

New BMCC president got start in community college

By **KATHY ANEY**
STAFF WRITER

Plenty of successful people attended community college.

The list includes George Lucas, Arnold Schwarzenegger, Tom Hanks and Morgan Freeman. The first woman to command a shuttle mission, Eileen Collins, started her rise in community college and so did Ileana Ros-Lehtinen, the first Hispanic woman elected to Congress.

Among them is Dennis Bailey-Fougner, who this month became the seventh president of Blue Mountain Community College.

Bailey-Fougner, the first in his family to go beyond high school, attended community college in his native Colorado near the farm where he grew up.

Eventually transferring to University of Oregon, he said he didn't set out to be a college president, instead studying public policy and historic preservation at the School of Architecture. To earn money, he worked in the school's admissions office, leading student tours and talking to high school seniors about going to college. The part-time gig changed his trajectory.

"I tell people I'm still doing my work study job," he said.

The job evolved into full-time admissions work for three colleges in Kansas, Virginia and Oregon. In 1991, he left the University of Oregon to become recruitment coordinator for Portland Community College. The move to a community college brought him full circle.



Staff photo by E.J. Harris

Dennis Bailey-Fougner is the seventh president of Blue Mountain Community College in Pendleton.

"Within days I felt like this is where I fit," Bailey-Fougner said. "This is where I belong."

After PCC, he worked as chief executive at Western Colorado Community College. He started his first official day of work at BMCC on May 1.

On May 14, Bailey-Fougner sat at a small table in his office near a sliding glass door that revealed a swath of his new city and a patio that a family of California quail visits each day. Behind his wooden desk, a huge welcome-to-campus card signed by student ambassadors and Associated Student Government officers adorned the wall.

The president sat back in his chair and tried to verbalize why he loves community colleges so much. He decided to tell a story. One day at PCC, Bailey-Fougner said, he stepped out of his office and didn't notice a woman walking by. They collided and he caught her before she fell.

"She was crying," Bailey-Fougner recalled. "I said, 'Oh, my god, I'm sorry.'"

The woman, a non-traditional student with several children, rushed to assure Bailey-Fougner that he wasn't the cause of her tears.

"Come to find out her husband had left her and cleaned out the bank account," he said. "She didn't have anything."

A neighbor had urged her to check out the community college. At the time, PCC had a program designed to get displaced housewives back into the workforce and Bailey-Fougner connected her with the people running the six-week program. The woman continued on in college, eventually earning her doctorate at Portland State. Periodically, she returned to Bailey-Fougner to give him enthusiastic updates.

He said the story illustrates the type of people who attend community colleges.

"I love watching people who value education and don't feel like it's owed to them," he said. "Every little step is a big win. I watch them go from not believing in themselves to having a huge amount of confidence."

In these early days at BMCC, Bailey-Fougner isn't spending much time in his big, light-drenched office. He has visited most of the BMCC centers around Northeast Oregon and had sit-downs with community members, employers, city and county leaders, college employees and students.

The next day brought more of the same. He started the day at the monthly 7 a.m. legislative video session with Sen. Bill Hansell, R-Athena. From there, Bailey-Fougner moved to a morning-long gathering of his vice presidents and then attended two other meetings before heading to Salem for two days of the Oregon Presidents Council, a meeting of all 17 Oregon community college presidents. In Salem, he will also meet past president Camille Preus, who is now executive director of the Oregon Community College Association.

"I'm in the firehose stage," he said. "There's so much coming at me. I've had a lot of really good conversations."

In describing his leadership style, he said he prefers a consensus form of decision making if possible.

"Ultimately the buck stops with me, but I want a campus environment where we are transparent and open with everyone from students to faculty to administrators when we're talking about issues," Bailey-Fougner said. "I never want to leave people out of decisions."

The new president is living in a trailer park while he looks for a house, bunking in his dad's fifth-wheel. He hopes to find a place before his snowbird father picks up the fifth-wheel and heads south for the winter.

Bailey-Fougner's partner, Mark Mauceri, soon will join him in Pendleton. Mauceri has actually spent more time in the city than Bailey-Fougner as he served as project manager for the build of the Wildhorse Resort golf course in 1996 and 1997.

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