

Student Advocate

'Coach' Blanco's influence will remain for years to come

AFTER 46 YEARS OF SERVICE TO UL Lafayette, vice president for Student Affairs Raymond Blanco will retire, effective Jan. 1, 2009.

He relinquished his student affairs duties in August but remains in charge of campus maintenance through this year.



Raymond Blanco's career has spanned four university administrations.

The university is conducting a search for Blanco's successor. Dean of Students Ed Pratt is interim vice president.

Blanco has served during the administrations of four of the university's six presidents: Dr. Joel Fletcher Jr., Dr. Clyde Rougeou, Dr. Ray P. Authement and Dr. Joseph Savoie. He earned a reputation as a passionate advocate for students.

"During my 46-year career at the university, I have watched the evolution of student life on campus from integration to student protests of the war, to the current era of instant communication," Blanco said. "But the one thing that has remained constant is that kids want to be respected and they want to know someone cares about them.

"We were able to deal with difficult times because we listened, we communicated, and we truly cared about kids."

Dr. Jimmy Clarke, executive director for the ACT Center for College and Career Success, worked with Blanco in Student Affairs for more than 15 years. "He would tell us repeatedly, 'Treat these kids as you would if they were your own or as their parents should,'" Clarke said.

Blanco initiated the Dean on Call program so that students could contact a student dean at any time of the day or night if they needed help. He was also responsible for providing emergency call boxes on campus.

Clarke said Blanco pays attention to detail and taught him and others to do the same. "In the same way he used to break down film as a football coach, he is able to process and think through multiple circumstances and situations and piece them together and see ahead."

Clarke said Blanco's retirement is a loss for the university. "But I think he would be the first to tell you that no one person is bigger than the organization.

And, what he has so successfully done is to bring up so many of his charges, who now have extraordinary responsibilities at the university. So, although he personally is leaving, his philosophies, his commitment and his ideas are there and they will be for a long, long time.”

Blanco grew up in Birmingham, Ala. He graduated from St. Benedict’s College in Atchinson, Kan., in 1958 with a bachelor’s degree in philosophy and political science. He became assistant football coach at Kirwin High School in Galveston, Texas, the same year.

From 1959 to 1962, Blanco was head football coach and athletic director at Catholic High School in New Iberia, La. He led its football team to the state championship in 1962.

Blanco joined the university in December 1962 as assistant football coach and defensive coordinator. During his coaching tenure at UL Lafayette, the Ragin’ Cajuns had five winning seasons and won two conference championships. He is still referred to affectionately as “Coach” by many former students.

Blanco married Kathleen Babineaux of



Raymond Blanco taught students about the importance of social justice.

New Iberia, La., in 1964.

In 1969, Blanco was named dean of men. He later became dean of students and was soon promoted to vice president for Student Affairs. He also took on the additional responsibility of overseeing the university’s Physical Plant Department.

University President Dr. Joseph Savoie said Blanco gave him an opportunity to become a university administrator. “He was one of my first mentors and taught me to be sensitive to students and their needs.

“Over his many years of service, he has also mentored dozens of college administrators that are now serving on campuses across the state. Many of the remarkable things he has done at the university have gone unnoticed, but have had a lasting impact on many students, faculty, and staff.”

When the university was grappling with rising energy costs, Blanco was charged with developing an energy management program to reduce electrical and fuel costs. That program saves the university more than \$1 million annually.

Savoie said the impact of the energy management program is significant. “This program has allowed us to dedicate more revenue to faculty salaries and is now a model program for other higher education institutions in the state.”

In the late 1970s, Kathleen Blanco was district manager of the U.S. Census. When that project was complete, she and her husband started a political consulting firm. Over the next two decades, she held several elected positions. In 2000, she was elected governor of Louisiana; Blanco became the state’s first gentleman.

Blanco said he is excited about the university’s new administration and the direction the university will take. “I had the opportunity to hire Dr. Savoie some 30 years ago and I have watched



Former Gov. Kathleen Blanco and Raymond Blanco celebrate at a ball held the night of her inauguration.

his career with great admiration and pride. The university family and the community are excited about the future of the university and under Dr. Savoie’s leadership, they have every right to be.” ■

BLANCO BIO

- 1935** Born in Birmingham, Ala.
- 1953** Graduated from John Carroll High School, Birmingham, Ala.
- 1958** Graduated from St. Benedict’s College, Atchinson, Kansas
- 1958** Assistant football coach at Kirwin High School, Galveston, Texas
- 1959-62** Head football coach, Catholic High, New Iberia, La.
- 1962-69** Assistant football coach University of Southwestern Louisiana, now University of Louisiana at Lafayette
- 1964** Married Kathleen Babineaux of New Iberia, La.
- 1969-72** Dean of men, USL
- 1972-74** Dean of student personnel, USL
- 1974-82** Dean of students, USL
- 1974-2008** Vice president for Student Affairs, UL Lafayette
- 2000-2004** First gentleman of Louisiana