

## A New Clark College Advocate Podcast

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RHONDA MORIN: Calen Ouellette—Clark College Foundation’s new CEO—came to understand the power of having a voice and relating to others within the past 10 years of his career.

CALEN OUELLETTE: Where I was sitting at tables with dignitaries or with corporations and CEOs and was able to lend my perspective and voice that people said, “huh,” that’s an interesting perspective that I’ve never considered or that is something I was not aware of, thank you for sharing that.

RHONDA MORIN: Fast forward to today, several months after taking his first CEO role, and Calen is finding a community that is interested in hearing his perspective because they are eager to help Clark students on their pathways to success.

CALEN OUELLETTE: I firmly believe—am I am sharing this with everyone—that connecting donors and partners with Clark’s programs and projects will entice them to become advocates and ambassadors of Southwest Washington’s premier community college.

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RHONDA MORIN: Welcome to Penguin Chats, a Clark College Foundation production. I’m Rhonda Morin.

RHONDA MORIN: Originally from Montana, Calen’s formative years were spent in Spokane, Washington, before setting off to college in Pullman at Washington State University where he earned a degree in public relations and communication. An MBA came later from the University of Southern California. He would spend the next 20 plus years living and working in New York City and Los Angeles working in public relations and fundraising. Just out of college, he had an exciting stint working as a page for NBC Studios. Then in 2001, he returned to the West Coast.

CALEN OUELLETTE: Where I started my career was in public relations and marketing and did that for quite some time at agency life. I got niched into consumer projects and consumer health care products and worked on toothbrushes for Oral B. That was where I started my PR chops and cut my teeth, no pun intended.

## A New Clark College Advocate Podcast

RHONDA MORIN: Later, Calen was recruited by the University of Southern California to start their corporate and foundation relations program at the school of dentistry. He worked his way up to chief administrative officer over 11 years at USC.

CALEN OUELLETTE: Really learned a whole different dynamic about higher education, the PR aspect and how it applies to fundraising and building relationships overall. And kind of fell into fundraising, but really enjoyed it.

RHONDA MORIN: Like he says, it was through this work at USC that he gained a deep appreciation for what higher education offers people.

CALEN OUELLETTE: It breaks down a lot of doors and gives people access to information and access to opportunities that they wouldn't typically have.

RHONDA MORIN: Opportunities and equity for all is what Clark College is all about. When the CEO job opened at Clark College Foundation, Calen learned about its stellar reputation and outstanding fundraising record. And he was intrigued.

CALEN OUELLETTE: Community colleges are nimble and have the flexibility to meet student and workforce demand effectively. The foundation has been and will continue to actively promote the steps Clark College is taking to ensure, one, student success and, two, equitable outcomes. This is a really exciting time for Clark.

RHONDA MORIN: He was hired for the job and started in late May 2022.

RHONDA MORIN: Before the pandemic started, higher education across the country was changing. But following two years of shutdowns, restarts and economic challenges, those adjustments have taken on a new urgency. Calen says the number of institutions nationally within higher education is about to decline. Yet community colleges have an advantage: they're already accessible to more people. That's because of lower costs, robust scholarships, more social services and they train students for technical and industry work.

CALEN OUELLETTE: We need more tradespeople. We need to reduce the cost of education. These are two really important pieces for us. We need to be accessible and equitable to those who are balancing work, family and taking a few courses or even pursuing a degree to advance their career at this point in their life. Clark College is providing all of these opportunities for success not only for our students, but really enhancing the community along with it.

RHONDA MORIN: Upping the awareness of what Clark has to offer and advocating for the college will bring positive results, he says.

CALEN OUELLETTE: It's such a unique but awesome relationship to be a, the foundation supporting the college because the college has so much opportunity in front of it.

## A New Clark College Advocate Podcast

President Edwards has a really great vision for where we're going and she's building that, taking a good-to-great scenario. We really can really get on track to help build that awareness and bridge to the community what the college is doing and how the foundation is supporting it, and how they can get involved.

RHONDA MORIN: A seven-year fundraising campaign recently wrapped up after raising more than \$32 million for Clark programs and services. It was the most successful fundraising campaign the college and foundation have ever undertaken. The roadmap for the next several years is about enhancing public relations and marketing to help Clark navigate changing expectations and promote the excellence it has to offer.

CALEN OUELLETTE: Everything is changing around us all the time—it's the consistent thing is change. And so, in building out our communication, engagement and making sure that we have ambassadors, we have advocacy and we have messaging that talks about these changes helps to soften the understanding of where we're going as a college and as a foundation.

RHONDA MORIN: And where the college is going next is through a new strategic planning process that will elevate high-level goals for it over the next five years. This will give the foundation's fundraising team and volunteers a map of priorities. One of the top college priorities will be diversity, equity and inclusion for Clark's students, faculty and staff.

CALEN OUELLETTE: We have an opportunity as a foundation, just as Clark College is doing, is to lend our voices and support to those individuals that don't traditionally get that stage or platform to tell their story.

RHONDA MORIN: One of his plans is to adjust the foundation's fundraising approach.

CALEN OUELLETTE: For me, fundraising is not just about fiscal resources; it's about advocacy as well. And really engaging people to share a voice and share resources. And what I mean y that is yes, if listening, we would greatly appreciate a gift to the foundation that supports Clark College. Absolutely. You will never hear me say no on that. But also, maybe take the road less traveled and try something different that isn't just about generating millions of dollars. We may generate some great support, but we've generated more awareness on something, and that will in turn, because our mission is fiscally supporting the college, by that in turn may generate more support into the future.

RHONDA MORIN: For those who *are* contributing dollars right now, you are increasingly asking to see or hear about what your gift is doing for Clark College.

## A New Clark College Advocate Podcast

CALEN OUELLETTE: We're going to be held, and I'm not saying we weren't accountable in the past, but we're going to be held more accountable for how that money is making a difference. The younger generation is looking for, um, they want to see how their money is being spent. They want to see stats. They want to see impact factors to be able to report what is it that you are doing—whether it \$5 or \$5 million—how is my dollar making a difference? And they are less likely to invest long term but make short term investments. To say, I'm going to look at the next couple of years and here's what I want to contribute and keep me informed.

RHONDA MORIN: Calen anticipates a buildup of resources to meet the modern demand for this transparency. Things like social media messages, QR codes, expanding online services and more rapid transactions over personal devices, like phones.

CALEN OUELLETTE: It's going to take resources of people and finances to build a pipeline of new donors and build a pipeline of, into new communities that we haven't traditionally served or allowed a voice or given a voice within the foundation.

RHONDA MORIN: Now that he's in Vancouver following more than 20 years of working in PR and fundraising in fast-paced American cities, Calen is settling into the cadence of the Pacific Northwest to build partnerships, make friends, advocate for the college and take Clark College Foundation to an even greater level.

CALEN OUELLETTE: I firmly believe—and I am telling this to everyone—that connecting donors and partners with Clark's programs and projects will entice them to become advocates and ambassadors of Southwest Washington's premier community college.

RHONDA MORIN: Be sure and visit our website—[ClarkCollegeFoundation.org](http://ClarkCollegeFoundation.org)—to listen to other fascinating stories about Clark, its alumni and faculty. Well, that does it for this edition of Penguin Chats. Thanks for listening. I'm Rhonda Morin

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