



MARK ANDRESEN

# Panamanian Tulanians

by Mike Fitts

It was no accident that I chose Panama for my first trip abroad as president of Tulane. With its Spanish and Afro-Caribbean influences and melting pot of cultures, Panama City is truly our sister city. Tulane's history is rooted in this kinship.

From our founding in 1834 as a medical college devoted to eradicating the diseases that menaced both New Orleans and Latin America, Tulane's academic mission has been identified with Panama and its neighbors. In the century that followed, the opening of the Panama Canal convinced city leaders of the need to establish a school of business at Tulane as well.

Today, our academic collaborations in Panama include two graduate school programs through the A. B. Freeman School of Business and the Payson Center for International Development, as well as a partnership with the United Nations Regional Center for Latin America and the Caribbean and the Universidad Católica Santa María La Antigua, through which Master of International Development students study one year in New Orleans and one year in Panama. There are also law and development courses on a variety of topics that bring Tulane students to Panama, the Panama Summer Institute study abroad program and much more.

Panama and its neighbors also inspired the introduction of Latin American studies through the Stone Center, the Middle American Research Institute, and other Tulane programs that make up one of the largest, most respected and most comprehensive Latin American studies programs in the Western Hemisphere. (See story on page 14.)

Panama is also home to a large Tulane alumni base. Tulane Law School alone has more than 150 Panamanian alumni, who include Cabinet ministers, Supreme Court justices, diplomats and the country's top lawyers. Expect more in the future since Tulane's Panamanian alumni recently established a scholarship fund to send more Panamanian students to Tulane Law School. And, of course, we continue to welcome new undergraduates from Panama.

While our partnership with Panama continues to grow so does the famous channel that played a vital role in the formation of our business school. On my visit I had the chance to walk on the bottom of the not-yet-flooded portion of the Panama Canal that is part of its historic expansion.

## CROSSING BORDERS

Panama is a vital site for the Tulane connection to Latin America.

It was a breathtaking sight.

My tour of the canal came courtesy of Jose "Pepe" Barrios Ng, a Tulane parent and former deputy administrator of the Panama Canal Authority. I also attended a gathering of Tulane alumni at the home of Tulane graduate Stanley Motta, chairman of the board of the parent company of Copa Airlines, which will begin direct flights from New Orleans to Panama soon.

Tulane's presence and other global connections are a reflection of our diverse culture and the base upon which we are building an exceptional worldwide interdisciplinary university.

My academic life has been defined by crossing boundaries and borders in the belief that the best teaching, research and learning takes place when the boundaries between seemingly unrelated subjects—medicine, engineering, law, business, science, the arts—are crossed and problems are approached from an interdisciplinary perspective.

This boundary crossing extends to countries as well. This is why, while crossing boundaries between disciplines, Tulane literally spans the globe from the front lines of the fight against Ebola in West Africa to our Master of Finance program in China to the School of Social Work's efforts in Tibet, to our Summer in Cuba program.

We have 40 major academic programs operating in 20 countries. Last academic year, 1,153 international students attended Tulane and there are more than 7,400 Tulane graduates living in 177 countries. In fact, while visiting Panama, I traveled to Costa Rica, where I was honored to meet its president and Tulane graduate Luis Guillermo Solís Rivera.

A favorite quote of mine is from organizational theorist Karl Weick, "Simply pushing harder within the old boundaries will not do." This is the attitude I believe every university should adopt when confronting the pressing societal problems of today and preparing their students to do the same.

Pouring more money and energy into old models in which professors teach, researchers investigate and students learn within the narrowly drawn specialties of cloistered campuses does not offer students the same level of academic rigor or the equal promise of effecting positive change.

Crossing boundaries opens a whole new world of possibilities and hope. It also reveals a startling truth—that boundaries between countries, people and disciplines are only imaginary. Breaching these boundaries is where real learning begins and where Tulane began.