

THRUST INTO THE SPOTLIGHT

BLUMENTHAL HAS BROUGHT 'MUCH-NEEDED STABILITY' TO CAMPUS

By J.M. BROWN

SENTINEL STAFF WRITER

SANTA CRUZ — Some times the most highly regarded leaders are those who have taken the helm when tragedy thrust it into their hands.

Thirty years ago, U.S. Sen. Dianne Feinstein, then president of San Francisco's Board of Supervisors, was named mayor after her predecessor was shot and killed in his office at City Hall. In 2001, Feinstein's one-time Senate colleague, Jean Carnahan, filled the seat her husband, the Missouri governor, was posthumously elected to after dying in a plane crash on the campaign trail.

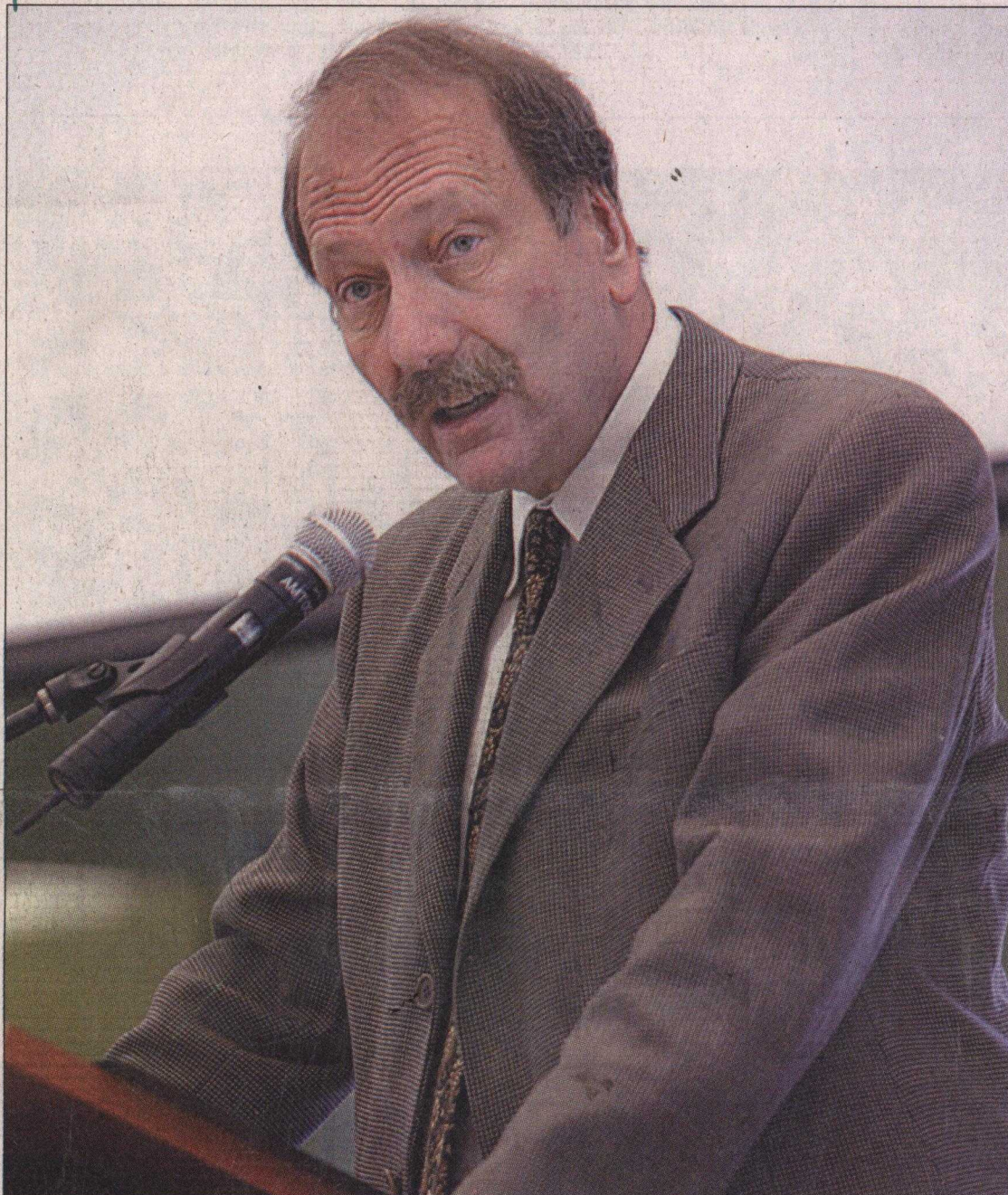
Similarly, astrophysicist George Blumenthal, a longtime faculty leader at UC Santa Cruz and within the UC system, was tapped to head up the 15,000-student campus nearly two years ago, after Chancellor Denice Denton committed suicide in June 2006. Even though the top job was not something he necessarily aspired to — he wasn't a candidate when Denton had gotten the position a year earlier — Blumenthal nonetheless stepped into the role amid strong support from faculty and staff, who saw him as a familiar and comforting figure who could unite the campus.

As interim chancellor, Blumenthal's first responsibility was to heal the wounds of shock and grief. After the UC Regents made the appointment permanent last September — naming him the 10th chancellor — he has improved UCSC's relationship with the community, kick-started a fundraising rally and weathered demonstrations against controversial growth plans and biomedical research.

"He has contributed much-needed stability to the position of chancellor," UCSC Academic Senate chair Quentin Williams said. "He has worked very hard at improving our relations with the community and legislative leaders."

UCSC will celebrate Blumenthal's achievements during his public inauguration ceremony Friday. There are no more tickets available.

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Dan Coyo/Sentinel

UCSC Chancellor George Blumenthal addresses the Academic Senate last Friday.

UCSC Chancellor George R. Blumenthal

AGE: 62.

CURRENT POSITION: Appointed chancellor Sept. 19, 2007, after serving 14 months as interim chancellor.

OTHER ROLES: Professor of astronomy and astrophysics since 1972 and former department chair; UC Academic Senate chair, 2004-05; faculty representative to the UC Regents from 2003-05; UCSC division chair of the Academic Senate, 2001-2003.

EDUCATION: Bachelor of Science, University of Wisconsin, Milwaukee; doctorate in physics, UC San Diego.

FAMILY: Married to Kelly Weisberg, a professor of law at UC Hastings College of the Law in San Francisco; two children.

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GEORGE BLUMENTHAL



Dan Coyro/Sentinel

UCSC Chancellor George Blumenthal talks with Academic Senate chair Quentin Williams before an Academic Senate meeting.

UCSC

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The 62-year-old Blumenthal joined UCSC in 1972 as a professor of astronomy and astrophysics, and has since built a career in studying the origin of the universe — an ironic background for someone also well-versed in the microcosms of a relatively young research institution. His relationships among the faculty and universitywide leadership have made him one of the most well-connected campus leaders in the UC system.

Many of UCSC's stakeholders describe him as an affable and accessible leader, born out in such complicated situations such as the ongoing litigation between the 43-year-old campus and its host city over the Long-Range Development Plan, which calls for enrolling up to 5,100 more students by 2020.

"The issues we have are complex and contentious and wrapped in years of history," Santa Cruz Mayor Ryan Coonerty said. "(Blumenthal) has really dedicated an enormous amount of time and energy to understand the city's concerns and taking steps to address them. He's certainly not solving all the problems, but he is trying to lay the groundwork for a relationship that will work better in the long term."

Christi Suchil, outgoing president of UCSC's Student Union Assembly, said the chancellor is "definitely an ally of ours." She credited Blumenthal's support of voter registration — a key issue among student leadership — for UC President Robert Dynes' decision to allow registration drives in dorm halls.

"He's been pretty approachable. Even if there is a difference of opinion, he is open-minded and listens to those things as well," Suchil said.

However, she said Blumenthal needs to push for "a more concrete and applicable diversity plan." Although there have been gains in recent years, "a lot of conversations (about diversity) have been open-ended," she said.

"He has ideas and plans but I haven't seen realistic plans — I haven't seen implementation," Suchil said. "It's beyond time."

Williams said many faculty members have great admiration for Blumenthal, who led the systemwide UC Academic Senate from 2004 to 2005 after serving two years as the faculty representative to the UC Regents and a year of leading UCSC's faculty.

"He is very accessible, partially because he knows the campus community and feels very comfortable interacting with the campus community," Williams said. "He knows what people's issues are, what their hopes,

aspirations and gripes are."

Whether he can make lasting change remains to be seen, Williams said, listing lagging salaries as compared to peer institutions as a key concern among faculty.

"Change is always a challenging thing at UC Santa Cruz," he said. "It's often difficult to push change at the small level. I know he knows the details of many, many things that go on on campus."

It is, in fact, change that Blumenthal says he is focused on. With the governor's state budget cuts threatening to reduce UC's state funding by about \$300 million under what the Regents requested for next year, the otherwise reserved Blumenthal has taken on the role of UCSC's biggest cheerleader and fundraiser.

The year before he took the reins of UCSC, Blumenthal said there was a "marked drop in donations," adding that his efforts since to reach out to untapped donors, as well as those who had cut their support, made this past year the third highest ever for fundraising.

"I thought I could do it, but I wasn't sure," Blumenthal said in a recent interview. "I've always seen myself as a shy person."

He said he thought "it would be hard to meet with people that I was going to ask money of."

But he said he soon realized fundraising was really just an

opportunity to promote UCSC's achievements, which made the task easier for him.

Blumenthal is focused on growing the campus' capital campaign and an endowment to offset student fee increases.

"We need to become less dependent on the largess of Sacramento because there are going to be boom years and bust years," he said. "That problem is going to go on forever."

And it's one he doesn't want to pass on to students through steep fee increases, like the 7 percent hike in undergraduate tuition fees recently approved by the Regents.

"If this trend continues, then we really need to think hard about where we're going at this university," he said.

Blumenthal understands firsthand the impact of increased costs for a college education on families. He and wife Kelly Weisberg, a professor of law at UC Hastings College of the Law in San Francisco, have one child who graduated just weeks ago from UC Berkeley and one who is a freshman at Harvard.

His family has also felt the impact of his weighty position, on top of Weisberg's busy schedule.

"It's a rare evening when we sit and have dinner and watch TV together," she said.

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