

Retirement farewell address: Mr Tony Long

– 27 February 2009

Mr. Tony Long, Ms. Dee Long, family and friends of Tony, the DVC's, Deans, Registrar, HOD's, academic, administrative and support staff colleagues, members of the SRC and students, ladies and gentlemen

Molweni, good evening, and welcome to this farewell for an esteemed and long-serving colleague, Mr. Tony Long. It is most pleasing to observe such a good turnout.

Hamilton Anthony Long was appointed as Registrar (Finance) at Rhodes University in January 1990 and has served Rhodes for just over 19 years.

Born on 13 August 1948 in Grahamstown, Tony attended Kingswood College and Elliot High School in the then Cape Province. He married Denette Hounsom, known to us as Dee, on 26 January 1974 and has a daughter and a son.

Tony qualified as a Chartered Accountant in 1972 after completing a Certificate in the Theory of Accountancy at the Durban campus Natal University in 1971. He served Articles with Arthur Hopewell and Company in Durban and between September 1973 and August 1974 undertook a one-year training spell in the New York office of Hurdman and Cranstoun.

Upon his return from the USA he entered practice as a partner of Arthur Hopewell and Co which became BDO Spencer Steward after a number of mergers. During this time he managed the Pinetown office of the practice for a period of time and also, whilst in Durban, acted as Staff Partner of the practice. During his period as a practitioner he undertook audits, investigations and accounting work on behalf of clients, engaged in various industries and commercial activities in the Natal area.

In 1982 he became Financial Director of a retail group known as F W Knowles, but in 1985 returned to practice as a partner of BDO Spencer Steward. During this time he concentrated his practice in the area of liquidation and distribution of deceased and insolvent

estates and undertook investigations of a forensic nature on behalf of the Reserve Bank and the Commercial Branch of the South African Police. These investigations were centred on exchange control activities and invariably involved investigation of fraudulent exchange control transactions.

In 2008, following restructuring of senior administration portfolios the post of Registrar Finance was expanded to that of Registrar: Finance and Operations. As a result, since then Tony has been responsible for the functions of Finance, Human Resources, Information Technology, Estates (Buildings and Grounds) and Residential Operations at Rhodes University. Over and above these responsibilities, Tony has also ably serviced and been a valued member of the Investment Committee of the Rhodes University Board of Governors, which has the important task of growing the University's financial reserves.

You will appreciate this is an extensive portfolio of responsibilities - necessitated by our very flat senior administration structure and by the desire to free up the VC and DVC's to focus on core academic matters. I

wish to register my sincere gratitude to Tony for his willingness and indeed readiness to take on the challenge of the extended portfolio, which has made a significant difference to enabling myself and the DVC's to concentrate on strategic academic leadership issues.

During his period as Registrar, Tony has developed considerable expertise and experience related to the financing of higher education, financial management of universities and the available opportunities and methods of financing a university, including the pitfalls of some methods of financing with respect to sustainability. He is one of the most knowledgeable and experienced finance managers at South African universities and I also know, given my chairpersonship of Higher Education South Africa's Funding Strategy Group and my interaction with finance managers, that he enjoys great respect among his peers.

During the past 33 months as I and colleagues, and we as a University, have sought to shape our future, to think through issues of size and shape, enrolment, staff remuneration, infrastructure, equity, institutional culture and other challenges, I and we have been able

to do so with the immense comfort that the University finances and later also operations have been in immensely capable hands.

Furthermore, as we have come to grasp the reality that because of our size and the current subsidy finances will be an ongoing challenge in relation to our aspirations and needs, I and we have been able to do so assured of the diligent, effective and efficient financial management and administration of the University under Tony.

In the light of the financial crises that plague many other universities, this has been a great comfort as it has provided the opportunity to think, deliberate, strategise and plan in ways that are not always available when a University is in continuous crisis mode.

Tony is well known for his careful and tight control of Rhodes finances, and although it is not my experience, some describe getting money out of him as an "arm-wrestle" of epic proportions. Perhaps Obie Oberholtzer lost most of these arm-wrestle's for I am told that at

his farewell Obie displayed a photo of a run-down shack in the middle of nowhere – and stated that it captured Tony Long's idea of a state of the art research facility.

It is not always that the chief financial officer of a University wins the trust and respect of academics but Tony has done so admirably. This is because, and any of you who have had to deal with Tony will agree, he is, mercifully, not the archetype grey-suited accountant.

He is not a dour little grey man, but a person with an expansive and considerate personality. He is also not a mere implementer of rules and conventions, but also a strategist and a solution finder, who frequently challenges his colleagues to think creatively and out of the box. This is as it should be, as the post that he occupied is a leadership and strategic one, rather than simply administrative.

If not a dour grey suit, Tony's friends testify that he is nonetheless quite cautious and often not very adventurous. John Duncan recounts a trip with Tony to the UK in the days before GPS's were common.

At Heathrow, Tony volunteered to drive the hired car. Leaving the parking lot a voice in the car instructed to turn left at the first intersection. Tony and John were totally baffled but proceeded as instructed while also looking very nervously at each other.

A short while later the voice suddenly instructed again to turn right at the stop street. Tony looked at John very wide eyed and in a panic whispered: "Shit, I think we're being hi-jacked!" Both then nervously braved a look at the back expecting to see a hi-jacker. Only then did they sheepishly realise the voice was probably from this new thing called a GPS system, activated by the car hire company to help us get them out of Heathrow.

My experience of Tony has been that of a respectful, collegial, considered 'can do' person, sensitive to what it is to be a University and to academic values, imperatives and issues. He has demonstrated a humanity and empathy that is not always associated with accountants – be it in cases of individual staff in personal difficulties, or as in the recent case of a group of staff members that have experienced adversity and

have required support, or the difficulties of a section of staff seeking to acquire accommodation that is affordable relative to their salaries.

Following the report of the Accommodation Task Team that Dr Mabizela chaired, he was entrusted by me to produce a plan through which we could support staff around accommodation needs. He has indeed produced a plan, which will be tabled in due course.

Most recently, we witnessed this humanity and empathy in the final budget meetings of 2008 and at Council, where, in the light of unexpected additional state subsidies Tony motivated for slashing the proposed student fee increase from 12% to 8.5% and for prioritizing student financial aid.

On various occasions it has been necessary for me to draw on institutional memory and Tony has provided this. I have also sought his views and advice on a number of issues and he has invariably provided wise counsel. Inevitably, this has at times has been around delicate issues and I have always been able to

approach him and obtain an honest and considered view in the strictest of confidence.

I have appreciated his consultative approach – even on issues where I would be happy to trust his judgements. And on some important issues I have especially appreciated him providing me the space to think through matters – his approach always that I did not need to decide immediately but should mull it over for a few days.

Tony is large in physical stature, work capacity, expansive thinking, but he is especially large - in fact a giant - in the area of integrity. This is why I know people generally trust his views, seek out his advice and respect him.

In his 19 years at Rhodes, Tony has served alongside three Vice-Chancellors – Dr. Henderson between 1990 and 1996, Dr. Woods between 1996 and 2006 and myself since June 2006. This is not always easy and no mean achievement. Each Vice-Chancellor could have a particular conception of the contemporary role of the university, be driven by different social and educational

imperatives and priorities, have a different style of leadership and management and also differing idiosyncrasies and egos. I hope that each of us has drawn on your knowledge and expertise appropriately, facilitated the discharge of your responsibilities and accorded you the respect and dignity that you deserve.

When Tony joined Rhodes, the University's student enrolment was about 4 200, split over campuses in Grahamstown and East London. 79% of the students were white, black South African students comprised only 13%, 49% were women and there were 307 international students. Total staff numbered some 1 200. There were 33 student residences and 8 halls.

Today, as Tony takes leave of us, in 2009 our student enrolment is 6 515, black students make up 55%, black South Africans comprise 37%, 59% are women and international students number 1 200. Academic staff number some 1 400. There are now 48 student residences and 13 halls. Our building portfolio and our property holdings are considerably more extensive than in 1990, when there was no Eden Grove, Hamilton building, African Media Matrix and Barratt lecture

theatres. Without prizing growth for its own sake, Tony can be proud of these developments and derive satisfaction that he has played no small part in these developments.

My strong sense is that Tony's position at Rhodes has not just been simply a job as much as a means for fulfilling much else. It certainly cannot have been money, since someone with Tony's expertise could command considerably more in the private sector, and indeed also at other universities. Instead there has been commitment, dedication and diligence, and undoubtedly Rhodes has meant a lot to Tony.

We can only hope that in the years to come you will remember your times at Rhodes with fondness and satisfaction, both the good and the difficult – and we hope, Tony, for your sake that that overall and on balance they have been largely good times.

Tony has had a distinguished career as an accountant and auditor, as a trustee of several trusts, chair of audit committees, and so on. He is a Director of GBS Mutual Bank (and the Chair of the Bank's Audit Committee) –

something that he declared to me when I joined Rhodes and offered to relinquish if I believed it represented any conflict of interest.

He has also served on the Finance Director's Forum of Higher Education South Africa, been involved in the Purchasing Consortium of Higher Education Institutions, and has been my nominee on Grocott's, where his expertise has been much valued.

It should be no secret that I hoped that Tony would be willing to stay on a few more years. I had sought to persuade him to continue by evoking the lovely excitement and great challenge of mobilising funds for new academic initiatives and new infrastructure, and the sheer joy of squeezing out support from the Department of Education's infrastructure funding through compelling proposals so that Rhodes could continue to be one of South Africa's and Africa's outstanding universities.

I would, of course, not have used such a tack with a person of nervous disposition, but in this case I did so confident that it would not frighten a person of Tony's

stature. Here, it is proper that I publicly acknowledge Tony's great contribution to the majestic new library building that is taking shape day by day. Tony's 'can do' attitude provided vital impetus to the decision to build and he was also critical in getting the Board of Governors to stand surety to the tune of R35 million.

I requested members of our Council and of the Board of Governor's to try and persuade Tony to stay on. Regrettably, this was to no avail, and I and we must respect Tony's desire to move on and pursue other interests. However, he is not entirely lost to us and for this I am grateful. He will continue to service our Pension and Provident funds as well as our Medical Aid fund and has undertaken to also provide assistance when possible.

This evening, Tony, we acknowledge, are grateful for and celebrate all your years of loyal service to Rhodes University, the integrity with which you have conducted yourself, and the expansive and hopefully fulfilling career that you have had. You leave with our finances healthy and in good shape, with a wonderful legacy,

and you will always hold a special place in our hearts.
We will miss your invaluable contribution at all levels.

Our wish is that the years ahead will bless you with good health, bring you joy and happiness as you spend more time with your grandchildren and Dee and give you the space to pursue other interests.

Ladies and Gentlemen, I invite you to join me in commending a wonderful and loyal leader and servant of Rhodes University, Mr. Tony Long.