

THE CLARION

Campus' Past Points to Promising Future

By Ashley Burns

Ashford University has seen many changes over the years, from its name and ownership to many instances of both growth and downsizing. We weren't always a dry campus, the basement of Regis Hall once held many student facilities, and President Obama paid a visit to campus shortly after his election in 2008.

As we enter a period of downsizing with the announcements of the closing of the BW and the elimination of the golf, bowling, tennis, and cross-country teams, we should keep in mind that Ashford did not always look and operate in the way we experience it now. In fact, it took many years for the university to become what we know it as today.

A look into *The Clarion's* archives provides a colorful telling of our campus's story. In the words of past reporters, we can see just how much has changed over the years. In the face of the biggest change that has befallen Ashford in several years, it's important to keep in mind that sometimes several steps backward have to be taken before a giant leap forward can be possible. The first issue of *The Clarion*, published October 14, 1992, was published in the year the university was celebrating its 75th anniversary. Back when Ashford was called Mount St. Clare College, and we were the Mounties and not the Saints, tennis, baseball, and cross-country were first emerging on campus. The Elementary Education program and the Communications Concentration of the English program were brand new, and campus gained its first fitness center, the Student Life Center, and the Child Care Center. The issue's front page story was one covering the success of a recent fundraising campaign to raise money for expansion, and the first of our famous parking editorials, this one headlined "Parking is a Wheel Problem," found its home on page five.

The October 17, 1997 issue reports that the pool in the Regis basement (which has since been removed) was open for student use between the hours of 6 p.m. and 9 p.m. on weeknights, with the exception of Thursday, when it closed at midnight. The pool was staffed full time by professional lifeguards. The same issue included an article with the campus's alcohol policy, which, at the time, allowed students 21 years of age or older to have and consume alcoholic beverages in their rooms. No one under the age of 21 was to partake, and those of age could not partake anywhere else on campus besides in their dorm rooms. However, if campus events wanted to serve alcohol, a permit could be obtained to do so. Another parking editorial found its way onto the pages of the paper, this time recognizing that Springdale Dr. had space for as many as 100 cars to park, as well as encouraging student parking in the residential area to the east of N. Bluff Blvd. along 3rd, 4th, 5th, and 6th Avenues.

The year 1998 was a big one for Mount St. Clare College. In January of that year, an “on-campus student club” was opened in the basement of Regis Hall, which was in the process of converting from the convent it was formally to the residence hall it is now. The club occupied the old cafeteria space, and was named Three Peaks, for the structure of the front of St. Clare Hall. The space was renovated to include a dance floor, a pool table, an electronic dart board, a pinball machine, and various furniture, and was intended as a space for students to come to spend time and relax. It was open every Thursday night beginning at 9 p.m., and in its first month of operation brought three nights of dancing and a night of comedic entertainment by Al Carpenter to the students of MSC. 1998 also saw the emergence of the track and field team, and the first year the Mount St. Clare wrestling team was present on campus. The team produced four national qualifiers in the NAIA championship.

1998 was also the year the construction of the Durgin Educational Center reached completion. A project that took years of planning was completed just in time for spring graduation. An article in the April 24, 1998 issue shows pictures of the construction process, and features an article that announced that the athletics department would be relocated to Durgin offices, and the new fitness center would move there from its previous location in the Student Center. The article also talked about a plan for what we now know as A Lot to be removed and replaced with grass and benches, as an extension of the current courtyard in front of St. Clare Hall, which was also remodeled in 1998 as part of a land restoration class taught by a handful of university professors. The front page story in the November 2008 issue covers an event that brought a prominent American political figure to campus. On November 12, 2008, AU was the venue for one of the first speeches Barack Obama gave after being elected to his first term as President. A photo by Campus Communications Director Larry Libberton shows President-Elect Obama shaking hands with members of AU faculty. That same issue reports on the completion of a parking lot across the street from Ashford.

The Clarion archives are full of flashbacks to the Ashford University that existed in the past, an Ashford that was just fine at its small size. If our history can provide any insight into our future, we can confidently say that Ashford will be just fine returning to a small university.