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John B. Simpson

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Few, if any, in Buffalo knew of John B. Simpson before he trekked across the country from California three years ago to become the 14th president of the University at Buffalo. He was the former No. 2 official at the University of California, Santa Cruz, and spent his career as a university professor and administrator on the West Coast.



But these days, Simpson, 59, is making a splash in this town, since rolling out an ambitious agenda to build a bigger UB – and a better Buffalo.

His vision for the university is clear: Grow by 10,000 students and 750 faculty on the way to becoming a top-tier public research university over the next 13 years. Whether that will happen remains to be seen.

But Simpson has been on a campaign to win public support and dollars for the mission he calls UB 2020. And it's gotten people's attention.

UB, one of the most powerful entities in Western New York, has always had a big influence on the region. Even the doubters can't help but wonder what more the university could do if it were 40 percent bigger and cast an even larger shadow in Amherst and Buffalo. Simpson will tell you.

It means more students spending money in the region, more faculty paying local tax dollars and more cuttingedge research with potential for spinning off high-tech companies.

"There are no great American cities," Simpson says, "without a great hometown university."

– Jay Rey

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