

EASTSIDE BUSINESS *monthly*

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President of Bellevue Community College Helps Serve the Growing Educational Needs of our Community

By Joshua Young

At the end of the school year in 2nd grade, a young Jean Floten raised her hand in class and stood up when she was called on. At the risk of great humiliation, she told her teacher Miss Dodge how much the class would miss her and asked if she could give her a kiss. After walking to the front of the room to give Miss Dodge a peck on the cheek, she turned around surprised to see every one of her classmates waiting in line for their turn. This was her first experience in public speaking and gave Floten a glimpse of her future of having positive influence on others.

Since that time, B. Jean Floten has served as the Chief Executive Officer of Community College District VIII and President of Bellevue Community College since June 1, 1989. Prior to arriving at BCC she was Executive Vice President at Edmonds Community College in Lynnwood. Floten previously served as Dean of Student Services and Director of Student Programs at Edmonds, and holds a Master of Science and a Bachelor of Arts from Portland State University. She has taught speech and communication skills at Mt. Hood Community College and Portland State University.

During Floten's reign at BCC, the institution has gone through tremendous growth and changes. In the last decade alone, there has been a 250% growth in facilities and enrollments have more than doubled.

President Floten currently serves as vice chair of the CIS, the Washington Community College Computer Consortium and is an ex-officio member of the Bellevue Chamber of Commerce Board of Directors. She is a member of the Science and

Technology Roundtable, Washington Association of Community and Technical Colleges, Eastside Business Roundtable, and Seattle Foundation. She is on the Key Bank Advisory Board and the national community college advisory councils of the Educational Testing Services, American College Testing Services, and Chauncey Group.

Floten's awards include the Charles Kennedy Equity Award for 2005, Washington Research Council's 2000 Pathfinder Award, the 1999 Trustees Association of Community and Technical Colleges President's Award, 1998 Leadership Award from the Council for Advancement and Support of Education,

District VIII and the 1998 Public Official of the Year award by the Municipal League of King County.

B. Jean Floten is often asked to speak throughout the state and nation on technology issues, college programs, and higher education issues affecting community colleges.

During Floten's reign at BCC, the institution has gone through tremendous growth and changes. In the last decade alone, there has been a 250% growth in facilities and enrollments have more than doubled. The region's population has also shifted greatly and today approximately 1 of every 4 Eastside residents are foreign born and 1 out of 3 jobs statewide are involved in international commerce. As a result, globalization is a great topic at the school.

At BCC there has been a slight dip in enrollments over the last couple of years, which has been one of the factors in large budget cuts that the college has been facing. It is very difficult to sustain needed growth and development while funding is being decreased, but Floten is doing an admirable job of it. Floten says that her current priorities for the school include student recruitment and success initiatives, morale and climate issues, organizational structure issues, as well as organization and staff development.

President Floten feels very privileged to be in a line of work that closely matches her values – and BCC and the Eastside communities it serves are fortunate that she chose to work in education here on the Eastside.

13 Questions with BCC President B. Jean Floten

EBM: What do you consider your single biggest accomplishment?

Floten: Being President of BCC for 16 years! Starting the National Workforce Center for Emerging Technologies (NWCET), the college's first large partnership with the community and first major gift campaign was a serious turning point for the College.

EBM: Do you like to travel? Where do you like to go most frequently?

Floten: Yes. Right now, I prefer to visit my father who lives on the East Coast; I do that as often as I am able. My husband Bill and I like to do road trips together—destination doesn't really matter—just seeing something new, enjoying the terrain and each other is fun for us. We have had a couple of very interesting trips—one was in the early 90's when we went to Nassau, Bahamas, and recovered a Grumman Duck, a Warbird that was actually in Pearl Harbor when it was bombed. Salvaging it and getting to Seattle was a real adventure—right out of Indiana Jones! We sold the project to a collector. The plane's restoration was just completed and it will make its debut at the Oshkosh Air Show next month and will be the "cover girl" in some classic airplane magazines in September. Another wild and wooly adventure we had was cruising through the Caribbean with friends.

EBM: Is there any place in the world that you haven't been and would like to go?

Floten: Since I attended college in Europe with the good fortune of traveling a lot at that time of my life, there are many, many places I would like to return to. I would like to spend a lot more time in Italy and England looking up family members; the older I get, the more interested I am in my family history. Australia and New Zealand are on my list on new places to see, for sure.

EBM: How much do you like to read? Fiction or non-fiction? What book are you currently reading?

Floten: I do like to read. Both fiction and non-fiction. *Eats, Shoots & Leaves: The Zero Tolerance Approach to Punctuation* by Lynn Truss—which I think ought to be required reading for every English composition student. It is informative and witty and speaks loudly to maintaining the dying art of appropriate punctuation. I just finished *The Egyptologist* by Arthur Phillips and *The Twentieth Wife* by a local writer, Indu Sundaresan, novels that made airplane travel much more enjoyable. I am almost done with *The Botany of Desire* by Michael Pollan, our BCC Read! selection for next year, where we at the college—faculty, students, and staff--read, discuss, have classroom projects around a book that is looked at from a multidisciplinary point of view. One of our colleagues, who reads five books per week (!), just gave me and the faculty members in her division *How to Think Like Leonardo da Vinci* by Michael Gelb, and said it was the best book she had ever read. I am certainly looking forward to starting it. I also have *The Tipping Point* by Malcolm Gladwell and *Good to Great* by Jim Collins in my soon-to-read bin on my desk.

EBM: What are your favorite two books of all time?

Floten: This is too hard to answer. Here are some thoughts-- There are books that have had great impact on me like *The Second Sex* by Simone de Beauvoir that I first read in college in the mid 60's and *Philosophical Investigations* by Ludwig Wittgenstein, which I would have never have read, unless I had been forced to do so in graduate school. I was unprepared for the impact it would have on me on how to think. With a mother from the South, I love Southern novels, like Faulkner, or more contemporary, Wells. The South is such a colorful place to me—rich in language and filled with characters who are bigger than life.

EBM: What is your favorite way to communicate? In person, by phone, written letter, email, fax?

Floten: I am a much more facile speaker than writer so by phone is easiest for me; but, I find it is also too time consuming for small and quick items or items that require thought and background, where I prefer email.

EBM: What type of communication device(s) do you currently use?

Floten: I like electronic tools, so I am always interested in what is “out there.” I use a PC at work and at home, digital projection system for PowerPoint and videos, cell phone, Palm email and digital camera.

EBM: How much time do you spend on the Internet?

Floten: Considering email and research, it probably averages about 4 or 5 hours a day.

EBM: Do you watch television?

Floten: Very little.

EBM: Have you seen any good movies lately?

Floten: I just saw *The Girl in the Café* this weekend on television –quirky and fun.

EBM: What would you say to a recent college graduate considering a career in education?

Floten: I would certainly encourage the graduate to pursue a career in education. Education is so personally rewarding because you are preparing people for fuller and richer lives and livelihoods. It is also a privilege to do work that matches your deepest values. At the same time, I would encourage the graduate to find ways early-on to supplement his/her income by other work or investment. Real estate is an example where one can turn “sweat equity” and savvy purchasing into a nice nest egg down the road, which is hard to do with current educational salaries.

EBM: How long do you plan on working? Any plans for retirement?

Floten: I probably will retire sometime in the next five years. I really have made no plans yet, but I am getting to the point in my life that I really should think about it.

EBM: What would you like to be remembered for?

Floten: I would like to be remembered as one of the people who has helped the college reach its potential in serving students and our greater community.

Because of her experience in both public speaking and as a forensics (competitive public speaking) coach, she is uniquely qualified to give some tips to those interested in public speaking. Jean says that the old adage to “Tell them what you’re going to tell them, tell them and then tell them what you told them” still rings true today as much as ever. She said that in preparing a talk, it is very important to understand and analyze your audience and the points that you want to get through to them. Floten explained that the way she gauges the effectiveness of her speeches is to talk to people afterward to see if they understood the points she was attempting to get across to them. Another way that public speakers can make improvements in their speeches is to videotape them. “There is nothing better than videotaping to help speakers improve their delivery”, Floten said, “speakers will tend to be their own best and worst critic after seeing themselves on video”.