

OLIVET UNIVERSITY

New college undergoing birthing pains

Bethany
Bethany alumni question school's validity, tactics

By **KIMBERLY WHITE**

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SCOTTS VALLEY — The fall quarter has started at Olivet University, with classes slated to begin Wednesday, but not without controversy.

Olivet administrators, who are operating from the campus occupied by Bethany University for the past 61 years, have raised the ire of some Bethany alumni. Though Bethany officials have given Olivet permission to use the now-defunct university's name to continue what administrators from both schools deem parallel missions, many alumni say Olivet has latched on to their alma mater's name and nearly 100-year-old history to make itself seem bigger and more credible than it really is.

Alumni, including Ken Smith and Debbie Pope, question whether their beloved school's name should be affiliated with an institution without regional accreditation. Olivet is not accredited by the Western Association of Schools and Colleges, which carries more weight in the academic world than the agency through which Olivet is accredited, the Association for Biblical Higher Education.

However, Dr. Bill Wagner, Olivet's president, said in a previous interview that Olivet hopes to obtain regional accreditation within the next couple of years. He was not available for comment Monday, the first day of the fall quarter.

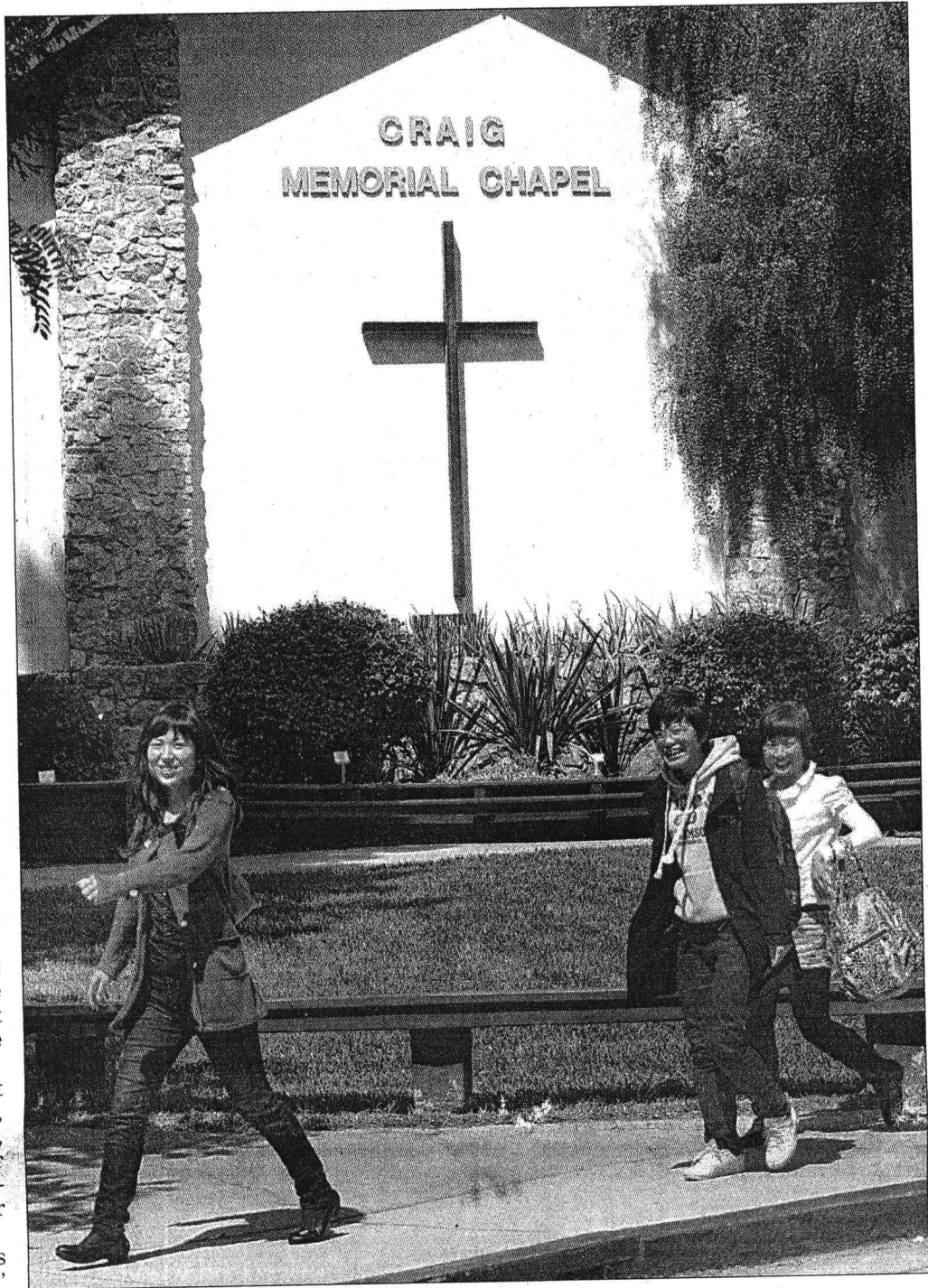
Olivet has existed in its present form for a little more than a decade, and Bethany alumni such as Smith, a 1990 graduate, say it's not right for school officials to appropriate Bethany's history to enhance the newer university's stature.

Freeway signs still show exits leading to "Bethany University,"

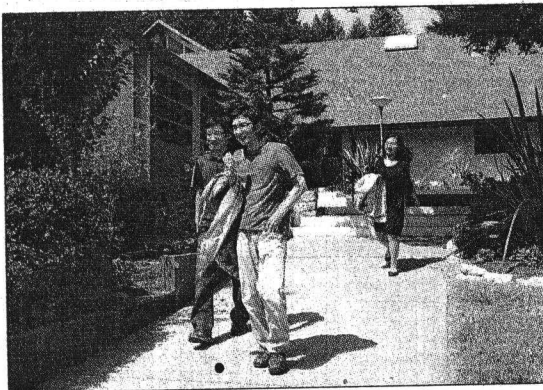
SEE **UNIVERSITY** ON A2

ON THE NET

- To view Bethany's new website, go to www.bethany.edu.
- To view Olivet's website, go to www.olivetuniversity.edu.
- To read Ken Smith's blog entry, go to <http://blog.wouldbethetheologian.com/2011/09/whats-up-with-olivet-university.html>.



ABOVE: Olivet students check out the old Bethany University campus Monday before classes officially begin Wednesday.



LEFT: Monday was the first day of the fall quarter at Olivet University, which is working out details of the Bethany purchase and the structure of the new university.

DAN COYRO/SENTINEL PHOTOS

UNIVERSITY

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and a large concrete structure that stands at the intersection of Scotts Valley and Bethany drives bears the Bethany name — including the words “Founded 1919.” On the campus itself, the buildings christened by Bethany still bear their old names. For all intents and purposes, the Olivet campus is a mirror image of Bethany — only management has changed.

Dr. Jay Herndon, secretary-treasurer for the Northern California and Nevada District of the Assemblies of God — which owned and operated Bethany — confirmed Olivet has been given permission to use Bethany’s name, history and mission.

In June, Bethany officials announced the school was closing after decades of financial difficulties and \$15 million in debt that the small Christian college could not overcome.

The next month, Bethany Corp. members voted to dissolve that entity. Last month, Olivet made an undisclosed down payment on the roughly 60-acre campus.

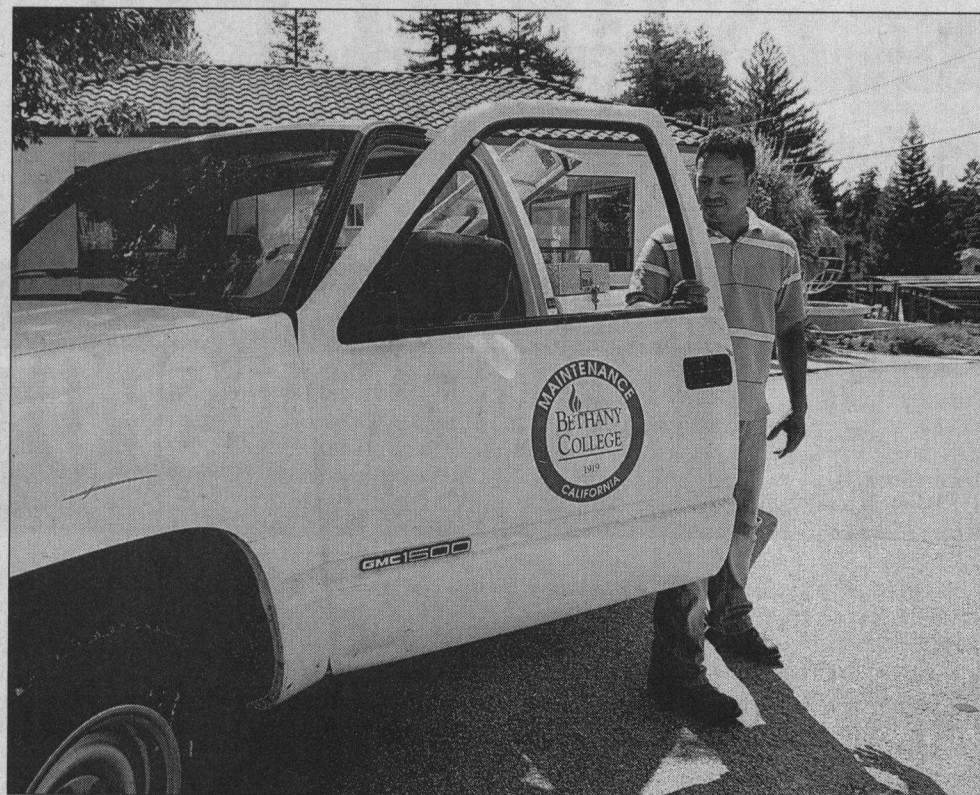
Ahead of the school’s opening this week, Smith posted a blog entry on Friday in which he questioned Olivet’s operational structure and what he believes is a misappropriation of Bethany’s history.

Olivet administrators were apparently uncomfortable with his musings, because Smith said Nate Tran, Olivet’s dean of administration, called him almost immediately and requested that he take it down.

“He said, ‘I need to let you know that if you don’t remove or rewrite your post, we may be forced to consider legal action,’” Smith recalled, though he added that Tran sounded uncomfortable and apologetic while making the request. “And that was a significant mistake. That’s not how you reach out to thoughtful critics who are raising reasonable questions.”

Smith said he has no plans to remove the blog.

Asked Monday whether he



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Maintenance supervisor David Navarro is a former Bethany University employee hired by Olivet University.

requested the blog be removed under threat of legal action, Tran circled around the question and instead said that “from the very beginning, both of our boards wanted to work together. We didn’t want to do something that was not approved by the board or alumni” and that details of the sale and Olivet’s structure are still being worked out.

In his blog, Smith noted that the new Bethany site that was up Friday made no mention of the school’s closure and subsequent purchase by Olivet, and Olivet claimed to have been established in 1919 — the year Bethany was founded in San Francisco.

Since then, the site’s been updated to describe Bethany’s closure, but goes on to say that Bethany has “re-emerged under the management of Olivet University. Both institutions continue to provide world-class theological education together.”

That’s misleading, Smith says. And Tran, when asked about the specific wording, admitted it could lead to confusion.

“The school that I graduated from, the school that opened in 1919, has shut its doors. That’s sad, I grieve

that, but that school’s gone,” Smith said. “And for Olivet to state or imply that they are continuing to operate that school with the same heritage and history and that there’s a significant continuity between Olivet and Bethany, it’s inaccurate and wrong, and it devalues the history and the heritage of the many students who went to Bethany over the years.”

Smith also noted that in their haste to open and get a website up and running, Olivet officials lifted content word-for-word from the University of Phoenix’s website and posted it on the new site. Olivet officials have designed for Bethany University. For example, one section related to postings on forums states that libelous comments “about University of Phoenix Faculty or Administrators” are not permitted.

A receptionist at the University of Phoenix’s call center said there is no link between that school and Olivet.

Smith said it’s an “understandable mistake” for Olivet officials to cut-and-paste from another university’s website and forget to replace “University of Phoenix” with “Olivet University.” But still, he’s dis-

turbed by the oversight considering most policies undergo thorough review and possible revisions before being implemented and posted online.

Tran was unaware that the Bethany site referenced the University of Phoenix until late Monday afternoon. Asked how it could have gotten there, he said he didn’t know and that “maybe previously, Bethany had something ... Olivet has no connection with the University of Phoenix. I’m not sure where it came from.”

Meanwhile, escrow on the property is expected to close in November, though the complexities of dissolving a corporation has resulted in a new twist in the saga.

Calls to Bethany officials about the close of escrow were not returned Monday. But according to a post on Olivet’s website from the Rev. James Braddy, chairman of Bethany Corp.’s Board of Trustees, the board may meet again Oct. 20 in Sacramento “to approve the specific points of the sale” following a recently discovered law related to the transaction.

Attempts to contact Wagner, Olivet’s president, were unsuccessful Monday.