**2023-03-15-Edwards-Ouellette Conversations Podcast\_9003-2.0\_FINAL**

[MUSIC PLAYING]

KARIN EDWARDS: When you do right by everybody, everybody does better. And that's just truth. And just a simple example of that. Some of you may have heard of drain-the-pool politics, that because you don't want in the city-- I think it was Philadelphia-- because they didn't want Black kids swimming with white kids, they closed the pool and nobody swam. And that's what happens when you continue, when you perpetuate inequities.

ANDY PALMQUIST: Penguin Chats is brought to you in part by Ginn Group, Schwabe Williamson and Wyatt, Vesta Hospitality, Waste Connections of Washington, Arnerich Massena, and US Bank. Our corporate partners are helping make extraordinary things happen at Clark College Foundation.

RHONDA MORIN: Welcome to Penguin Chats, a Clark College Foundation production. I'm Rhonda Morin. In late February, Dr. Karin Edwards, the president of Clark College, and Calen Ouellette, CEO of Clark College Foundation sat down with about 60 invited guests for a warm and inviting evening of conversation.

The two came together at the Vancouver campus to share the college's newest strategic vision to talk about equity and the importance of volunteering. They also exchanged funny personal moments, like identifying Calen's twin, Ryan Seacrest, and the president's love of chocolate. Let's take a listen.

[MUSIC PLAYING]

CALEN OUELLETTE: It's not a secret that enrollment is down at community colleges and nationwide. Clark is trending better than many Washington State community colleges, but we are also down FTEs, or full-time enrollments. Can you share more about the causes and what we are doing to reverse that trend?

KARIN EDWARDS: Thanks, Calen. And you are correct, it is a national trend, not something that's just happening here at Clark College. And it's a confluence of things that I believe is causing the enrollment decline. We were declining in enrollment prior to COVID, but during COVID we plummeted. We saw double-digit declines.

In part, we saw our Running Start population decrease. And even though there are some declines in K-12 enrollment, it's not to the level that we've seen the decrease in Running Start. And that Clark was one of, if not the largest, Running Start programs in the state. So that's hitting us pretty hard.

Additionally, the economy-- historically, community college enrollment is tied to the economy. And so when there is high unemployment, when the economy is not as strong, you see people come back to school for retraining, to learn something different. In this case, it did not happen. What we were used to seeing did not happen during this time. And so we didn't see the boost in enrollment that we had in other times when the economy was not as strong, or when there was high unemployment.

There is also real hard social times. This is hard social times for people. They are having to juggle with not knowing where their next meal is coming from, not knowing where they're going to lay down at night, choosing between eating and paying rent or paying for child care. And going to college, paying for classes, it just doesn't make that list of their top five. So we are seeing that as well.

And then there's a narrative that kind of started where, who needs higher education anyway? That you can do this-- you're paying too much, and you're not yielding your good results. And so there are some people who are spreading that, that now higher education is obsolete, and there's other ways that you can get an education.

And lastly, I think people just in general are having opportunities, and I would say probably more the younger generation, where you can get a job paying $20 an hour at Starbucks. Where McDonald's, at one point, was offering a sign-in bonus. And, for some, $20 an hour is a lot of money, and I'm going to do that instead of go to school.

So it's a confluence of things that have impacted our enrollment across the country, but specifically here at Clark as well. What we're doing to try and reverse that? Certainly taking a look at our own programs to make sure that they are in line with what industry needs, and making sure they line up with well-paying jobs. We don't want students to invest in an education that's not going to yield them a high-paying job, where they can then sustain their family.

We're looking at our own policies and practices to make sure that there are not any things in our system that create barriers for students to enroll and to be successful. And we're looking at marketing strategies. Maybe that high school population that we flourished with in the past, maybe we need to look at an older population now. And maybe they're already employed, and maybe they need to be retrained for the work that they're doing.

So an opportunity to look at other populations, and to look at populations that haven't been tapped in the past by higher education, that have not either accessed or not felt welcome, that have been marginalized in educational systems. We're looking at that group as well. So hoping to see certainly the turnaround.

[APPLAUSE]

Hoping to see a turnaround. I don't know that we will recover as many students as we lost, but we certainly do have an opportunity to gain some.

CALEN OUELLETTE: First off, thank you for being a supporter. I think the fact that you are the president of this college, and you're investing monthly in this college says a lot. So thank you. And thank you for all of you who are supporting as well. I'll take us on a little bit of a tangent here. I talked about 90 years of Clark College in 2023. In 2023, it's 50 years of the Clark College Foundation. So that's big. And over the 50 years, the foundation, in partnership with many of you and the college, has contributed more than $80 million to Clark College, which impacts the community. So $80 million.

[APPLAUSE]

So that clap is for you, not us. So with that, I have the fortune and privilege-- and thank you to the foundation team that's here tonight. You know who you are-- to work with a small but really powerful team that helps to facilitate, cultivate, listen, and connect investors or donors to Clark College. And when I say a donor, I think of someone who's going to give fiscal resources, and/or advocacy, and/or volunteerism.

Those are all very, very valuable things that any individual or group can do. And so it's our job to help listen and connect those individuals or those resources to the ideas and the motivations that the college has set forth. We are facilitators. And I say that as in the sense that we are part of the Clark College community to help meet the objectives of Clark College.

So we've done that with a lot of the resources. We spent-- we just completed a campaign back in July, $34 million. Deb, I'm going to make you raise your hand. She's from our board of directors, and was integral in leading that effort. So thank you. Thank you to all of you who contributed.

A large sum of that effort was directed towards scholarships. So we've done a lot to award scholarships. More than $1 million a year is awarded to scholarships at Clark College and growing. That's thanks to you. So thank you, thank you, thank you. Where we can break those barriers down and invest in the future is what we're trying to do.

An opportunity that exists for us, and where I see us moving forward in the fundraising arena, is really looking to work with the college to say, how is your money making an impact? And learning, and turning, and communicating using our mediums-- communication mediums to really start talking about what is the impact that's being made, and how is that making a difference?

We could do better on that. And so I think we really want to lean into that effort. And I welcome as those of you who donate to many different places. And I mean this. I have never been in a community that is more philanthropic than this community. I have attended a number of events. So thank you for all that you do.

[APPLAUSE]

I will tell you, I do not like dessert dashes. I've done enough of those. And those are not my favorite things in the world. It's really expensive if you're buying Twinkies. But I say that in the sense of, as you learn best practices please share those. Because we can always learn what we could do better as well in communicating in that effort.

KARIN EDWARDS: Thank you, Calen.

CALEN OUELLETTE: --you. Clark College is training students for our local workforce. How can businesses best share their needs, partner with the college, and provide feedback to Clark to create the workforce of the future?

KARIN EDWARDS: So there are two ways-- there are more than two ways. But there are two ways I would like to suggest that we channel some of these conversations through our-- three ways because I'm going to add the foundation now--

CALEN OUELLETTE: Thank you.

KARIN EDWARDS: --that I'm thinking about it-- through our community and continuing education department, which mostly provides either customized or short-term training opportunities both to incumbent workers, but also to companies who are just looking to start up as well. And through that, it's an opportunity for that department to connect directly with employers to find out what their needs are, and customize training and education for their current employers, or to help recruit with new employers.

The other is through our career technical education programs, and I would love to tell you the exact number that we have, but it's not on the top of my head at the moment. We can certainly get that for you. So those who are looking for-- who need the degree, a credential, you're not only going to get the technical skills that you need. With all of our degrees come an array of other skills that students acquire. So communication skills, interpersonal skills, civic engagement-- those are all of the other things that come packaged with our degree programs. And we have several, like I mentioned, career technical programs.

The way employers can connect? Each of those programs have an advisory committee, and they meet regularly. By serving on one of the advisory committees, you're able to tell us what industry needs now, but also what the needs will be in the future, so that we are providing students with relevant and up-to-date education, that when they're done with our degree programs they are workforce ready in the full sense of it. So not only do they have those technical skills, they're going to come in knowing the responsibility of being an employee.

Having cluster or industry conversations, I think, is another way for us to get information on what the needs are, and those are activities that we can certainly host here. So if there's a change-- we know that technology is changing. We know the influence of artificial intelligence. All of that is taking place right now. And one conversation I had recently was about our diesel program. That's great that we have our diesel program, but there's a change with hybrid vehicles and electric vehicles. Of course, us hosting certainly a cluster or industry conversation would be important.

Another way for us to partner is we know that work-based learning is a retention strategy. And so students who have an opportunity to learn in the classroom but then apply those skills in real world at a workplace really helps both the student be successful as a student, but also to be successful as an employee, and the employer to be successful in hiring someone who feels that they've been invested in. And so they're going to invest in your organization. Providing those opportunities are critical for our students, so look to create more opportunities for that.

And then the last thing I'll mention that also is important, tuition remission. If you are at an organization where you can help your students pay their tuition, that's wonderful. It will eliminate a huge financial barrier for so many students where they will persist here at college, and then, of course, you get to keep them investing. And so you will see the return on your investment by connecting with them in any one of those ways. That answer your question?

CALEN OUELLETTE: It does. Thank you. I feel like you should ask me one now.

KARIN EDWARDS: I think I will.

[POP MUSIC] Dancing, feel the heat. It's good . I'm not looking for no drama. Gonna take the vibe with me because that's where I like to be. And if you want you can come with me.

KARIN EDWARDS: You're still in your first year at Clark College Foundation. Now that you've spent some time here, what do you see as a top priority for the foundation, both at the institution and in the community?

CALEN OUELLETTE: That's a great question. I came in, and I really looked at a 1-3-10-year plan. And this first year, we need to do a lot of friendraising, a lot of connecting to the community and connecting to the college. Over the years we've had-- as a foundation and a college, we all know that we've had different relationships where we're kind of in lockstep moving forward. COVID and the pandemic created a large rift in a lot of relationships and disconnected people overall.

And so the benefit of coming into this organization after a very successful fundraising campaign is we get the opportunity to do friendraising and reconnect with 90 years of Clark College, but also look to the future of, where are we going? Let's celebrate where we've been and, where are we going?

We have wonderful, wonderful supporters of this college, but we also have 90 years of people who have not been connected. So reconnecting with them, learning, hearing their stories, hearing their journeys, using our mediums to talk about what our alumni-- and for the sake of that anyone that's passed through the penguin nation, one course or a graduate, is part of the penguin nation. So how do we celebrate those people? Use their experiences, bring them in, help to educate current students, and really set the tone moving forward. So that's a significant priority for not only the college but our community.

Our three-year plan is going to be looking at, what is the strategic plan of the college? Hint. We have some tenets over here of the new strategic plan that's going to be rolled out in the near future. So over the next three years, we look to develop at the foundation the support and the infrastructure to really move the strategic plan forward. Invest, as I said, financial resources, advocacy, volunteerism around that, and probably launch a campaign in the near future.

And then that 10-year bucket is really looking at, how do we provide fiscal diversification to support the college moving forward? You spoke to the economy's changing, and the economy will ever be changing. Fundraising is something that this country is really in tune with, but as the economy goes up and down, we need to find other fiscal resources to invest in our priorities and be innovative. It takes money to create amazing things. So that's a 10-year plan. So I hope that answers your question.

KARIN EDWARDS: It does. And it makes me think I should start making a plan for myself. [LAUGHS]

[LAUGHTER]

CALEN OUELLETTE: 1-3-10.

KARIN EDWARDS: Thank you. [LAUGHS]

CALEN OUELLETTE: Clark College has put racial equity at the forefront of its planning for our future students, and the college just completed an equity-centered strategic plan. The tenets of this new plan are throughout the room to my right. Can you share how and why your centering equity?

KARIN EDWARDS: Yeah, this is important work for me. And I can probably talk a lot and maybe even ramble or be all over the place, so I'm going to center myself at the moment. And so, Calen, aside from legislation that is requiring community colleges to focus more on equity, and the State Board of Community and Technical Colleges that also is leading with racial equity, and our own board of trustees who is pushing for an anti-racist institution, aside from all of that, we do it because it's the right thing to do.

There is history all over, but history here-- why this is important? We believe firmly at Clark College that everyone deserves the right to quality and equitable education. And that's something that we need to provide. We feel it is right because there are communities who have historically been marginalized for a very long time, but who have contributed so much. And so they too should benefit from some of the rights of all people.

I'm, again, passionate about this. But I will say this. I've seen too much already where folks just don't understand the true benefit-- and this is not-- I'm not reducing this to a dollar value, but when you do right by everybody, everybody does better. And that's just truth. And just a simple example of that. Some of you may have heard of drain-the-pool politics, that because you don't want in the city-- I think it was Philadelphia-- because they didn't want Black kids swimming with white kids, they closed the pool and nobody swam.

And that's what happens when you continue, when you perpetuate inequities. Nobody benefits from racism. I shouldn't say that. That's not true. Everybody suffers because of racism. That is the correct statement that I need to make. And education is the vehicle, I think, for us to best combat that system. There are systems of oppression all over the country in education, in housing, in health care. And we can go just on and on and on on how that really impacts us.

And our job is to elevate, impact, and empower people. And you don't do that by oppressing them. So that's our why. We are doing this by providing trainings for folks to understand, and recognize, and raise awareness to those systems, and to help us in dismantling them. We are doing that by reviewing our policies, our practices, and our procedures, making sure that we are not perpetuating that in how we function, and how we operate.

We are looking at our hiring procedures, and making sure that we are providing opportunities to increase at least representation-- which isn't the total answer, but it is an answer-- to increase representation from diverse populations. And we are doing that by trying to ensure that our students, all of our students, but particularly those from marginalized populations, know that they belong here, that there is a sense of belonging, that you are wanted here, and that you deserve to be here.

So those are some of the ways in which we're trying to break down those systems. But equity and anti-racism is central to the work we do and, in my opinion, is central to an education.

[APPLAUSE]

CALEN OUELLETTE: Thank you.

[APPLAUSE]

Elevate, impact, empower. Thank you.

[POP MUSIC] [INAUDIBLE] It's a beautiful view. And you know I will. Yeah, yeah.

KARIN EDWARDS: You are originally from the Pacific Northwest, but have lived in Southern California over two decades. What's your favorite part about returning home?

CALEN OUELLETTE: Eddie Bauer sleeveless vests.

[LAUGHTER]

No one in Southern California understands what a sleeveless vest is for or why you need to have multiple of them in your wardrobe.

[LAUGHTER]

So returning, I got to dive into some old sleeveless vests, Eddie Bauer, Columbia. So that's probably my favorite. And the people. You know, it's--

[LAUGHTER]

There's something about being-- even this past week with a snowstorm-- there's something about being in the Pacific Northwest, and just being able to connect with people in a very different way. Southern California was a great experience. Post I went to Pullman, Washington State University. And right after school moved to New York. I moved to Brooklyn. It was an opportunity to make a shiny thing on my resume. And I fell in love with big cities, and lived in New York for a while.

And then moved to Los Angeles. And I thought that would be a short stint, and go to Seattle like all my friends, and ended up staying in Los Angeles for a very long time and a very unique journey. And COVID really imprinted, as many, the importance of family, and being connected back to my extended family that's up here in the Pacific Northwest.

And this opportunity was very serendipitous how everything unfolded, but I'm really happy to be back. I have felt nothing but warmth and invitation from folks for the time I've been here of being as a cisgender, gay, white man being accepted into this community, coming back as someone that grew up here. It's just-- it's home, and it feels really good. And Eddie Bauer sleeveless vests.

[LAUGHTER]

KARIN EDWARDS: Well, we know what you're getting for Christmas then.

CALEN OUELLETTE: Deal. OK. Last question. Since I arrived, I've had the opportunity to sit with you on your executive leadership team, participate in community functions with you, and even prepare for an upcoming international trip we'll be on together. From where I sit, calling you busy would be an understatement. What do you do for self-care and relaxation?

KARIN EDWARDS: I'm a foodie, so I love trying all the good food that's around the Pacific Northwest. [LAUGHS] I really enjoy eating, chocolate specifically, if anyone cares to know that. Dessert, remember, end big.

[LAUGHTER]

All of that. All the dots are connecting I hope for you all. I also enjoy still exploring the Pacific Northwest. My husband and I enjoy taking long rides. There's still so much that I haven't seen in this region, so we enjoy doing that.

All of my family is still back on the East Coast, which is challenging. Yeah, 3,000 miles away, so I'm very much reliant on FaceTime and phone calls. And I have three granddaughters, two of them are 2 and 4. And so FaceTime is sketchy with them. Depends on when they want to talk, and for how long.

But I do also enjoy family time, even though it's not as much as I'd like. I do stay connected with folks back on the East. And I love community. I love getting involved. There's other organizations that I'm connected with. So I do my community service work, and make new friends, and go for long car rides, and eat chocolate. [LAUGHS]

[LAUGHTER]

CALEN OUELLETTE: As part of that, not that we're done, but we have chocolates for everyone to take, in celebration of Karin's love for chocolate. So just FYI. They're on the table out there.

KARIN EDWARDS: It caught my eye, which is why I keep talking about it. All good.

CALEN OUELLETTE: That's our questions. Do you want to wrap us up?

KARIN EDWARDS: Thank you all very much for being here. This has been fun. I thank you, Calen, for being my co-host. And my little inside-- whatever it is for Calen is, does he look like Ryan Seacrest to you all? [LAUGHS]

[LAUGHTER]

CALEN OUELLETTE: When Ryan leaves Ryan and Kelly, I'll step in then.

[LAUGHTER]

KARIN EDWARDS: Well, it's always fun, and so I feel like I'm with a celebrity when I'm with Calen. Yeah, my own little thing. Calen, really appreciate you. Glad that you are here. Appreciate all of the folks from the foundation, and for the work that you do for the board of trustees that's represented, and the board of directors for the foundation, appreciate you.

And all of you, our community, friends, and partners. It's really good to be in your company tonight. And I'm very appreciative for your support of Clark College, some of you of me personally. Really appreciate that. We have some faculty and staff with us. They're a terrific group of people that work here at Clark.

And just know that we are committed to this community. We do listen, we do respond, and we do act. May not be as fast as people want, but we do listen. We do respond as well. And so thank you all for joining us this evening. It's been a pleasure for me.

CALEN OUELLETTE: Thank you.

[APPLAUSE]

And if I can leave you all with just one piece is a call to action, is get involved. Be an advocate for us, Clark College. There's a lot of great things happening at Clark College. We'd love to hear from you. We're sticking around as long as you would like. There is wine. There is chocolates. There are friends. We're happy to answer any additional questions as we mingle. Please enjoy yourself. But thank you, thank you, thank you for coming. We love your feedback. Love your advocacy. Enjoy your evening.

[APPLAUSE]

[MUSIC PLAYING]

RHONDA MORIN: Get involved with Clark College Foundation or Clark College by visiting our website, clarkcollegefoundation.org. Well, that does it for this edition of Penguin Chats. Thanks for listening. I'm Rhonda Morin.

ANDY PALMQUIST: Penguin Chats is brought to you in part by Ginn Group, Schwabe Williamson and Wyatt, Vesta Hospitality, Waste Connections of Washington, Arnerich Massena, and US Bank. Our corporate partners are helping make extraordinary things happen at Clark College Foundation.

[MUSIC PLAYING]