

DN In Focus

EXCLUSIVE

TSU Interim President Kenneth Huewitt speaks

By ReShonda Tate Billingsley

When Kenneth Huewitt came to Texas Southern University in 2017 to serve as Vice President of Finance & Administration and Chief Financial Officer, he was poised to use his decades of financial experience to oversee all fiscal matters at the school. Now, Interim President of the Third Ward institution, Huewitt is using that experience to position the university in an unprecedented financial standing, all while navigating a pandemic.

Huewitt, who served 14 years with the Houston Independent School District as Controller, then Chief Financial Officer prior to joining TSU, sat down with the Defender to talk about his triumphs, accomplishments and what lies ahead.

Defender: How is the university adjusting during the pandemic?

Kenneth Huewitt: We're doing well. We're looking forward to more face-to-face as we move forward. This spring semester, we've been able to socially distance and meet with students and student leaders. There is a buildup of excitement about us getting back to some new normalcy. We do have a plan in place for that, but it's written in pencil. However, we are looking forward to the fall semester. We're planning right now and hope to return at least 70% of our classes face-to-face.

Huewitt discusses his long-term goals, keeping alumni engaged and other accomplishments at www.DefenderNetwork.com

Defender: TSU is in partnership with Baylor-St. Luke to provide vaccines to the community. How did that partnership come to be?

Huewitt: They were looking for another site to be able to administer the vaccines and we heard about it. They toured the campus and liked what they saw. It's a great partnership because we're located in a vulnerable, underrepresented population. We felt like this would be great to just bring it right here and make it accessible for our population. And also, making it available to our own faculty and staff was a huge win for Texas Southern, as well as the community that we serve. Baylor-St. Luke's has been an extremely cooperative partner with us. They've rolled up their sleeves and they're here until seven in the evening every day.

Defender: What would you say are your three biggest accomplishments?

Huewitt: Our SACS (Southern Association of Colleges and Schools) reaccreditation was huge. That process really

got underway the first week of March with their onsite reviews. We were able to get that accreditation for another 10 years taken care of. So that license to operate is important. Then we entered into this pandemic, where we had to flip the university from a face-to-face environment to 100% remote was difficult. Now, we're gradually returning to campus, getting back engaged with our students and our faculty, and continuing the business of teaching and learning. We've really been focused on doing things in a way as to not deter people from wanting to get their education. And then the third thing is fundraising. We've had our best year ever. We have gotten \$21 million of research funding in fiscal year 2020, and we're already at about \$20 million right now [for 2021].

Defender: What do you attribute to the university's sound financial standing right now?

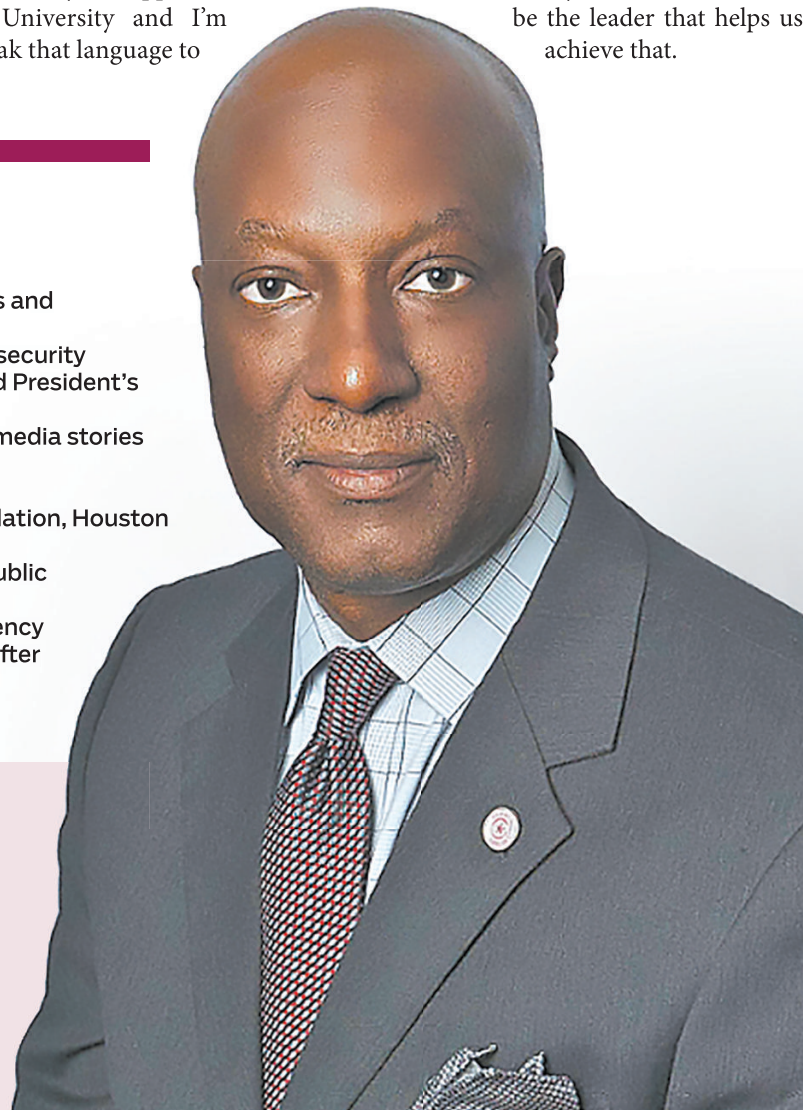
Huewitt: I hope it comes with my background as far as just the credibility, the integrity and being a financial steward all my time here in Houston, since 1997. And of course, we have something to sell. There's a good return on the investment when you support Texas Southern University and I'm able to speak that language to investors.

Defender: The university appears to have seen an increase in endowments, donations, fellowships and scholarships. Are you seeing a global shift in thinking about Texas Southern University, in turn inspiring more people to give?

Huewitt: Absolutely. It's all about reputation management right now and that's what we're focusing on. And again, letting folks know that we've always had these capabilities. It's amazing what we're accomplishing with what we have right now. And yes, I keep asking for more - whether it's with the federal level or at the state level. I'm asking for more so that we can do more and we're capable of doing it. It's just that you have to have those resources to be able to do it.

Defender: You are currently interim president as the University conducts a nationwide search for a permanent president. Are you interested in the job?

Huewitt: Yes, I am. I've been doing this now 14 months. Obviously I didn't ask for it, but now that I'm in it, I can see that we're on the brink of something great. And I just think that I can lead this university to that. I see some great things happening on the horizon for Texas Southern University, and I would like to be the leader that helps us achieve that.



ACCOMPLISHMENTS

Secured compliance

- Reaffirmed TSU's Accreditation by SACSCOS (Southern Association of Colleges and Schools Commission on Colleges)
- ABA full compliance for Thurgood Marshall School of Law
- Implemented new Division of Compliance
- Annual financial audits completed, clean and in compliance

Established collaboration/partnerships

- COVID testing center with Thermo Fisher Scientific/Just Project partnership in the College of Pharmacy and Health Sciences
- Launched "TSU Forward" campus masterplan
- Campus to Career student program funded by Bank of America
- Aviation and United States Airforce partnership
- New corporate partnerships for student internships

Created new initiatives

- Increased technology offerings and equipment
- Upgraded campus safety and security
- Established new Chairman and President's Council
- Increased number of positive media stories

Increased fundraising

- Private gifts from Gates Foundation, Houston Endowment
- Increased Alumni giving and public research dollars
- Spearheaded Tiger Aid emergency fund for students during and after pandemic

ABOUT

- B.B.A., Accounting - Texas State University (Distinguished alumni)
- Certified Public Accountant, Certified Internal Auditor, Certified Government Financial Manager, Certified Financial Services Auditor and Chartered Global Management Accountant.
- Former member of the back-to-back Texas State National Championship football teams in 1981 and 1982.
- Inductee into the T-Association's Hall of Honor, the highest honor for any athlete at Texas State in 2007
- He and his wife are the proud parents of two children.