said this is really the first and only example of a high-quality academic institution, Xavier, creating a partnership or an affiliation agreement with a hospital system. All of the rest of the big ones are universities that have hospitals, but it’s Ohio State, or UC, or any of those. It was with that as kind of a— I’ll call it ‘make no little plans,’ something that’s really exciting, that we created the first-ever relationship here that we call an ‘affiliation agreement’ that impacts on the allied health academic buildings, sports center, student health center, employee wellness, health and academic innovation and student internships.

TK: This would be a new building and will incorporate all these various facilities.

JFK: Yes, all of these things are in that. I would say that the health and academic innovation piece is really just beginning to materialize with our deans and with our provost and the like.

TK: What do you think the future holds in store for Xavier so far as land acquisition and further facilities are concerned?

JFK: Yeah. As far as land acquisition, I think for our use—for Xavier’s use, we have probably purchased it all. We are still watching for property that is along Dana Ave. because there are properties that look good and properties that look bad.

TK: This would be on the south side?

JFK: It would be on the south side, right. I would say that we’re always on the lookout for properties that I’ll just call it ‘appear to be blighted’ and that we walk to the front door and say, “We’d like to buy it.” We don’t send a silent agent to sneak up; we don’t do that; others do. You can see some of the green space that’s there right now. There was a car wash that was kind of up near Montgomery Rd. I don’t know what the name of it was, but it was a car wash and kind of suspicious looking spot anyway; they essentially wanted to sell. I was in conversation with them, but they also had someone who wanted to turn it into a used tire and check-cashing
operation. We made sure that we bought that property; we paid a premium for it, but we
needed to buy it. There are some more properties that have just been taken down in the last
few months. It essentially creates Dana Ave., which is a nice boulevard that a lot of money has
been spent--$5 million was spent to improve what it looks like now with the centerpieces.

TK: Turning it into a boulevard.

JFK: Yeah, yeah. We just want to complete that.

TK: Good.

JFK: I think our biggest interest now in terms of property, and this goes back to Bob Kohlhepp, many
years back—20 or more years back—essentially saying that we need to look at all of the
surrounding territory, properties, and based upon what is our master plan for construction and
for the campus—the Campus Master Plan—to identify the properties that we want to purchase,
the ones that we don’t want to purchase, so we don’t waste a lot of time, but also ones that we
want to influence; we don’t want to own, but we want to influence. Because the changed
thinking from Mike Graham to Jim Hoff where Jim Hoff was looking inside of Xavier, and when
the Norwood Plaza was available, Jim said, “Why would we want to own a shopping center?”
Mike Graham, when we ultimately bought that—I think it was still during Jim’s time, but it was
sort of toward the end. When F&W Publishing was available, and this was Mike Graham’s first
opportunity. There were a few of us in the room and I said, “It’s available to be purchased.
What do you say?” Jim Hoff didn’t have any particular inclination, but he said, “Mike, if we buy
this it’s going to be on your watch.” What did Mike say? “Hell, yes!”

TK: And this is located on the south side of Dana Ave.

JFK: On the south side of Dana.

TK: Which is now our Alumni—

JFK: It’s Alumni, it’s HR, it’s University Relations, it’s Physical Plant.

TK: A huge facility.

JFK: Physical Plant was over on Tennessee Ave., so it really was a very important purchase and
acquisition. The same with University Station. University Station was assembling 20 acres of
property not for us to push the frontier of Xavier up to Montgomery Rd., but to really create
something that will serve as a catalyst for things that would develop across Montgomery, across Dana, that would help with Evanston and its business district. That’s a big part of what is our interest moving forward; it’s a big part of why I am continuing here as a part-time vice president instead of just heading off into the hinterlands.

TK: I was going to ask you about that because though you have officially retired, you’re staying on in a part-time capacity.

JFK: Yes.

TK: Maybe you can talk a little bit more about that.

JFK: Right. First of all, I am what they call ‘half time.’ Mary Kucia said, “John, are you half-time or just half-pay?” She said she was going to keep a close eye on my time, so I have scheduled to be in on Tuesday, Wednesday and Thursday. Consequently, every week is a long weekend.

TK: Good for you.

JFK: I’m off on Friday and I don’t work on Monday.

TK: That’s what retirement is all about.

JFK: In terms of where I focus my time, though, 30% of that time is really working on these real estate—to get University Station done. Phase 1 still isn’t successfully done; Phase 2 is still calling for probably 150,000+ sq. ft. of commercial office—commercial office with companies that would want to co-brand with Xavier. We call them ‘affinity partners.’ TriHealth is an affinity partner; CTI, which is the clinical trials and consulting—Tim Schroeder’s company—these are folks that want to do things with the university who want to engage, co-brand, create internships for our students, things like that; we’re looking for more of that.

TK: And this is Phase 2 of University Station.

JFK: Yeah, but we started it and so the TriHealth Affiliation Agreement really is an outcome of TriHealth being in the University Station and having three different healthcare facilities that are on the first floor of one of the buildings in that development. The other big part as I was retiring and the question was asked, “What could we do to honor you?” I couldn’t think of anything. So, reluctantly and through conversation, Leadership in Balance, the book that I co-authored, is a collaborative approach to leadership basically that keys of the way leaders think, not in the
way they behave; thinking about ‘leadership in balance’ instead of ‘leadership in control.’ None of the people that I interviewed or researched thought that were in control. Leaders in balance lead based upon relationship and influence rather than position and power; that’s a concept that’s very different. It speaks to those who are charged with more responsibility than authority or control, and I’d say that’s all of us. Consequently, the “John F. Kucia Leadership Academy” is something that Mike Graham said, “Why don’t you do that?” Right now, I’m working with HR and folks around that to put together a leadership academy that would continue. We’ve had a leadership academy before and Leadership in Balance was one part, one module, of a 10-month program. Now, Leadership in Balance will be a theme throughout a 10-month program targeted to emerging leaders at Xavier so that we would cultivate a distinct brand of leader.

TK: Now this would be an academic program?

JFK: It won’t be a ‘for credit’ from that standpoint.

TK: I see.

JFK: It will operate out of Human Resources.

TK: I see.

JFK: And so that’s something I’ve been putting a lot of time into.

TK: Good, good. Of all the things that you’ve achieved in your 34 years at Xavier, John, of what are you the proudest?

JFK: Well, I really think I just spoke about it.

TK: You just spoke to that. Okay.

JFK: Yeah. I mean, really, I think the opportunity—I’ve had opportunities with Jim Hoff’s time and with Mike Graham’s. It really was Al DiUlio’s; he didn’t have to hire me, but he did.

TK: He certainly made a good choice.

JFK: He didn’t do a search and he didn’t hesitate, so that was either smart or not so smart at the time; he was rolling the dice, but the opportunities to provide collaborative leadership and to develop and demonstrate Leadership in Balance: the Role of Collaboration for Leading Change at Xavier in very tangible and lasting ways, and something that will continue through the John F.
Kucia Leadership Academy, cultivating a distinct brand of collaborative leaders at Xavier—that’s a big deal for me.

TK: Very good.

JFK: And I appreciate it.

TK: Well, I hope it goes well.

JFK: Thank you.

TK: Any final thoughts before we conclude? There’s much more we could touch on, I’m sure.

JFK: I don’t know how many minutes this is but we’re doing okay, but I think I’ve said everything I have to say.

TK: Good. This concludes our interview. I want to thank you, John, for a very interesting and very informative conversation. I hope you’ve enjoyed it as much as I have.

JFK: I have and I’ve learned and this was good. Thank you.

TK: God bless.

END OF INTERVIEW