Movers & Shakers: New Chief for New School
President will work to integrate university’s divisions, raise funds
By Miriam Kreinin-Souccar

David Van Zandt, former dean of Chicago’s Northwestern University Law School, took over the presidency of The New School on Jan. 3. He replaced Bob Kerrey, who achieved major growth but also faced student unrest and faculty criticism for what some said was his autocratic leadership. Now, with the school’s degree enrollment reaching 10,510 in 2010, up from only 7,180 nine years ago, Mr. Van Zandt, 57, is charged with continuing to integrate the school’s eight academic divisions and raising the university’s profile.

What’s your first order of business?
One of my first jobs is to begin a strategic planning process that will come up with defining traits for The New School and help us present ourselves better. Before I took the job, I didn’t know that Parsons [Parsons The New School for Design] or Lang [Eugene Lang College The New School for Liberal Arts] were part of The New School, and that’s a common perception.

What else?
It’s going to be important to grow fundraising. In The New School’s case, we’ve been raising about $25 million a year. We need to work with our alumni a lot more and understand where they are [in] their careers. There hasn’t been as much outreach as needed.

You’re taking over after a difficult period.
I am not going to speculate about [Bob Kerrey’s] troubles or the response. My sense is that people are very open and ready to move forward.

What were you proud of at Northwestern?
I spent a lot of time with law firms learning what would make our graduates better professionals, and we were then able to make our school much more relevant to the marketplace it serves. Also, our student culture—a lot of law schools are very cutthroat and competitive. Ours was a teamwork-oriented place.

What’s your biggest challenge?
Like with all leaders in higher ed, it’s the economy. How are our students doing in getting jobs, and what is going to happen on the governmental front with student loans?

How was it to move?
I grew up in New Jersey and lived on and off in Manhattan; my wife lived 12 years in Manhattan—so it wasn’t a difficult change. The only one really having trouble adjusting is our dog.