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## Becker reflects on 22 years Insights and anecdotes from retiring ass't VP

By HOWARD KAMAN

After more than 20 years at York University, John Becker, Assistant Vice-President (Business Operations) has retired. And although he has enjoyed his years at York, he is disillusioned with some of the projects the University is currently undertaking.

Becker came to York in 1966, working from Glendon College. In 1967, he moved into the newly built Atkinson College, and worked as assistant to the Dean.

"I had a whole range of different kinds of jobs," said Becker, mentioning the first non-degree programmes at York which he helped set up with the Centre for Continuing Education. He described a course on European art museums taught at Yorkdale plaza, because "we didn't have any space on campus."

With 22 years of hindsight, Becker is looking at the changes the University has been through, and sees the good and the bad. His office is adorned with mementos of his years on campus. In one corner, a framed parking ticket leans against the wall — the only Metro Police parking ticket ever issued on York campus, given to John Becker.

On a shelf lies a framed five dollar bill of scrip, the 0000001 bill from several years back. He seems to have enjoyed his time here, and looks at it with fond memories.

In 1968, he moved from Atkinson to the new McLaughlin College, and took on two new jobs. For two years he served as both Senior Tutor in McLaughlin College, and as assistant to president Murray Ross.

As the Assistant Vice-President of Student Affairs, a position which he held from 1969 to 1984, Becker had to deal with the many problems that students have had over the years.

As Becker explained, "The role that I had is the role that became the Provost's. The difference between the role that I had, and the role that Tom Meininger has (is that) Tom Meininger's background is an academic background."

After creating the position of Provost, and bringing in Meininger, the University moved Becker to Business Operations.

Student Affairs allowed him to hear the concerns of the student body, but Business Operations gave him the opportunity to address those concerns. He believes that one of the greatest changes the University has seen over the years has been a change in the average student's attitude.

"Students seemed to be more serious as we came into the 80s. Part of that had to do with the fact that the University got bigger and there was more, perhaps, economic pressure on people to pursue careers and pursue the professional courses.

"I guess my feeling was that the average age of the student tended to go up, and there seemed to be a little more seriousness."

With the enormous growth of the university over the years, the campus

has become overcrowded. Becker blames the over-crowdedness of Central Square, in particular, on bad design — namely the Square's proximity to the Curtis Lecture Halls.

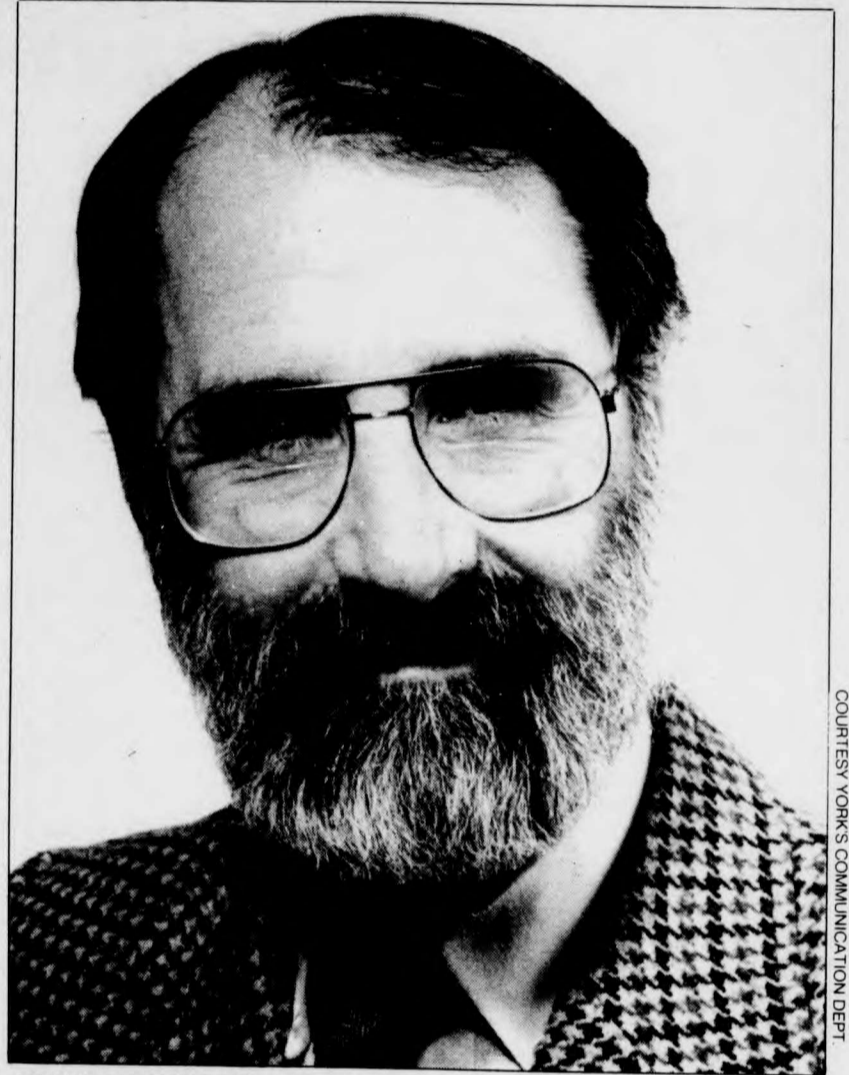
"If the Curtis Lecture Halls weren't there you wouldn't feel quite as much congestion. It's not the Central Square that's causing it, it's this huge lecture hall."

While he sees the current construction on campus as a good step in correcting the problem, he also sees it as coming fairly late in the

start building residences before we did because the housing crisis in the city is really hurting a lot of students. If we had been able to start a little earlier, we could have accommodated more students."

If the University doesn't keep up its momentum of building new residences, Becker explained, the housing problem will continue.

Another problem on that he foresees on campus is the increased involvement of private corporations. In the Student Centre, for example,



**JOHN BECKER:** The retiring assistant VP looks at the changes York has gone through in the last 22 years.

game.

"I think maybe there's a problem of timing of when these other facilities might have been built. But the University was subjected to a building freeze as early as 1972.

"If the University planners had some good ideas about how they would resolve congestion which, say, appeared in 1976, they didn't have any money to do it with. So some of these things aren't a matter of planning, they're a matter of not having the bucks at the right time."

Becker estimates that the new residences slated for completion in 1990 "will accommodate about half of the people that are on our waiting lists."

He also attributes part of the residence problem with "what's happening in the city as far as rental housing is concerned. It hardly exists and it's very expensive when you do find it.

"I'm a little sad that we didn't

all of the food outlets will run independently of the University. Becker believes that this will ultimately result in financial difficulties.

"Some of these operations are healthier, deliver a higher quality of service, and deliver better service if they are monopolies. With the arrival of the Student Centre and the arrival of Yorklanes, we don't have a monopoly, Becker sees an advantage in being able to run "10 or 12 different restaurants as one cost centre. If you separate these things you're not going to have this freedom to manage the whole thing as a single cost centre.

This lack of a centre will have repercussions for the University, says Becker.

"The food service department will lose money because it won't have all of the business that it used to have. There's going to be competition for price, competition for hours of service."

"So we may find that the Student Centre profit targets are very difficult to realize as those operations come under pressure. What happens when the Student Centre doesn't make its profit targets? I suppose one of the things they could do is turn the lights off and lock the doors."

Becker is ready to close his doors to York. His reasons for leaving are twofold.

Firstly, he believes that the loss of monopoly he described has taken away from his role on campus, as his department has lost some control.

His other reason is more philosophical.

"I'll be 57 years old on my next birthday," he said. "I have a number of things I'd like to experience, rather than getting up every morning and coming down to York. I've been working for 35 years now. I can take some freedom."

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