

The

By Sam Bishop

Vocal residents of Fairbanks clashed in spring 2004. The local environmental center had appealed a federal water discharge permit sought by developers of a nearby hard rock mine. The mine owners stopped construction, putting hundreds out of work. An environmental center representative said the company was trying to turn a stream into “their own unregulated private waste dump.” Mine supporters picketed the center, waving signs and honking horns.

Seeking a way out of the impasse, the mining corporation’s regional manager turned to Brian Rogers.

Rogers, who co-owned a company specializing in public policy analysis and mediation, led talks culminating in an all-night session through which he shuttled proposals between the two sides until they had an agreement.

“We finished at 4:30 in the morning,” recalled Karl Hanneman, then-environmental affairs manager for the mining corporation, Teck-Pogo Inc. “We all went home and took a shower, came back and had our pictures taken with the governor.”

Score another success for “the flow master.”

That’s the moniker Rogers first earned decades earlier in another job that employed his ability to make things happen — manager for the early-1970s Fairbanks rock band The Glass Bead Game.

Flow Master

Background image: UAF photo by JR Andrich.

More than 40 years later, Rogers retired Aug. 31 with the title of “chancellor emeritus” of the University of Alaska Fairbanks, but “flow master” captures best the essence of the man, judging by testimony from friends and colleagues.

“He is one of the more effective people I’ve ever met, a leader in the best sense of the word, who has vision and knows how to motivate people and bring together people of all sorts of persuasions and backgrounds,” said former professor Vic Fischer.

Fischer, who also served as a delegate to the Alaska Constitutional Convention and in the Legislature, first encountered Rogers in the early 1970s when the future chancellor sold lemonade from a truck on the Fairbanks campus. Rogers’ retirement followed decades of varied work and public service, but much of it, like that lemonade truck, has linked him to the university.

From firefighter to band manager

Now that he has retired, neither Rogers nor his spouse, Sherry Modrow, expect those connections to dissolve. “Sherry and I will continue to be involved in the university,” he said. “I’ve had some affiliation since 1970. That’s 45 years. You don’t walk away from that.”

The affiliation began as a 19-year-old student. Rogers, originally from Blue Hill, Maine, arrived in Fairbanks looking for work as a wildland firefighter. A fraternity brother at Brown University had made good money fighting Alaska fires in summer 1969 and talked Rogers into returning with him.



Photo courtesy of Brian Rogers.

Customers line up at The Lemon Tree on the Fairbanks campus during a summer day in the early 1970s. Brian Rogers still has the now-weathered artwork that decorated his food truck, and a photograph of it provides the background image above.

“1970 was not a big fire season,” Rogers recalled wryly. Alaska left a big impression, though. “I fell in love with Alaska and decided I would transfer to the University of Alaska.”

Rogers’ already keen interest in public affairs prompted him to run successfully for a student government post in his first year. He also entered the newspaper business, working for The Polar Star, a predecessor of The Sun Star, and at the Fairbanks-based All-Alaska Weekly. He did some reporting for the weekly, and then became Polar Star editor in 1972.

To make money in the summer, Rogers created The Lemon Tree, a one-ton post office truck outfitted to sell lemonade. Fellow student Luke Hopkins, now Fairbanks borough mayor, installed a custom door. The truck, which Rogers operated in summers from 1971-1974, was enormously popular.

In summer 1974, Rogers managed The Glass Bead Game’s five-week tour of Alaska. Susan McInnis sang with group. “At some point along the way, it occurred to us that Brian was the flow master,” she said. “We needed to be paid. Brian figured it out. We needed someone to talk to the people who were going to hire us. Brian did that. He made that happen.”



UAF photo by JR Ancheta

Sherry Modrow and Brian Rogers enjoy the 2013 Chancellor's Gala. The annual events have raised more than \$280,000 for university programs and community partners since 2010.

"He did it with grace and skill," she said. "That's kind of the way I've looked at him."

The same year, Rogers started building a house on Birch Hill, cut his ponytail and ran for state legislative office. He didn't win, but he kept looking for ways to enter politics.

Finishing school became secondary to other interests and needs. Rogers "essentially ran out of money, had to get a job," he said.

Thriving on issues

In spring 1975, Rogers went to see Mike Bradner, a Democratic state legislator from Fairbanks. Bradner said he had a secretary's position open. "Before I could say another word, he said, 'I'll take it,'" Bradner recalled.

Rogers met Modrow the next year when they served together on the board of directors for the Fairbanks Solstice Festival, an annual music fair. Rogers and Modrow married in 1979.

During the mid-1970s, Rogers worked in Juneau, first for Bradner and then other Democratic legislators. Rogers was energetic and astute, said Bradner, who today publishes two subscription newsletters, the Alaska Legislative Digest and the Alaska Economic Report.

"If he didn't have an assignment, he found one," Bradner said. "He was also a data person, and that was probably good in those days. It was pre-Internet. He'd show up with his charts."

From student to university advocate

By Sherry Modrow

Born and mostly raised in Alaska, I enrolled at the University of Alaska in 1967 and lived in Wickersham Hall. I relaxed in the Constitution Hall SUB (student union), dragged myself to 8 a.m. classes, joined the small gymnastics team and made good friends.


Out of money, I took a year off, returning in 1969. A scholarship-funded summer of study in France and the support of professors Hollerbach, Gordon and Pourny saw me through to a B.A. in French. I graduated in the 50th commencement — 1972 — also President Wood's final term, and I returned in the 1980s for a master's in teaching.

With many friends in common, surprisingly Brian and I did not know each other until 1976, when we wrote bylaws and nonprofit papers for the Summer Solstice organization. We married in 1979 and made his cabin a house as our boys came along. Great memories include family time at fish camp on the Yukon River.

Our son Chris earned a B.A. in journalism from UAF and works in Colorado. Tracy returned home after college for his M.S. in natural resources; he and his wife, Heather, moved to Seattle last year.

After Brian became interim chancellor, we wanted to use the chancellor's house to bring people together. Its comfortable atmosphere helped create positive relationships on campus as well as with community members. We maintained a busy schedule of receptions, dinners, meetings, house concerts and lawn parties. I loved getting to know talented faculty, staff, alumni and students.

I continued professional work at Information Insights until 2012. Meanwhile, adopting the title of university advocate gave some cachet to my campus volunteer role. My first major initiative at UAF, the Chancellor's Gala, has become a successful community fundraiser. I served on the UA Museum advisory committee, the planning group for a Center for Salmon and Society, and the centennial committee; and I traveled with Brian for UAF and the University of the Arctic.

Moving forward, I hope to help with fundraising initiatives for Troth Yeddha', Alaska Center for Energy and Power, and centennial scholarships and fellowships. Always a proud Nanook, I am delighted to have had this unique role as the UAF chancellor's spouse. 



Modrow receives a hug from husband Brian Rogers as the two are applauded for their service to UAF on July 6 during the 100th anniversary rededication of the university's cornerstone.



Photos courtesy of Brian Rogers and Sherry Modrow

At left, Rogers stands next to his Subaru wagon and campaign vehicle in 1978. Fairbanks-area voters elected him to the state House that year and again in 1980. At center, Rogers places a ring on Sherry Modrow's finger during their wedding in 1979. At right, Rogers and Modrow with sons Chris, standing, and Tracy at their Yukon River fish camp in 1987.

"He was very social, and that helps," Bradner added. "I can't ever remember him have a serious dislocation with anybody."

In 1978, at 28 years old, Rogers ran again for the state House as a Democrat and was elected. As a legislator, Rogers continued his affiliation with the university, becoming chair of the university budget subcommittee in the House Finance Committee.



Rogers, as UAF chancellor, tosses the traditional rotten watermelon from the top of the Gruening Building during SpringFest 2013.

"He thrived on the issues, not the politics," Bradner said. "He knew the politics; he was good at it, but he thrived on the issues."

At the time, large sums of oil tax money began to arrive in the state treasury, following the 1977 start-up of the trans-Alaska oil pipeline. "When state revenue increased, I was able to get

major amounts of new money into the university, with over a 30 percent increase one year," Rogers said.

Rogers was re-elected in 1980, but a 1981 coup in the House put Anchorage Republican Rep. Joe Hayes in the speaker's chair. Rogers decided not to run for re-election in 1982.

He and Modrow went fishing instead.

A great way to raise kids

Modrow, whose father worked for Wien Airlines, grew up in Nome, Kotzebue and Fairbanks. After high school Outside, she began attending UAF in the late 1960s. While in school, she lived for several years with the family of her mother's best friend, Wien flight attendant Jeanne Wright. Wright's part-Athabaskan husband, Al, founded an air service. They also ran a fish camp on the Yukon River where Modrow spent part of each summer.

When Modrow's grandmother died, she left some money, so she and Rogers used it to buy a commercial salmon fishing permit for the middle Yukon. In 1982, they built their own fish camp on an island downstream from the Dalton Highway bridge.

Rogers and Modrow also started raising a family, with sons Chris born in 1980 and Tracy in 1984.

"We joked that it was semi-commercial fishing, but it was a great way to raise kids on the river, a great way to enjoy the summer in Alaska," Rogers said.

They continued to fish through 1999, even while working at their town jobs and dabbling in other enterprises, including shared ownership of the All-Alaska Weekly in the late 1980s.

A better policymaker

Commercial fishing wasn't going to keep Rogers busy during winters, though. So, in fall 1983, he entered Harvard University's John F. Kennedy School of Government and earned his master's degree the next June.

“I just have always respected his skills. He’s out there. He’s enthusiastic with people. He’s an incredible policy and data analyst.”

Fischer, the former professor who served in the Legislature with Rogers, said he encouraged Rogers to attend the Harvard school.

“It made him an even better public policymaker and administrator,” Fischer said of Rogers’ time at Harvard.

Three days after graduating, Rogers went to work as budget director for the University of Alaska’s statewide system in Fairbanks. In 1986, oil prices dropped, forcing deep cuts and a restructuring of the system, in which Rogers had a large role.

Rogers rose to the position of UA vice president for finance before leaving the university in 1995. He and Modrow joined Ellen Ganley and her spouse, Rick Lonn, to form the consulting firm Information Insights the next year. The company provides clients with research-based issue analysis, but Rogers also specialized in moderating large meetings and negotiating agreements, such as the Pogo Mine deal.

“I just have always respected his skills,” Ganley said. “He’s out there. He’s enthusiastic with people. He’s an incredible policy and data analyst.”

Return to the university

In 1999, Gov. Tony Knowles pulled Rogers back to the university by appointing him to the UA Board of Regents. Rogers spent eight years on the board, including three as chairman.

“The university had not been able to do much in terms of programs and facilities in the ’90s, and then really exploded, much of it in Anchorage and not Fairbanks,” Rogers said. “But we were able to add degree programs, a lot at the vocational area,

things like process technology ... and I think really put a much firmer foundation under UAF’s rural campuses.”

Rogers’ appointment came about a year after regents had selected retired U.S. Army Gen. Mark Hamilton as the university’s statewide president.

Hamilton said his relationship with Rogers was “overwhelmingly very good and very collaborative.”

“We certainly had some disagreements and were very adamant in our stances,” Hamilton said. “He, being the chair, would win.”

Hamilton remained president 12 years, long enough to name Rogers as interim chancellor in 2008 when the previous chancellor left.

“Here was Brian, who was chair of the board of regents, where he was my boss, then at UAF, where I was his boss,” Hamilton said. “But the relationship never changed.”

Choosing Rogers as permanent chancellor after the interim period wasn’t difficult, he said.

“When you have an interim like that, the people who might otherwise apply will kind of just check the air a bit and say ‘How’s he doing?’ and ‘Do you think the president likes him?’ or ‘Does the faculty?’ And if they say ‘Yes, everybody likes him,’ they say ‘Why bother?’” Hamilton said. “So it was pretty much by acclamation.”

Courting the community

Unbidden standing ovations marked Rogers’ last few months at the university. Faculty stood and clapped at the commencement ceremony. Staff did the same at a luncheon the next week. And when a variety of community and campus people gathered to mark the 100th anniversary of



UAF photo by JR Ancheta.

1950

Born in Blue Hill, Maine, to Joan S. and Raymond Rogers Jr.

1970

Enrolled at UA

1972

Served as editor of The Polar Star, UA’s student newspaper

1976

Met Sherry Modrow ’72, ’85

1978

Elected to Alaska House of Representatives

1979

Married Sherry



Rogers helps open an expanded Wood Center, featuring a new dining facility, in August 2014. Rogers, as a student, voted for bonds to build the original center, which was completed in 1972.

the university's cornerstone in early July, they jumped up and clapped again.

Rogers said he had a hard time speaking after the faculty honored him with their applause at commencement. "I don't know how often administrators get ovations from faculty, but that one was very meaningful to me," he said.

As chancellor, Rogers said, he had a few central accomplishments of which he is proud.

He energetically promoted the university's reputation as the expert institution on Arctic science and policy. While that work required an international vision, Rogers also concluded that building a closer connection to the Fairbanks and Alaska community was necessary for the university to make essential improvements, he said.

"I came in knowing that the community and the university were not as connected as we needed to be," he said. "I spent a lot of effort on the community connection."

During Rogers' tenure, UAF completed the Murie Building, expanded Wood Center, launched a new veterinary medicine program, got a start on the new engineering facility and secured funding for a new heat and power plant.

Modrow and Rogers serve freshly squeezed lemonade for UAF employees during Staff Appreciation Day in 2013.

Such expansion required community support to secure legislative approval and funding, particularly for the heat and power plant. "The entire community mobilized to say that to have a campus in Fairbanks, Alaska, you need to have heat," Rogers said.

The Wood Center expansion forms a curious bookend to Rogers' long history with UAF. As a student, Rogers voted for the bonds, backed by student fees, that provided the construction money to complete the original building in 1972. Then he worked briefly on a crew repairing the rubber roof membrane, which had been damaged by a fuel spill.

As a legislator, Rogers secured funding to pay off the bonds so students were no longer burdened with the fee.

"I came in knowing that the community and the university were not as connected as we needed to be ... I spent a lot of effort on the community connection."



Rogers receives an ovation during the commencement ceremony in May 2015, just a few weeks after announcing he would retire in August.

1980

Son Chris '04 born

Elected to state House again

1984

Son Tracy '12 born

Earned master's degree from Harvard University's John F. Kennedy School of Government, hired as UA budget director three days later

1995

Retired from UA as vice president for finance

1996

Formed Information Insights with partners Sherry Modrow, Ellen Ganley and Rick Lonn

1999

Appointed to UA Board of Regents by Gov. Tony Knowles, served until 2007

2008

Appointed interim chancellor at UAF by UA President Mark Hamilton

2015

Retired as UAF chancellor emeritus



UAF photo by JR Ancheta

Rogers reviews old student newspapers with Sam Allen, editor of The Sun Star, during a 2014 open house at the newspaper's office in Constitution Hall. Rogers served as editor of The Polar Star, a predecessor, in 1972.

"But the part I'm proudest of is this latest addition," Rogers said. The 34,000-square-foot expansion, which opened in August 2014, houses the new central campus dining facility and was financed with a private-public partnership.

Rogers' focus on connecting with the community also has increased private donations to the university. "People don't donate if they don't feel like it's something they want to be a part of," Rogers said.

Rogers encouraged more alumni to give. It seems to be working. "Our alumni giving is up by double digits every year," he said.

Modrow, who adopted the title "university advocate," has been an integral part of the fundraising effort.

"UAF has gotten a two-for-one," said Bob Shefchik, who worked as Rogers' executive officer from 2009 to 2013. "Sherry has been there — not just being the hostess at the receptions — she's played an integral role."

Stressful times

Rogers issued an email to university employees on April 16, just as the Legislature was approving deep cuts to the institution. Rogers announced that he would retire as chancellor in August and would not seek to lead the statewide system following President Pat Gamble's retirement, which was scheduled at about the same time.

"I am an optimistic person," Rogers wrote in the email. "That has required me to internalize the issues and decisions we are making, to maintain that positive outlook. This stress is negatively affecting my health, and I cannot ignore this effect."

In a June interview, Rogers added that there was a little more to the story.

"It became clear that the board [of regents] was split on my candidacy [for the presidency]," he said, "and as I thought

about the stress of working for a divided board, that wasn't appealing. So I think that had as much or more to do with it."

Hamilton, the former president, said Rogers' decision makes sense on another level. "The presidency is going to be so difficult in this economic downturn," Hamilton said. "He [would] be presiding over a significant diminishment of resources, and that's a shame."

Just doing the job might be impossible for someone who has spent a career within the system, he said. "You end up facing having to take down programs that you helped to start."

Rogers warned against the damage greater cuts could inflict.

"It's my hope that the state will realize that if we don't want to crash the state's economy, we need to keep investing in higher education, and that's going to require some broad-based taxation. It's going to require some Permanent Fund income. It's going to require the balancing of oil production, price and taxes at an appropriate level. And probably some more budget cuts. We need to do all of those," Rogers said.

Looking out for others

Rogers leaves an impressive professional legacy, but people who know him also speak of his personal charm and generosity.

"He's the smartest man in the world, even though he doesn't act like that," Shefchik said. "He's got a kind heart."

Shefchik said he'd seen Rogers in a variety of settings and always admired his lack of ego.

"It's my hope that the state will realize that if we don't want to crash the state's economy, we need to keep investing in higher education."

"He'll leave a good idea for a better one, even if it's his," Shefchik said.

Pat Pitney, Rogers' former vice chancellor of administration who now works as budget director for Gov. Bill Walker, said she would never have gotten her current job without Rogers' advocacy.

"He teaches people, without being a teacher," she said. "He really helps people improve every step of the way, by example



Photo courtesy of Brian Rogers and Sherry Modrow.

ODE TO THE MUSTACHE



By Jesse Manchester '10, '12

I remember the first time I saw him. I was just a wide-eyed undergrad at an awards ceremony, intimidated by the dignified guests.

And there he was.

He was up there at the podium, silently demanding the attention of distinguished members of the campus community. He lay with such quiet confidence as the chancellor gave his prepared oration. I don't really remember what the chancellor said, but the impression his mustache had on me will continue to influence my life for decades to come.

The legendary Chancellor's Mustache has become an institution at UAF and has ushered in a new era of renewed masculinity and revitalized veracity on campus. The truest hipster does not aim to inspire — they just are inspirational. The Mustache just is.

That first introduction to the Chancellor's Mustache at the ceremony inspired me. It was uplifting to see such a traditionalist own his identity in a world of conformity. In an effort to explore my identity, I grew my own mustaches — yes, plural. I tried all the different types I could: the chevron, handlebars, Fu Manchu, the dirty Sanchez, Caesar Chavez, the railroad tycoon, the Tom Selleck — you name it, I tried it.

I was lucky enough to have several opportunities to work closely with the Chancellor's Mustache. Early on, I managed to take a picture with him and the coveted Tradition Stone with some of my brothers in the Alpha Phi Omega co-ed service fraternity. Later on in my career, I also got to be there as the Chancellor's Mustache was on display when we threw the first watermelon drop during SpringFest.

My brothers and I even built a bonfire as an homage to the Chancellor's Mustache during the university's annual Starvation Gulch.

Congratulations on Brian Rogers' retirement. I would like to thank him for his stalwart service to the students over the last six years. But mostly, thank you for the Chancellor's Mustache. 🍷

Rogers used this photograph during his successful 1980 campaign for a Fairbanks seat in the Alaska House.

but also by the work he gives them to do, the free rein he gives them to accomplish it.”

McInnis, the Glass Bead Game vocalist who later spent many years as a radio and television journalist at KUAC, said Rogers always seemed to find ways to combine a caring nature with his work.

“When he got the job as chancellor, I sent him a note: ‘The flow master rises again,’” McInnis said. “I’m sure he must be aware of in what ways he is intelligent, and how his ambition — which I don’t consider a bad thing — can merge with his skills and his heart to have a fulfilling life.” 🍷

Sam Bishop is an editor and writer at UAF Marketing and Communications. Born in Alaska, he previously worked as a newspaper journalist in Fairbanks, Anchorage, Juneau and Washington, D.C. He has lived in Fairbanks long enough that his recollections of Rogers date back to the time when the former chancellor had not only a prominent mustache but also a ponytail.

KUAC
TV 9 • FM 89.9
www.kuac.org

Listen to an upcoming interview with Brian Rogers by Rob Prince, associate professor of journalism, on KUAC FM and <http://kuac.org>. Check the station's website for the broadcast schedule.

Rogers holds a T-shirt featuring an interpretation of his mustache that was auctioned during the 2014 Chancellor's Gala.



Jesse Manchester is a multiyear alumnus of UAF, with bachelor's degrees in political science and foreign languages already earned and a master's in secondary education on its way.