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FR. BIONDI'S
10th
ANNIVERSARY

RESEARCH

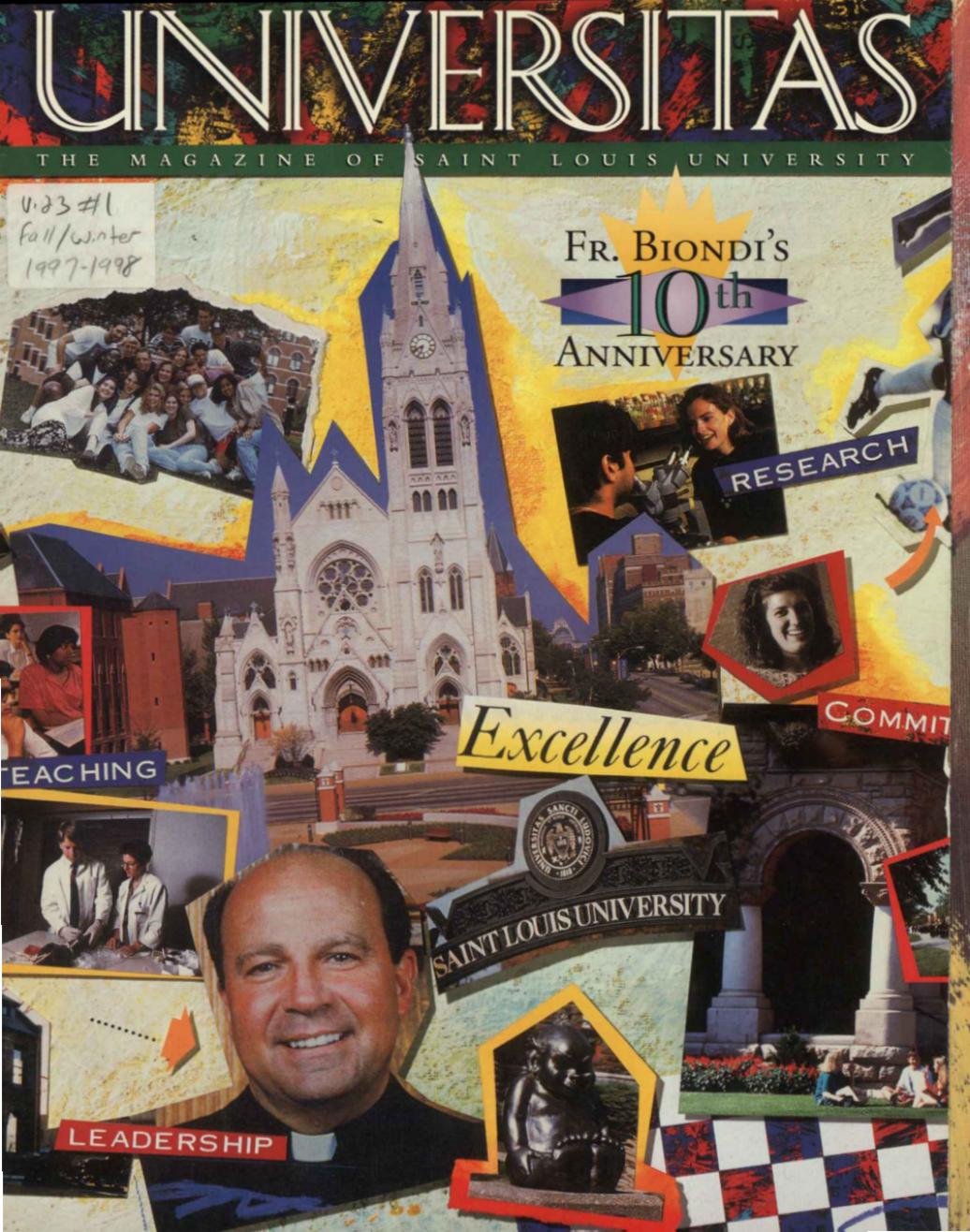
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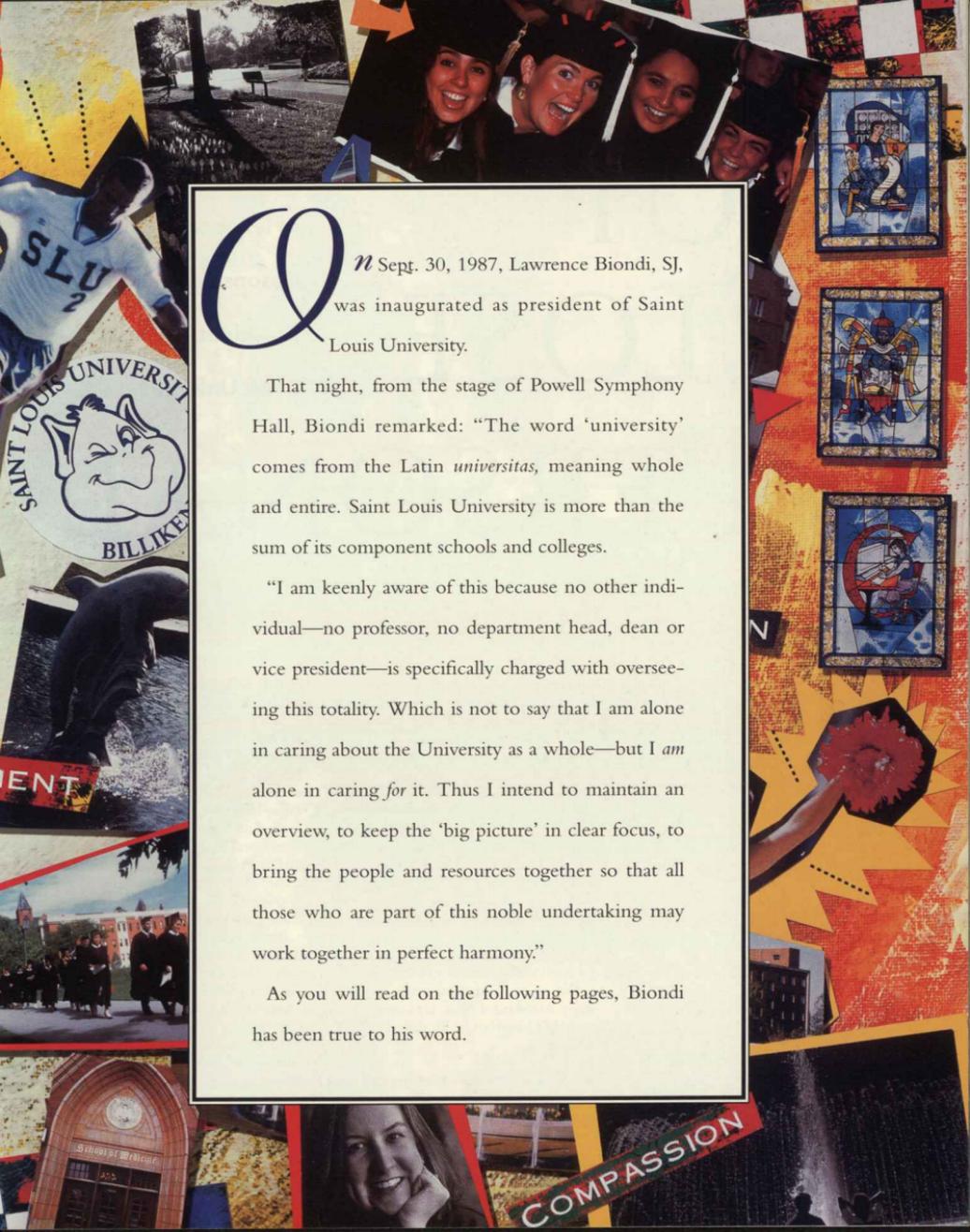
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SAINT LOUIS UNIVERSITY





Qn Sept. 30, 1987, Lawrence Biondi, SJ, was inaugurated as president of Saint Louis University.

That night, from the stage of Powell Symphony Hall, Biondi remarked: "The word 'university' comes from the Latin *universitas*, meaning whole and entire. Saint Louis University is more than the sum of its component schools and colleges.

"I am keenly aware of this because no other individual—no professor, no department head, dean or vice president—is specifically charged with overseeing this totality. Which is not to say that I am alone in caring about the University as a whole—but I *am* alone in caring for it. Thus I intend to maintain an overview, to keep the 'big picture' in clear focus, to bring the people and resources together so that all those who are part of this noble undertaking may work together in perfect harmony."

As you will read on the following pages, Biondi has been true to his word.

UP & CLOSE PERSONAL

Lawrence Biondi, SJ,
reflects on 10 years
of leadership,
lessons and life as
president of Saint
Louis University.

Some people would call his desk cluttered. Stacks of papers are scattered about, but it is clear that he knows where to find everything.

His shelves and window sills are loaded, albeit neatly, with honors, trinkets and mementos. His travels are well represented with shells and sand castles, but there's a real hometown feel to his stuff: a St. Louis snow globe, a crystal award from the St. Louis Ambassadors and Billiken antiques. The fleur de lis motif appears almost everywhere—on decorative plates, stained-glass hangings and coffee mugs.

If our offices paint our best portraits, Larry Biondi's is worth 1,000 words.

But on his tenth anniversary as president of Saint Louis University, it wouldn't be fair to let his desk do all the talking.

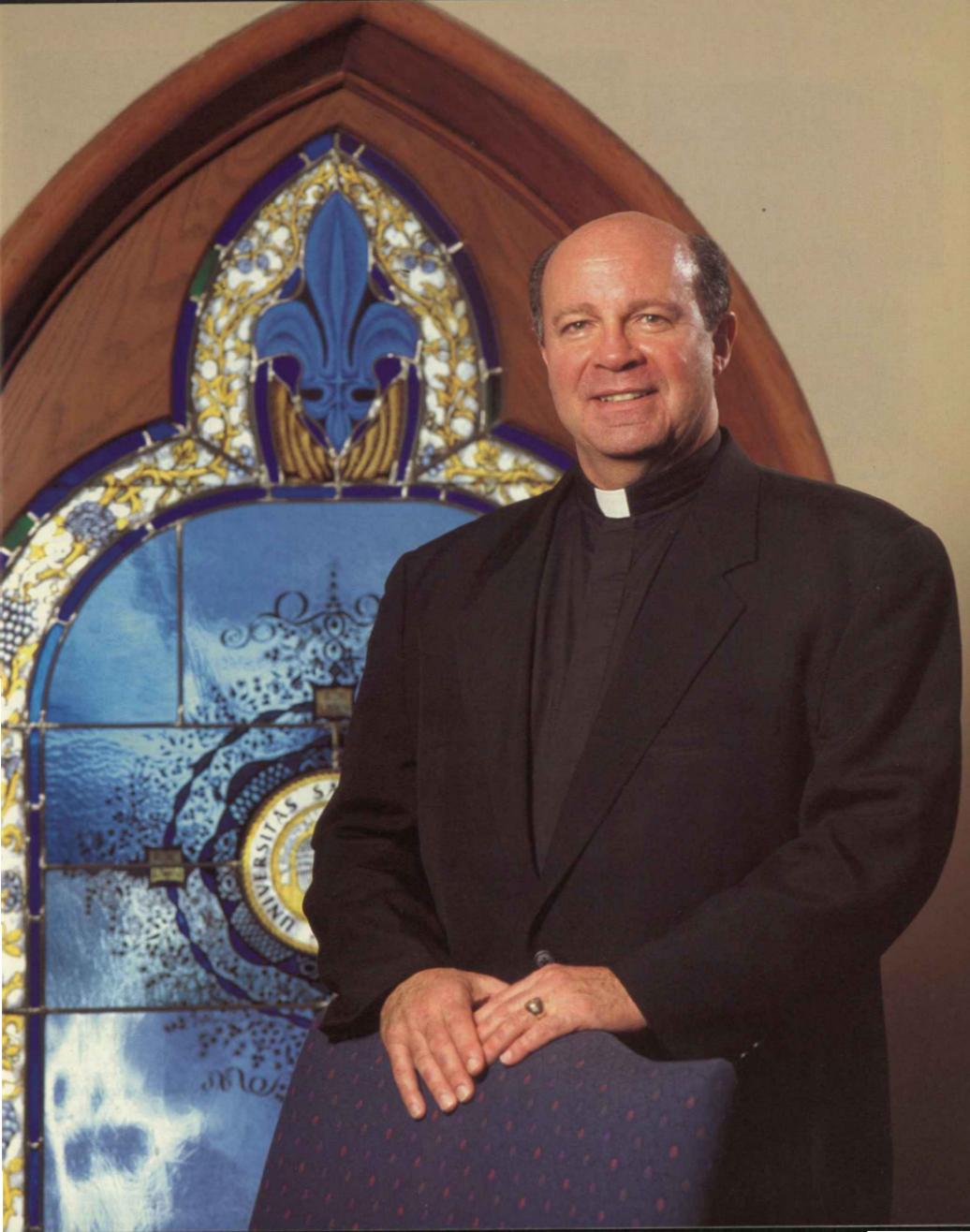
The following is an edited transcript of an interview conducted shortly after

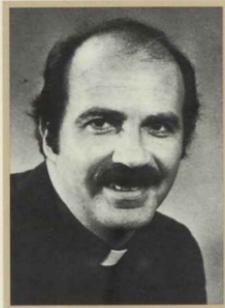
Biondi completed 10 years at the helm of Saint Louis University.

UTAS: *What were your first impressions of Saint Louis University?*

Biondi: In my formation as a Jesuit seminarian, I always heard about Saint Louis University as one of the premiere Jesuit universities in the United States. During my seminary training, most of my professors in philosophy received their degrees from Saint Louis University. So for me, the University always had a fine national reputation.

But it wasn't until I was on my way to Mexico City during the summer of 1968 that I first visited St. Louis. Another Jesuit and I were going to study Spanish in Mexico. We took a Greyhound bus from Chicago to Mexico City, and to break up our long trip we stopped in St. Louis and San Antonio. We spent a day and a half here. We stayed at the old Coronado





Hotel, which was Lewis Hall at the time.

The next time I visited St. Louis was when then-president Fr. Tom Fitzgerald invited me to be a member of the board of trustees in 1983. I remember that when I came to Saint Louis University for my first board meeting, I drove right past the Frost campus because nothing marked it.

I arrived to take on the job of president on the feast day of St. Lawrence on Aug. 10, 1987. Again, driving along the campuses, I still didn't know where they began and ended! Obviously I knew the College Church and Jesuit Hall, but it seemed like all the rest was asphalt. The buildings were in need of repair, and there was no green space to speak of—no places for people to relax.

After working here a few weeks, I took the opportunity to look more closely at our campuses and the nearby community. And I said to myself, "There needs to be something tying the campuses together."

It took me a little while—I couldn't tear up the asphalt until we built a parking garage—but by 1989 we had begun adding green space, constructing pedestrian archways and using the green copper roof as our signature motif.

But, you know, those are the cosmetic things. Really, I was first impressed by the people here. They were, and are, bright, talented and committed to Saint Louis University. They were ready for new opportunities, and so was I.

UTAS: *What do you remember about your inauguration day?*

Biondi: I was really impressed that the Mass of the Holy Spirit was outdoors, and I was impressed because it was held the same day as my inauguration. The

Mass was celebrated in the quadrangle on the Frost campus. Somehow the students knew that I was a scuba diver, so they gave me a snorkel, mask and fins. I still have them and still use them.

I remember fondly the openness of the students. They were very outgoing, but then, it's always been a joy to talk to students from across the United States

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and from different countries.

I also recall great excitement for myself and my family and a real sense of awe and inspiration. I was genuinely impressed by the warmth and honesty of SLU people and the large welcome from the entire St. Louis community.

I had a really long honeymoon as president. Fr. Fitzgerald had put the University on firm financial footing, and that allowed me to do some important strategic planning—even some dreaming, so to speak.

UTAS: *When you arrived, did the community recognize the important role of the University in the city, or do you think that respect has come in the last 10 years?*

Biondi: There always was a respect for Saint Louis University. But I sense that it's grown. People are excited about what's happening here. I keep hearing over and over about the University being the midtown anchor.

Maybe the enthusiasm for Saint Louis University has grown because education and health care have become more complex. And serving as president of the University is more challenging because all the various constituencies expect much more from the University than in the past.

UTAS: *What do you remember about your first year?*

Biondi: What first year? It was a total blur!

Actually, I remember that there was a lot going on. I remember meeting all kinds of new people at events and orientations and that there were countless administra-

tors trying to get my ear. I was a "baby" president just trying to get my footing. And I was doing my best to learn about Saint Louis University—the history, traditions and people. There is a definite "culture" here.

But I think I got the hang of all that pretty quickly. St. Louis is a city easy to appreciate, and it doesn't put on a lot of airs. Pretty much what you see is what you get.

One thing that impressed me that first



Opposite left: Biondi celebrates the Mass of the Holy Spirit in 1992. Opposite middle: Biondi with then First Lady Barbara Bush at the 1990 commencement. Opposite right: Biondi during his trustee days. Above: Biondi with Washington University Chancellor Mark S. Wrighton. Right: Biondi helps students plant a tree in 1991.



year was that Bill Danforth, who was then chancellor of Washington University, was the very first person to call me about the civic, business or educational leaders. He made me feel very welcome and aware of his deep respect for Saint Louis University. He spoke on behalf of all universities at my inauguration.

The second thing I was impressed with was the fact that it was easy, really easy, to get through to the mayor's office. In Chicago that would be very difficult to do. But because of Saint Louis University's excellent reputation in the metropolitan area, I found it extremely easy to have a meeting with then-mayor Vince Schoemehl. One of the first things I asked him was for the city's help in getting healthy trees planted up and down Grand Boulevard.

UTAS: *What have been your biggest challenges as president?*

Biondi: One challenge was establishing a uniform vision and engaging people to buy into it.

I think that is becoming less and less of a challenge now, but in the beginning some University administrators resisted having a very clear, distinct vision to become the finest Catholic university in the United States. In fact, one of the first things that my vice presidents challenged me on was creating a strategic plan, which was the first step in achieving that vision. They didn't want a

strategic plan because there was a great independence among the majority of the vice presidents. They all wanted to do their thing, and, of course, a strategic plan is all about unity.

That's similar to when I predicted very rashly during my second year that our men's Billiken basketball team would be in the Top 50 very soon. I heard a lot of laughter mixed with a lot of applause when I stated that goal. I felt at that time that people didn't take me seriously. They figured I was this young president who didn't know what I was talking about. But, sure enough, one thing led to another and within two years we were in the Top 50.

UTAS: *How important are athletics?*

Biondi: Athletics are important in developing a spirit among the students, faculty and staff, but especially among alumni, friends, benefactors and corporate leaders. You can't always have a winning season, but it's nice when the community is interested in seeing a local university do well in athletics.

The second important aspect is that a strong athletic program helps to build a national reputation and bring prestige to a university. Of course the recognition and reputation are nice, but I'm not just interested in recognition. I'm interested in the prestige that comes when there's good, solid academic strength among the athletes. Two years in a row Saint Louis University has led Conference USA with the highest grade point average among all of our student-athletes.

I'm more proud of that than any kind of win/loss record.

UTAS: *What have been your greatest accomplishments?*

Biondi: That's easy:

One—Increasing Saint Louis University's academic standards and achievements. Two—Tripling the endowment. Three—Furthering the quality of our faculty, staff and students. Four—Rebuilding the Madrid campus and its academic programs into the premier university in Europe. Five—The renovation and beautification of our campuses. Six—SLUCare. And seven—Providing more academic, service and social opportunities for our students.

UTAS: *What have been your disappointments?*

Biondi: NONE!

But if I had to say, I probably would answer, "not being able to do more—more quickly." But then again, maybe that's not all true. I do think I get a lot done. God has given me good health, abundant energy and a good team of administrators, deans and managers.

But perhaps my biggest disappointment is my lack of regular contact with the students. When I was at Loyola University Chicago as dean of Arts and Sciences, I had more time for casual interaction with students. I lived in a residence hall for seven years. But so much of that opportunity is virtually impossible as a president of a large university. There are only so many hours in



Above: University facilities specialists Rich Moffitt, Kathleen Brady, Biondi and Chuck Smith accept an Excellence in Masonry Architectural Design Award for campus improvements in 1997. **Above right:** Biondi with his mother, Albertina, and great nieces and nephews (left to right) Peter, Atina and Nicholas (on Biondi's lap).



the day, and sometimes you just have to decide where you can effect the greatest amount of change. It's my pond theory—you throw a pebble in a pond, and the bigger circles that radiate out are where you have the greatest influence.

UTAS: A lot of statues and art galleries have sprung up around the campuses during your tenure, and they've attracted attention, both positive and negative. What do you have to say about the artwork?

Biondi: I select the artwork. People ask, "What criteria do you have?" I say, "I don't—I just know what I like."

I think, despite the trite phrase, that beauty is in the eye of the beholder; if you don't like it, you don't have to look at it. I'm interested in fine art and culture, and I'm trying to get benefactors to contribute art to the University because art has been a long tradition of the Jesuit philosophy of education.

UTAS: What are your favorite pieces of art at Saint Louis University?

Biondi: There are two sculptures that I am very fond of. One is right outside DuBourg Hall, "The Classics." The boy, named Danny, has Down's

Syndrome, and he's posed reading to two other kids, who are the son and daughter of George Lundeen, the sculptor. I met all of them at a party at George Lundeen's home in Loveland, Colo. Those are three real kids. Now,

then they should step up and send me a check or contribute artwork to the University.

UTAS: Is there anything you'd like to do over again?

Biondi: I don't think in those terms.

Sometimes you take 10 steps forward and fall back three ... but you're still ahead.

I certainly evaluate every decision I make, but I do not regret anything. I just don't work that way. If I make 80 percent good decisions a day, I'd give myself an A+.

UTAS: Has your presidency been what you expected?

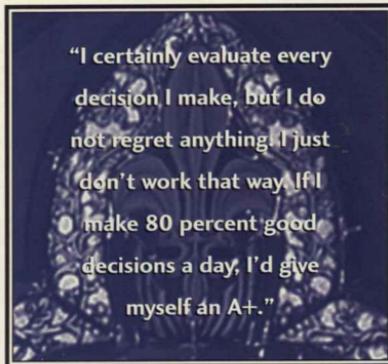
Biondi: This job has been everything and then some!

It's been a very intense experience with a very high level of stimuli that is absolutely incredible and unpredictable. Some great, some not so great. But it has to be handled.

I did not think it would be as varied as it has been. It's a job in which you do not become bored. No one day is the same as the previous day—I can honestly say that. Nothing is static.

Maybe there are presidents of colleges or universities who just enjoy the status quo. But if you have a vision and you want to carry things through, your zeal becomes pretty intense. And when you want to carry out your vision, you can't just concentrate on one ball in the air, you have to have at least a dozen.

UTAS: What are the best things about this job?



some people call it representational art or commercial art, but here's a boy who has made great efforts to learn how to read. The other sculpture I like is the Christ figure called "Quo Vadis." It is an enticing sculpture of Christ in the Père Marquette Gallery in DuBourg Hall.

I'm sorry that many people do not like my choices of art. But, unlike some university presidents, I don't have millions of dollars to spend to purchase sculptures by Moore or paintings by Picasso, Botero or Monet. I would like to have a \$900,000 Henry Moore, but I can't afford it. So if people want to see Saint Louis University have better art,

The Biondi File

Biondi: Absolutely the best part is working with the women and men who are Saint Louis University. It's the people who matter. I have been blessed with many friends in St. Louis, and I enjoy sharing our successes with them.

I also enjoy my role as a servant/leader. You can't be a leader without being a servant, and you should not be a servant without being a leader. To be an effective leader today, you have to walk in the others' moccasins to know what they experience and believe and feel.

If you take the word administrator apart, it means ministry to, or for, others. Therefore, part of my administration of the servant role is to help all of us to live and work in a culture, society and atmosphere that is conducive to learning. For example, if students don't have the basic talents and skills necessary for them to be successful at Saint Louis University, then they're inhibited to learn, and they have to go to another college. Our faculty and staff need good salaries so they don't have to worry about getting a second job, and they need a calm atmosphere. Students, staff and faculty all need green space to relax, to reflect, to think, because that's who we are.

But you can't lead in a theoretical framework. You have to understand, experience and appreciate their situations. And having been a faculty member, having served as a chaplain-counselor, having lived in a residence hall, I know what it takes. I know what students go through; I know their challenges and difficulties.

UTAS: Describe your management style.

Biondi: I am someone who listens, gathers information, analyzes what is important or not important, builds consensus and then makes the decision. Then I move on to the next challenge.

I also believe in empowering others to do their jobs. We have a lot of talented people at Saint Louis University. We have succeeded because our people are empowered to do their jobs.

One can't administer this large university and do everything personally. I don't believe in micro management; however, I do believe you micro manage until you get people to do what they are responsible to accomplish. Once you get the right person in the right position, you can keep your dis-

tance because that person is then carrying out your vision.

I don't make independent decisions that touch people's lives. I seek advice, counsel and opinion on everything from raising tuition to selling our hospital. I don't make decisions independently. You have to listen to people. I am convinced the Holy Spirit offers communal discernment to those who listen. That's an Ignatian principle that I trust and that has worked over and over again. You weigh the pros and the cons, and you see as objectively as possible what is the greatest good for the University, always keeping in mind the vision and Catholic, Jesuit mission of higher education.

UTAS: You've been no stranger to controversy. What stands out in your mind from some of those incidents?

Biondi: Controversy is relative, and it's in the past tense, yesterday's news. A university environment is highly charged and passionate. People react and respond because they care so deeply about Saint Louis University. But most of the time, controversy occurs quickly and is resolved quickly.

In the end, you can't worry about whether or not a decision is controversial. You just have to look constantly at the University's mission and goals and then make the best decisions.

We don't live in a perfect world. There are certain decisions that I feel are in the best interest of the University. Some students may want more freedom in academic or social situations, but their purpose here and my responsibility is for them to receive an education in our Catholic, Jesuit tradition.

It's not that I'm a rebel-rouser per se, but if you are going to improve a university in all aspects of academic life, that means sometimes going contrary to the status quo. Some prefer the status quo, but most people

Name: Lawrence Biondi, SJ

Position: University President

Born: Dec. 15, 1938

Education: I received a bachelor's degree in classical languages, a licentiate in philosophy and a master's of divinity from Loyola University of Chicago. I earned a licentiate in sacred theology from the Jesuit School of Theology at Chicago. And I received my master's in linguistics and doctorate in sociolinguistics from Georgetown University.

Best and worst jobs ever: Worst—Being a barber for five years while in the seminary. Best—Teaching French and Latin at St. Xavier High School in Cincinnati.

What refreshes you when you're burned out? Walking on a deserted beach.

Favorite vacation spot:
The Caribbean

A book I would recommend is ...: *Inside the Vatican* by Thomas J. Reese, SJ.

What music do you like best? Blues and jazz

Favorite television show: *Nightline*

Pet peeves: Small-minded, prejudiced people

Favorite restaurant: Steak 'n Shake

A movie I recommend: *The Mission*, directed by Roland Joffé and starring Robert DeNiro and Jeremy Irons

Favorite St. Louis sports team:
The Billikens, of course

Best advice your mother ever gave you:
Be honest and love the Lord.

Guilty pleasure: Microwave buttered popcorn

Almost nobody knows that ...
I snore.

Favorite childhood memory: Mastering the multiplication tables

What I'm proudest of: My parents

Someday I hope to ... travel to Australia.



want to be part of an institution that is dynamic, growing, positive, with a strong future.

UTAS: *What drives you?*

Biondi: My car ...

Seriously, I'm an Italian-American, Catholic, Jesuit priest, the youngest child in the family. If you can tell me what drives me, then I will give you the Sword of Loyola!

I suppose it goes all the way back to high school, where I was very active and got a reputation as being somewhat creative and imaginative. People here have called me a visionary leader. Now, that may sound like peacocking, but I'm very competitive—not for me, but for Saint Louis University. If you want to be a true leader, then one has to do less talking and do more acting. "Actions speak louder than words."

UTAS: *Where did your vision that Saint Louis University become the finest Catholic university in the United States come from?*

Biondi: It began when I was a Saint Louis University trustee and was learning about the possibilities for the University, as well as understanding the challenges. I had an awareness of the need to re-invigorate.

Certainly, leaders such as Frs. Fitzgerald, Reinert, McGannon, Marchetti and Drummond and my good

"You can learn ethical norms of behavior from books and lectures, but unless that knowledge touches your life and you've made a change in your behavior toward other people, you've missed the point."

friends Dan Schlafly, Bucky Bush and Joe Adorjan [former chairmen of the University's board of trustees] and Mike Shanahan are inspirational. They and many others have helped Saint Louis University come very far over the past decade.

UTAS: *What's the biggest problem facing the University in the next 10 years?*

Biondi: There are several challenges that I see ahead. First of all, levels of federal funds for education probably will continue to decline. Secondly, I think that the government and consumers



increasingly will hold educational leaders responsible for student outcomes. Then there's the incredible cost of technology. And I also think that the next generation of students will have diverse and very different learning styles. All of these will force us to redesign how we teach and to rethink how students will learn and what technologies they will use in the learning process.

UTAS: *If you could change one thing about the University, what would it be?*

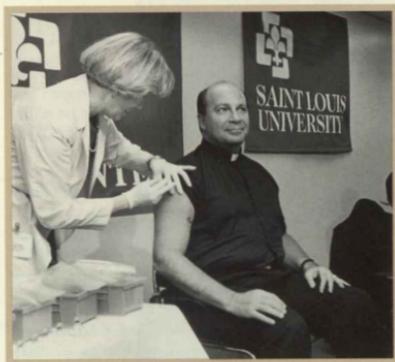
Biondi: Move it to the Cayman Islands!

But realistically, students are only going to come to a college or university that is safe, secure, dynamic and academically challenging. The greatest challenge is making Saint Louis University, particularly its undergraduate divisions, more recognized nationally. I think we've succeeded physically and intellectually, and we have a very generous scholarship program. Now we have to market the University more effectively, and we have to, so to speak, take the light out from under the bushel basket. Once people experience SLU, they get excited, enthusiastic and committed to Saint Louis University.

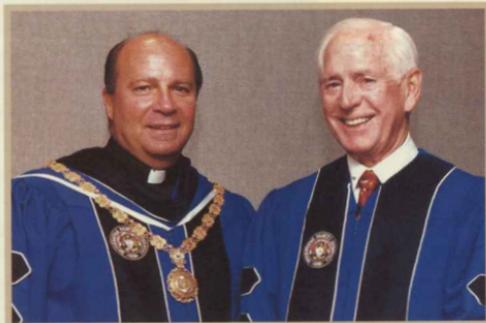
UTAS: *What's more important, teaching or research?*

Biondi: Teaching and research are equally important and are not mutually exclusive. I don't think you can do one well without the other.

But I'd like to add that I think service has been emphasized here at Saint Louis



Opposite far left: Biondi at a prayer breakfast. Opposite left: Biondi at his inauguration in 1987 with William H.T. Bush, then chairman of the board of trustees. Above: Biondi, participating in an AIDS vaccine trial, receives his first shot in 1993. Above right: Biondi and broadcaster Jack Buck at the 1995 commencement.



solid ethical and religious training. But I'd also add Tom Fitzgerald, my predecessor here, Frs. Marchetti, Reinert and McGannon, and my past and current assistants.

But I don't want to keep mentioning just administrators. I really admire all the Jesuits and the example they set. At Jesuit Hall there are so many men who live outstanding, inspirational lives. They don't get the glory, but I admire their spirituality and dedication.

There also are plenty of University friends and alumni who set wonderful examples for all of us as well.

UTAS: *What do you do in your spare time?*

Biondi: Well, when I do get spare time, I spend as much as possible with my family and friends. I also read incessantly—books and magazines on a broad spectrum of subjects—to keep in touch with life.

UTAS: *What's next?*

Biondi: Leading Saint Louis University to the next level of greatness and fulfilling our vision. We are on the way there—all the signs point to it—but we have some way to go.

Also, I hope we'll continue to be part of the incredible rebirth of the city of St. Louis.

I also hope that all of us at the University will continue to dream big and be successful. Five years ago some of my friends told me that Saint Louis University could never raise \$200 million, but we did it in less than five years!

UTAS: *What does the successful conclusion of the "Campaign for Saint Louis*

University: Our Promise for the Future in the Jesuit Tradition," which raised \$221 million, mean to you?

Biondi: It means that people believe in the University and that people think what we're doing here is good. Some of the hardest things to get people to let go of are time and money. So when people give you their time and their money, it tells me that they believe in our university, in its mission, in our students, in our faculty and staff, and in me.

UTAS: *What would you like to say to alumni?*

Biondi: I hope they have a true sense of the renaissance taking place at their alma mater. It's not just the physical improvements that they see in UNIVERSITAS. I hope they appreciate what's going on in the academic departments and schools in the University. The quality of students is the best ever; we're among the top three Catholic universities in research; we're publishing more academic journals and endowing professorships; and our endowment has grown five-fold.

And they should know that no matter when they graduated, the heart of Saint Louis University is still the same—it's still all about people. That's part of our Jesuit tradition.

UTAS: *If your presidency ended tomorrow, what do you hope people would remember about your tenure?*

Biondi: I hope they'd know that I cared passionately about Saint Louis University and about the women and men who have made it what it is today. And I hope they'd think I made a difference and that I lived up to the ideals of St. Ignatius Loyola. ✦

UTAS: *Whom do you admire? Who are your role models?*

Biondi: That's quite a list of people. First I'd say my parents: They gave me