

# Money bars Varner's goal of NU excellence

Woody Varner is a builder. UNL President Durwood B. Varner has spent his professional and personal lives building schools and cultural arts programs; modeling, coaxing and leading programs and institutions toward excellence.

Toward excellence: the title of his five year plan for boosting the University to the highest academic stature in the Big 8 schools. For three slow years, the road toward excellence has been blocked.

And the barricade has been money. With urgency in his voice, Varner says, "I am far from satisfied with what's happened. I've been extremely disappointed with the level of financial support we've received."

He continued, "I think anyone who looks at the support we've been given will realize that there has been no way to move this University."

"While the budget this year showed some encouragement, it came on the heels of two very tight budget years," he said.

Varner was appointed president of NU Feb. 1, 1970. Prior to his Nebraska position, he was chancellor of Oakland University, Oakland, Mich. During his administration there, enrollment increased from 570 students in 1959 to almost 6,000 in 1969. While the university grew, Varner helped develop a major performing arts center.

Earlier, Varner was vice president of Michigan State University. His duties included the administration of financial grants for a multitude of purposes.

Varner's experience with financial resources permitting growth may help him in his appraisal of the current situation at Nebraska.

"If the state is really serious about education, then this is the year our needs should be met," he said.

"I'm more encouraged. First of all, there is money available. No one ever can say the state can't afford to support education better than it has," he said.

"This is the best economic year the state has ever known," he added.

Varner gives Gov. J.J. Exon high marks on his budgetary recommendations, finding in them some optimism.

"I think the governor's track record is encouraging," he said. "In the last two years he has demonstrated a very real interest in the University."

"I believe the governor will be willing to support the University to the maximum extent possible," Varner said.

The Board of Regents also merits appreciation from Varner for their "unqualified support" of the five-year plan. He said, "I believe they are committed to developing the finest university in the Big Eight in this decade."

How has the five-year plan fared? "It's moving along," Varner says. "Financially,

no, it isn't progressing; it has fallen significantly short."

Varner said task forces set up to investigate deficiencies isolated in the five-year plan are functioning well. Reports from those study groups are due in the coming months.

Varner summarized his three top priorities for the University. The first is, he said, "a major commitment to improve the quality of teaching."

Increased financial reward for teachers, increasing stipends to graduate students and increasing the number of graduate assistantships are all components of this move, he said.

Second, Varner said he believes the graduate departments themselves need improvement. "With a little extra thrust, these departments could move and achieve national distinction," he said.

Third, Varner cites the programs of the College of Agriculture as having suffered from lack of funds.

"We've gone through three very august years," he said. "We have not been able to keep pace with soaring costs."

He said he has requested \$1 million to strengthen the tie between the College of Agriculture research on campus and the practice of agriculture in the state.

"This is an area in which I have a great personal interest," Varner said. "This nation is viewed across the world as having achieved a modern miracle in agriculture."

"Much of this can be credited to land-grant universities," he said. University extension divisions and experimental stations have served as the research and development arm of agriculture, translating their findings to farmers, he added.

Varner said it is crucial to reduce the lag between the development of new agricultural practices and their implementation.

Varner compared agriculture extension to his philosophy about the performing arts.

"I believe the University has an obligation to the state in the arts to provide an opportunity for the young and not so young to hear greatness," he said.

The "superb response" to past efforts to bring performing artists outstate has made Varner more adamant about the necessity of the arts.

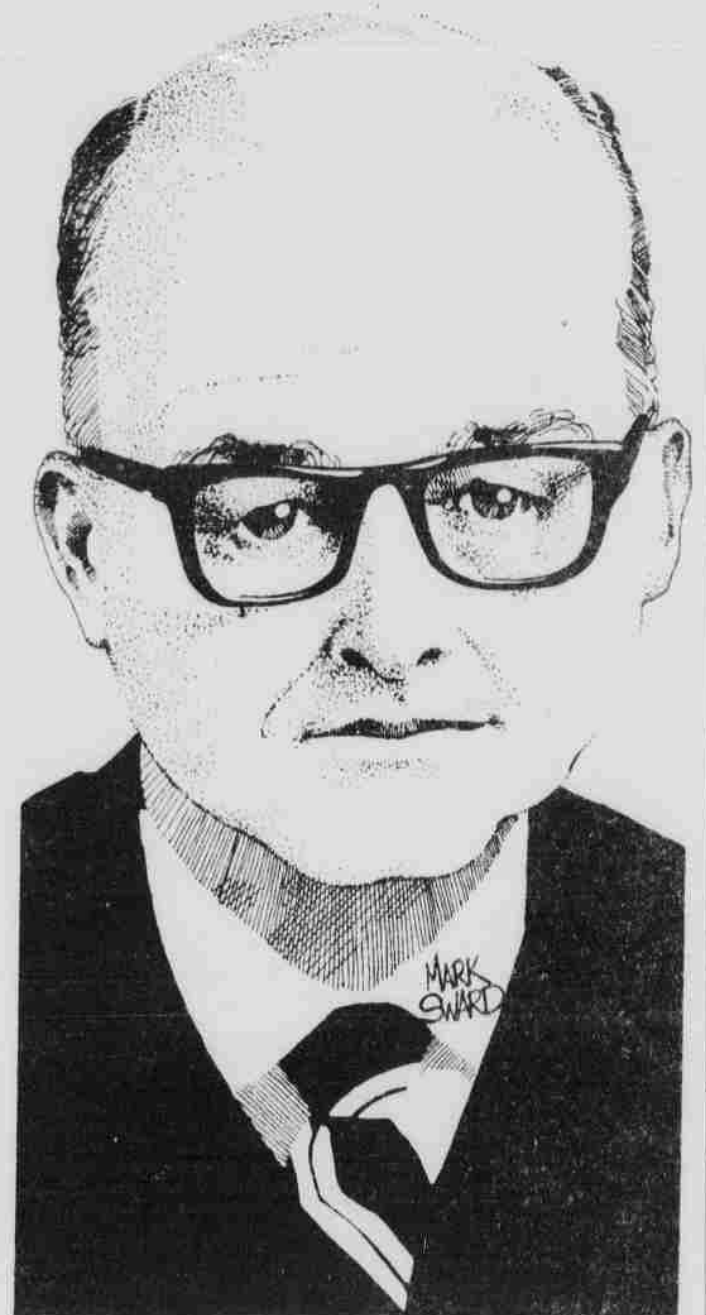
"The arts do not pay for themselves," he said. "There is no production line for an oboe player."

"Yet the cost is going up," he said. "This provides us with an economic crunch that can be met by private support and mostly by state and federal government monies."

After three years, what is Varner satisfied with as NU president?

He doesn't hesitate. "I can't be satisfied personally if it becomes evident that the University is not going to move."

"I don't think we've done enough for the students, but economics have not been adequate," he



NU President D.B. Varner

said. Varner said he has been impressed by Nebraskans' "warmth, responsiveness and genuine qualities."

Likewise, the community responsiveness and leadership of Lincoln and Omaha has been good, Varner said. "I have never once had any community interests inject themselves into the University."

Despite these pluses, Varner said he cannot be pleased personally until he is satisfied professionally.

"We can't gain any ground if we don't receive increased financial support," he said.

"And the plain truth is, we simply have not been able to move."

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