

"I realized we had met a true leader"

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Editor's Note: In this [series of articles](#), colleagues and friends of Tulane University President Scott Cowen write a remembrance of their work with him. Alumna [Cathy Pierson](#) has been a member of the Board of Tulane since 1995, served as board chair from 2003 to 2006, and led the search committee when President Cowen was hired in 1998. She is now a member of the Emeritus Board.



President Scott Cowen, right, shares a happy moment in 2008 with Cathy Pierson, center, and her husband, R. Hunter Pierson Jr. The Piersons, both members of the Board of Tulane, headed the successful [Promise and Distinction](#) campaign for Tulane that ended in 2008, raising more than \$730 million. (Photo by Paula Burch-Celentano)

I first met Scott in late 1997 when I was chair of the Presidential Search Committee, and he flew to New Orleans to interview for the president's job. Scott walked into the room and I immediately noticed his presence and warmth.

Then as he began to talk I realized we had met a true leader who understood the challenges and possibilities of Tulane University. His research and analysis of Tulane was extensive and instructive for the search committee members.

At the end of that day, search committee member Yvette Jones (now the executive vice president for university relations and development) and I looked at one another with elation because we knew we had an incredible candidate to lead Tulane. Our elevator trip down from the meeting was a celebration of excitement and relief.

We knew we still had work to do, introducing Scott to the Tulane community, but we were happily assured that he would convince them, as he had us, that he had the intellect, energy, vision and determination to lead Tulane. Which, of course, he did.

In the ensuing weeks I remember his unrelenting questions and requests for more information about Tulane. It was certainly exponentially more than from other candidates. This was my first introduction to Scott's skills as a strategist who could synthesize reams of information into a coherent vision and a public speaker who won over different constituencies to his vision.

The rightness of Tulane's selection was confirmed seven years later when Hurricane Katrina hit. Scott gathered the Tulane team in Houston and rebuilt Tulane into one of the finest institutions in the south.

His passion, dedication and vision have been and will continue to be noted and celebrated by the country, but I feel privileged, along with the other members of the search committee, to have recognized his potential the day he walked into the interview, a candidate among many brimming with energy, optimism, and ideas.