

Mr. Fix-it

TSU's next president should emulate his predecessor.

As John M. Rudley prepares to step down as president of Texas Southern University after nearly nine years, he'll leave behind a legacy of being a 'Mr. Fix-it' kind of administrator whose efforts revitalized TSU.

Rudley's contract expires at the end of August, and he's already looking toward an orderly transition to whomever the TSU Board of Regents selects as his replacement. His legacy of good works, however, is secure, and is now part of the university's storied history.

Rudley, 68, took on the job of managing TSU in 2008, during the worst economic downturn since the Great Depression. Even more depressing at the time were the circumstances surrounding his appointment, which was precipitated by the previous administration mishandling university finances.

To set the university on a proper course, Rudley reorganized its leadership, put it on financially stable footing, raised its credit rating, raised admission standards, expanded academic and building programs, diversified the student body, increased online graduate studies, created civil and computer engineering programs along with a new executive MBA program and much more — all while weathering funding cuts from the Texas Legislature, as he described in a wide-ranging interview with the Houston Chronicle editorial board.

We salute Rudley as he prepares to relinquish his office to allow fresh eyes to tackle some of the same impending issues that challenged him.

Few would disagree that acquiring additional support from the Legislature and other revenue streams should be the No. 1 priority for Rudley's replacement. That invariably raises the question about the practicality of the historic black university joining one of Texas' six university systems — a decision Rudley will leave to the next administration, though he offered this insight: "As a university executive, I will always say being in a university system has more value to it than being independent." We agree and hope joining a system, much like Prairie View A&M is part of the Texas A&M University system, is given serious consideration.

The next TSU president also will be forced to continue to shine a bright light on campus safety, not only because of its inner-city, Third Ward location but also because of a new state law allowing concealed handguns at public universities.

"Security is on our mind, but we still have to deal with the possibility that violence will occur and the gun law is going to be a problem," Rudley said, adding four shootings on campus last fall, including one fatality, played a part in his decision to step down.

Whomever replaces the affable Rudley will need to be prepared to roll up his or her sleeves to keep the university moving forward.