

# A Perfect Fit

STORY BY RYAN CAMERON

FOR THE MAJORITY OF **DIE-HARD OKLAHOMA STATE ENTHUSIASTS**, THE LOVE OF ALL THINGS ORANGE AND BLACK DEVELOPS AT AN EARLY AGE. OFTENTIMES THEY ARE BORN INTO A LOYALTY THAT PASSES FROM GENERATION TO GENERATION, OR IT MATERIALIZES WHENEVER THEY SET FOOT ON CAMPUS TO BEGIN LIFE AS A STUDENT.

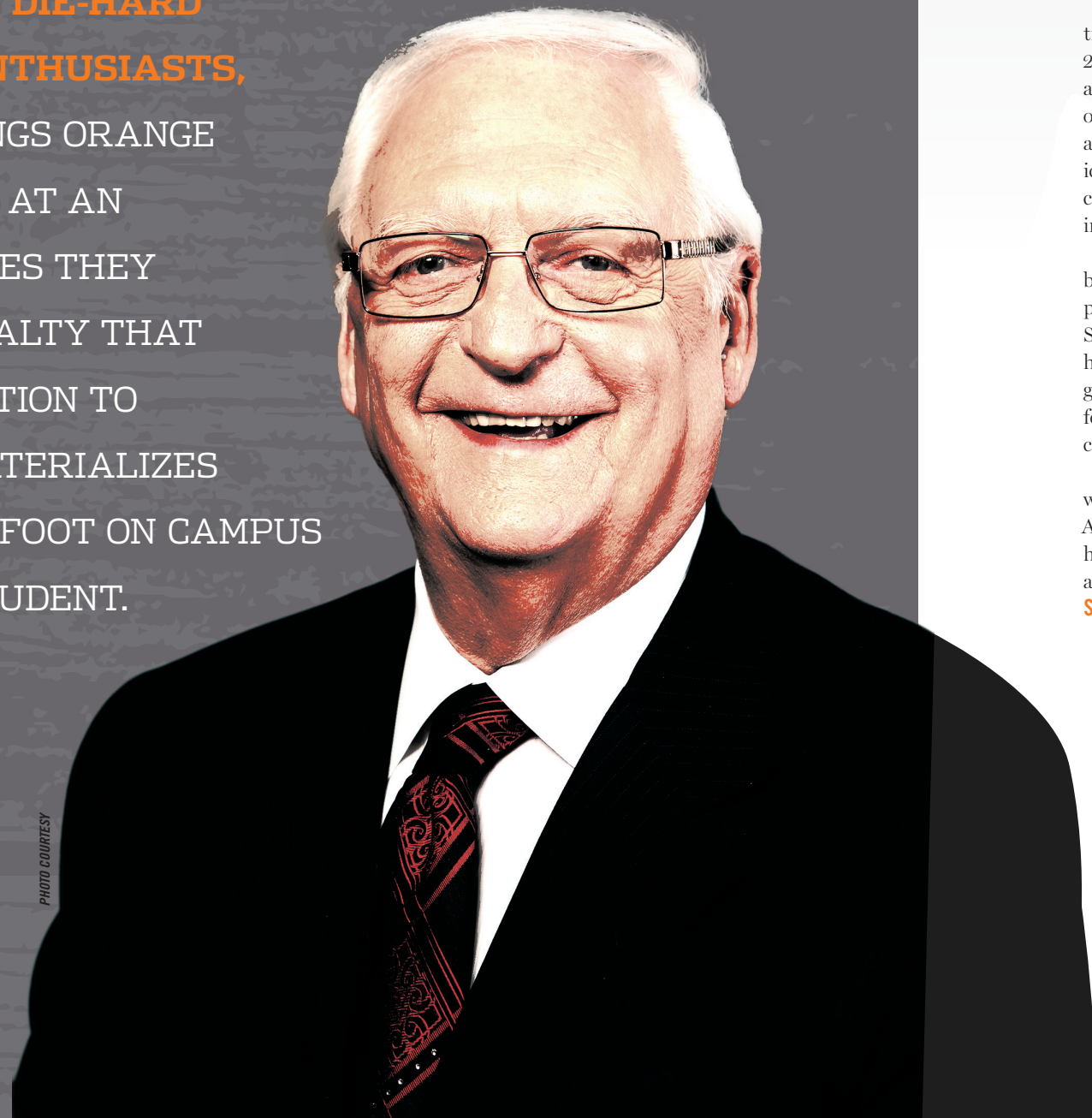


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**BOB FUNK, ONE OF OSU'S MOST PROMINENT SUPPORTERS, SAW HIS PASSION AND ADMIRATION FOR THE UNIVERSITY COME TO FRUITION AT A LATER STAGE IN LIFE, WELL AFTER HE HAD DIPLOMA IN HAND.**

With degrees in business administration and theology from an institution nearly 2,000 miles from Stillwater (Seattle Pacific) and with graduate work at the University of Edinburgh in Scotland, Funk may seem an unusual fit as one of OSU's most significant contributors. However, it is quite the contrary according to the man who was instrumental in the union of the two parties.

"Mr. Funk's Cowboy ethics, love for agribusiness and competitive spirit provided the perfect backdrop for him to adopt Oklahoma State as his 'state school.' The relationship has been wonderful and all parties have greatly benefited," said **Craig Clemons**, a former athletics administrator at OSU and current Funk employee.

Raised in Duvall, Wash., Funk grew up working on a dairy farm owned by his family. At an early age he came to the conclusion he wanted to become a minister, rancher and entrepreneur. **TO NO ONE'S SURPRISE, HE SUCCEEDED ON ALL COUNTS.**

**AMONG HIS MOST SUCCESSFUL VENTURES WAS THE CREATION OF EXPRESS RANCHES, WHICH UNQUESTIONABLY SPEAKS TO THE CULTURE OF OSU'S CAMPUS.** The operation houses thousands of Angus cattle on nearly 200,000 acres of land across seven locations. Additionally, the venture is also the leading Angus cattle producer as well as the top seed stock producer in the country.

"One of the big reasons that Bob Funk and Oklahoma State are a great fit is simple. We share the same values, which are at the heart of everything we do and every decision that we make. It has been a mutually beneficial relationship in part because we view the world the same way," said OSU Athletics Director **Mike Holder**.

Funk came on board as an athletic donor during the department's *Next Level* campaign, providing continued momentum toward the renovation and expansion of Boone Pickens Stadium.

"I admire great salespeople and anybody who was as aggressive as he was to come and see me umpteen times I felt there was an opportunity there," Funk said.

Inspired by the significant funding donated to the campaign by Pickens, **FUNK TOOK A LEAP OF FAITH AND BOUGHT INTO THE VISION FOR THE FUTURE OF OSU ATHLETICS PAINTED BY CLEMONS.**

In June of 2004, a little more than a year after a \$20 million gift toward the campaign came via Pickens, Funk joined the movement to construct one of the finest football facilities in the country. With a \$6.5 million pledge to the cause, the stadium's club level now bears the name of Funk's company, Express Employment Professionals, an operation he co-founded. He still serves as the CEO and Chairman of the Board.

"Boone certainly helped out with the programs. With what he initiated and we have participated in as well, I would say he has had an influence on my decision-making and an influence on the donation and the giving that we have had," Funk said.

"Hopefully, we have helped them and they have helped us to develop as a company and as individuals as well."


In addition to the vision for the growth of Cowboy Football, Funk's admiration for the university and its standing as a land grant institution intertwines with the nature of his enterprises. 



PHOTO / GARY LAWSON

***“We share the same values, which are at the heart of everything we do and every decision that we make.”***

**MIKE HOLDER**  
OSU ATHLETICS DIRECTOR

“We have hired many people from Oklahoma State in the agricultural area, and that certainly has been very advantageous to our ranch business and our human resources personnel business,” Funk said.

“To find those good people, those great people who have a wonderful work ethic and have wonderful values, we find that Oklahoma State, the rural environment and its students make great employees. Our thrust to find those great employees and those great kids was probably the main reason we did it as a company and personally as well.”

With that, the stage was set for Funk to provide the largest gift of his lengthy list of philanthropic endeavors, a generous sum for a man who has contributed more than \$7.5 million to various charitable organizations in Oklahoma over the past decade.

As it currently stands, **FUNK IS THE LARGEST CONTRIBUTOR TO THE OKLAHOMA STATE ATHLETIC DEPARTMENT AS A NON-ALUMNUS**, with gifts and pledges currently totaling more than \$7 million.

“It is pretty unique. There are fans, but there are not really that many donors who jump in with a school they didn’t attend. They will get into the sports if they live in the area or because they know someone that went there,” said **Larry Reece**, OSU’s senior associate athletic director for development.

“For Bob Funk to get on board and become part of the family is just remarkable, and it is rare. He has adopted Oklahoma State, and we have adopted him.”

For a department that has long prided itself on getting more for less, **WELCOMING SOMEONE THE STATURE OF FUNK INTO THE FOLD WAS ESSENTIAL IN THE DEPARTMENT’S QUEST TO SUSTAIN THE SUCCESSES OF YEARS’ PAST.**

PHOTO / GARY LAWSON




“Oklahoma State was always the little athletic department that could, and we would get by on a shoestring budget and we would win championships, especially in a lot of the Olympic sports. It is remarkable how many different sports we have won championships in, and it is really remarkable when you think that we did it with sub-par facilities for so many years,” Reece said.

With those championships as a backdrop and the generosity of difference makers like Funk, OSU has seen the momentum permeate from football throughout the rest of the department.

“With Coach (Mike) Holder’s leadership and Boone Pickens inspiring people to step up and help, Bob was kind of leading the way in that time period too when we were trying to spend \$300 million on the football stadium. You have seen how the domino effect has continued and the inspiration has continued throughout the athletic village,” Reece said.

**FUNK’S CONTRIBUTIONS TO OSU HAVE GONE WELL BEYOND THOSE OF THE MONETARY VARIETY.**

Attend any event conducted in an athletics facility and you are sure to see someone who has been impacted by the primary calling in Funk’s life, the desire to help people.

Founded in 1983 with the purpose of helping find quality job opportunities for those in need, Express Employment Professionals provides staffing for OSU events of all types, including each football Saturday when nearly 500 of Funk’s employees man the facility he helped make a reality. In the process, he is allowed to see his purpose carried out on the largest of stages. 



LARRY REECE, BOB FUNK AND MIKE HOLDER

**"He is probably Oklahoma State's best friend that didn't go to school here."**

**LARRY REECE**  
OSU'S SENIOR ASSOCIATE  
ATHLETIC DIRECTOR FOR  
DEVELOPMENT

"Employment impacts all of our lives. When we help people find a job, it helps restore confidence and provides them hope," Funk said.

OSU has helped Funk's company thrive and enabled him to provide such opportunities. In turn, his company has allowed the university to showcase the qualities which initially drew Funk into the OSU family.

"Hopefully, we have helped them, and they have helped us to develop as a company and as individuals as well. It has been a real asset for us," Funk said.

"OSU has what I would call value-oriented people. That goes back to integrity, goes back to work ethic and goes back to the principles, I believe, of America, which are to serve our Master first, then serve our country and then serve our communities and then serve our people."

The crown jewel of a very distinguished résumé, Express was born from a desire by

Funk to help people. **HE BELIEVES LIFE IS ABOUT WHAT YOU CAN PROVIDE FOR THOSE IN NEED.**

"I think life is really all about giving rather than taking," Funk said. "You are only as successful as the last person you helped."

The number he has helped through just Express Employment Professionals alone has surpassed 500,000 and has made a lasting impact in Stillwater.

"He provides jobs to temporary employees, who sometimes go on to get full-time jobs. It really is a remarkable company. It is a nationwide company, and it is incredible how many lives he has changed by helping people find work. He really believes that is his calling — helping other people," Reece said.

"He wanted to get involved in athletics and part of his giving was also wanting to partner with us and help with game-day staffing. He really wanted to dive into the athletics side of it, and I think it has been a remarkable partnership."

Since awarding its first franchise in 1985, **THE STAFFING COMPANY HAS GROWN TO MORE THAN 750 FRANCHISES** in the U.S., Canada and South Africa. With the help of OSU, that number will only continue to expand with the staffing of events in Stillwater serving as a testing ground.

"One of my purposes with the event staffing was a beta test, quite frankly, for our company to see if we could give back to the university and give back to the community and help them with our expertise, with recruiting and finding quality people," Funk explained.

The challenge presented to Funk and his company came in the form of recruiting a large number of people to staff events the magnitude of those conducted on the OSU campus.

"Recruiting people for a large event, 400 to 500 people, for a one- or two-day event, is a challenging recruiting function of any company whether it is OSU or any other company," Funk said.

Consider the experiment nothing short of a success as the purpose behind Funk's business has been met with countless people being provided opportunities, while OSU's operation has benefited from members of his team making the game-day experience flow as smoothly as possible.

"OSU has worked with us on issues they would like to see improved on at times and vice versa. It has been a great partnership and really been a great function for us because of the openness in communication by both parties involved," Funk said.

"I think it has been very beneficial. OSU has reciprocated with us in the training and developing of the program."

The blueprint provided by the athletic department in regard to staffing large-scale events has brought forth the potential for his company's growth throughout the Big 12 footprint and beyond.

"We aren't certain yet, but we might be able to develop with other universities around the United States as well. We are looking at a couple of other Big 12 teams and a couple of the SEC teams right now to try to replicate what we have done at OSU. OSU has been willing to help us do that," Funk said.

"The partnership has worked out for both parties, and our relationship with OSU has been very valuable."

The relationship is as healthy as ever, with Funk recently staking claim to his 50-yard line suite on the stadium's north side for the long term, allowing the adopted Cowboy to continue reaping the benefits of the program he helped propel to unprecedented achievements.

**APPROPRIATELY DEEMED AS A SERVANT LEADER, FUNK HAS SEEN HIS GREATEST SUCCESSSES WHEN OTHERS SUCCEED AND LEADS WITH HIS ACTIONS, NOT HIS WORDS.**

Nowhere is that more apparent than at OSU.

"Just like a lot of our donors, if we didn't have him, we would not be where we are today. He was with us early, and he has stayed with us the entire time during this transformative period for OSU athletics," Reece said.

"He is probably Oklahoma State's best friend that didn't go to school here. It has been remarkable how generous he has been."

Looking back several years after investing in a vision to help shape the future of Oklahoma State and forming a seemingly unlikely partnership, **FUNK FINDS GRATIFICATION IN NOT ONLY HELPING OSU, BUT IN THE SIGNIFICANT IMPACT THE UNIVERSITY HAS HAD ON HIS LABOR OF LOVE.**

"Oklahoma State has done a great job of branding our company and branding the ranches as well, giving us opportunities to communicate with other great leaders at OSU and to build relationships with those people. I get a lot of compliments from business people around the state because of our devotion to OSU," Funk said.

"It has been extremely rewarding both ways." 



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