



**LEFT: Birmingham-Southern College President Linda Flaherty-Goldsmith**

## The woman on the Hilltop

BSC's President *Linda Flaherty-Goldsmith*

By MELINDA RAINEY THOMPSON Photos by PAMELA VENZ

**I**f you're looking for a good read, I suggest Birmingham-Southern College President Linda Flaherty-Goldsmith's book, *An Anguished Hallelujah*. It will surprise you.

Like most college presidents, Linda has an impressive resume. Unlike most, she grew up dirt poor in rural Mississippi, one of nine children abandoned by their father and raised by a strong mother and grandparents. She landed her first job when she was 9 and worked Saturdays from 8 am until 9 pm in her uncle's drugstore. "He didn't cut me any slack," she says.

Linda calls her grandmother an early feminist. "She told me I could do anything I wanted to do and made me believe it," she says.

She also picked cotton. "My favorite part was riding out to the field in the mornings. All the family was together. We were all so close," Linda reminisces. She remembers there were many people—black and white—living a hand-to-mouth existence back then.

In 1962, she was in a cotton field when "the airspace over our heads was filled with planes, as the National Guard was activated to ensure James Meredith gained admittance to Ole Miss, just 20 miles away from us as the crow flies. That event could just as well have been occurring in South Africa."

Geographical isolation. Poverty. Limited health care. Obstacles to education. Linda learned about the social issues she advocates for now first-hand. She overcame, worked around, read, studied, and earned her way to a better life. Then she helped others do the same thing.

**DAVID C HUFMAN DMD**

**Linda Flaherty-Goldsmith is a success by any measure. She persevered, refused to be cowed by low expectations, and remains an unpretentious, hopeful person with an infectious sense of humor. She's been the "first" woman in too many jobs to count.**

Although Linda was the valedictorian of her high school class, no one talked to her about college. She began college at age 24, worked full-time, and graduated summa cum laude with a BS in Business from the University of Alabama. Eventually, she worked her way up to Vice Chancellor for Financial Affairs for the whole UA system. She received her MBA from UAB and ended up as its CFO. In addition, she spent 3 years as VP and COO at the University of Connecticut. Linda has a history of going where she is needed.

After viewing a documentary about human trafficking, she experienced recurring nightmares and vowed to "do something" about the problem. That vow led her from university work to a two-year, pro bono stint with Human Rights First.

"What I can't get over is how poorly educated the world is about human trafficking. In Birmingham, we live on a highway that transports these women and children. What we found is that the biggest gap was not attacking the root

cause. It's a lucrative business, 150 billion a year, second only to drugs and arms in terms of profitability. There are 27 million victims worldwide, and it's growing fast. There are more slaves today than any time in history," she says.

Linda never wanted to be a college president. After serving as VP to 7 of them, she knew the job well. When General Charles Krulak asked her to reconsider, she said, "No! Well... maybe if Birmingham-Southern needs me."

BSC's 15th president is everything you'd expect, but she's a lot more, too. She loves to fly. She even took lessons. On a Concorde flight, she claimed that, for the first time in her life, she "finally moved fast enough!" She jumped out of airplanes for the thrill. She enjoys traveling and camping, and she's a painter. She met Elvis in high school, and she was interrogated by the FBI as a child. She has a half-written novel she wants to finish.

Due to the untreated kidney disease that plagued her youth, resulting in

extended hospitalizations and irreparable damage, she was unable to carry her own child to term, an experience that turned her into a passionate advocate for affordable health care for all. In her book, she tells the truth about her life—the highs and lows. It is funny and heartbreaking in equal measure. The last time Linda saw her father was on a city bus in Memphis. He did not recognize her.

She remembers the day she adopted her son as the best day of her life. She was warned it would take time for the two-year-old, who had been in 4 foster homes, to bond with her. He was playing with a toy telephone when she first saw him. "Mama, it's for you!" he said, handing her the phone. In minutes, he was in her arms. He now lives in Peru with his wife, son, and another child on the way.

Linda Flaherty-Goldsmith is a success by any measure. She persevered, refused to be cowed by low expectations, and remains an unpretentious, hopeful person with an infectious sense of humor. She's been the "first" woman in too many jobs to count. She is obviously comfortable in her own skin. She credits an Incan shaman, who led a trip she went on to Peru, for teaching her: "To be truly invisible, you have to be truly visible. If you have no secrets, then you are free." ■

# PORTICO PICKS

Fabulous Finds for Fall

By ALISON BRUHN Photos by DAVID HILLEGAS



**Shoshanna Cutout Trimmed Shirt Dress in Navy \$350**  
CANTERBURY OF CRESTLINE  
112 Euclid Avenue  
205-870-7957

# PORTICO PICKS



David Donahue trim cut,  
100% Royal oxford cotton,  
spread collar dress shirt with  
barrel cuff \$135

Hickey Freeman Wool Traveler  
Sport Coat, Charcoal and  
Navy Window Pane \$1150  
Peter Millar Button Down  
Sport Shirt, "Crown Finish" \$125

Peter Millar Reversible Vest,  
Navy and Grey Wool \$245

MOBLEY AND SONS  
112 Euclid Avenue  
205-870-7929



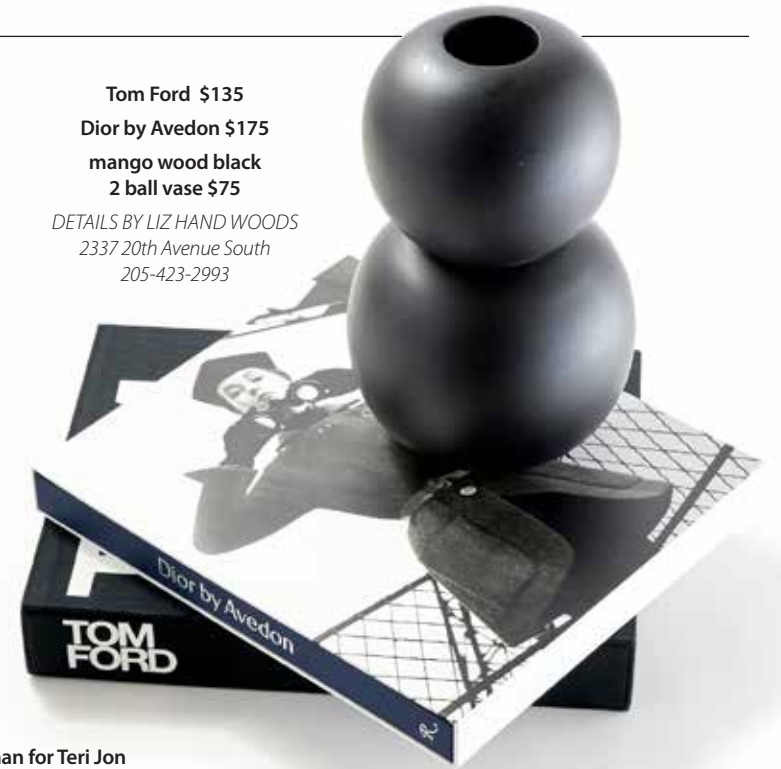
horn + silver  
cork screw \$48  
silver ice bucket  
with goat handles \$465

Bordeaux,  
Legendary Wines \$85  
DETAILS BY LIZ HAND WOODS  
2337 20th Avenue South  
205-423-2993



Rickie Freeman for Teri Jon  
Popover Dress With Petal  
Cut Flowers in Black \$560

CANTERBURY OF CRESTLINE  
112 Euclid Avenue  
205-870-7957



Tom Ford \$135  
Dior by Avedon \$175  
mango wood black  
2 ball vase \$75

DETAILS BY LIZ HAND WOODS  
2337 20th Avenue South  
205-423-2993



"Untitled" (above)  
Craig Green \$650

"Moondance" (left)  
Art Price \$375

GALLERY 1930  
1930 Cahaba Road  
205-870-1930

