

Spartan Spirit Shines at Picnic

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A little rain could not keep the Spartan spirit from shining April 15 when The University of Tampa hosted the final event of its 75th anniversary celebration.

“It’s been an upbeat and exciting year,” said President Ronald Vaughn. “You tend to look ahead more, but it’s good to look back and see the trials and tribulations of starting a university at one of the most difficult times, during the Great Depression. We’ve come a long way from those early days.”

Picnic in the Park, held by the University and the Henry B. Plant Museum, drew a modest crowd of visitors and university supporters. Outside, the event featured lawn games, activities for children and a strolling barbershop quartet. The UT Band played “Happy Birthday” while guests ate birthday cake, and dancers performed a tribute to their school.

Tables in Plant Hall featured blood pressure screenings by nursing students, a student art show and a book sale by the UT Press, which featured a memoir by school founder Dr. Frederic Spaulding.

Three players from the Negro Leagues, two of whom have worked at UT, held court in the Grand Salon, while former NFL star and UT Athlete of the Century Freddie Solomon ’75 made the rounds. The Spartan mascot posed for photos with kids, and UT Athletics played a film of sports highlights from the last 75 years.

Throughout the day, associate professor of communication Dana Plays filmed elevator diaries with her students. The historic elevator in Plant Hall served as a confessional where people recounted their memories of the University.

The film includes interviews with President Vaughn, former Florida governor and Tampa mayor Bob Martinez, and Richard D. Cheshire, UT president from 1977-86. The library will house copies of the video in its archives.

“It’s nice that they did this,” said Mark Johnson, who works construction on the new residence hall. “Better weather would be nice, but such is life.”

By early afternoon, the sun was shining, and kids were playing volleyball and soccer with UT athletes in Plant Park. Student volunteers painted children’s faces, and a balloon artist made hats for them to wear. Conductor Jeffrey Traster led the UT Band in a rendition of the “1812 Overture,” replete with shots from the Gasparilla canon.

“I think people are having a good time,” said Dr. Nancy Ross, professor of nursing.

The picnic concluded the celebration, which started with a kickoff on Oct. 5. The history of the University is told in three 16-page sections appearing in successive issues of the UT Journal beginning last fall. The last section appears in the spring issue.