

A Brief Update on "A Confederacy of Dunces"

Time to catch up with "A Confederacy of Dunces" (\$12.95), the first novel by the late John Kennedy Toole that has far surpassed the expectations of Louisiana State University Press, its publisher. Originally issued in a 2500-copy first edition, the book recently returned to press for a fifth time, bringing the in-

print total to a hefty 40,000 copies.

"It's still going strong and we're just beside ourselves with joy," LSU director Les Phillabaum told *PW* on a recent visit to New York. "Our concern at this point is: What do we do for an encore?"

For those who don't already know the unusual acquisition story behind "A Confederacy," it came to LSU through Walker Percy, who was sent a yellowing manuscript by the author's mother. Mrs. Toole told Percy that her son had written the book in the early 1960s and had made revisions on it up until 1969, when, after failing to interest a publisher in the work, he killed



Exceeding all expectations and still going strong

himself. Percy read the work, recognized its high quality and delivered it to LSU, which published it earlier this year with Percy's introduction.

In one of the first reviews of "A Confederacy of Dunces," the *PW* Forecast called the work "a crazily magnificent once-in-a-blue-moon first novel." Praise for Toole's comic/satiric rendering of life in New Orleans has been equally strong from other quarters, with many reviewers mourning the loss of a powerful American writer. Recently, the book has been weaving on and off local bestseller lists in Philadelphia, Chicago and Washington, and Phillabaum reports that an independent affiliate of 20th Century Fox has optioned movie rights to the work.

"A Confederacy of Dunces" will be reprinted next year by Grove Press, which recognized the book's literary merit early on and purchased paperback rights before the hardcover was released. Grove plans a sizable first printing.