

BUSINESS PROFILE

Managing the business of higher education

Edison College copes with higher enrollment and less money

BY EVAN WILLIAMS
ewilliams@floridaweekly.com

Dr. Robert R. Jones usually takes a moment to look out his office windows in the early evening. They offer a view of the student union on Edison College's Lee County Campus, of which Jones is president, and the clock tower beyond.

"Half of our students are at night, and at 5 or 5:30 p.m. they just pour on to campus," he said. "Coming from their jobs, coming with their work clothes on, maybe their ties or whatever. And they're switching gears, and they're changing their lives for themselves and for their families. So it's very gratifying to be here and to see that, sort of that daily transition.

"I always pause just to kind of watch...it's really great to see."

Jones is magnanimous and affable, the full time face of Edison's largest campus, since last Fall. But for 17 years before that he often worked behind the scenes in other administrative roles with the school, as Vice President of Business and Economic Development, and Chief Financial Officer. Those positions were more direct extensions of his own education.

"I grew up in a very, very small farm town," he said, (Kerens, Tex.). "There was one stop light and it blinked. It was very rural. But it was sort of in the shadow - it was an hour south

of Dallas. I was one of very few people in that town who probably went to college. But my parents had gone to college. My parents were both WWII veterans who had gone to college on the GI bill."

His mother still lives there, where she was an art teacher. Jones worked his way through school, earning an Associate's Degree in engineering, then a Bachelor's in economics at the University of Texas in Austin, an MBA, and finally a doctorate in higher education. He also worked for the Dallas Chamber of Commerce while in school and even sought work as a musician, picking up his old high school instrument, the trumpet.

"I really identify with our students because many of them are working with family and mortgages," he said. "We have sort of a joke in my family with our kids - try to pick a job that daddy hasn't done...everything from working in retail stores to construction crews."

He has two daughters - one going into Fort Myers High School next year and a 7th grader. His wife, Betsi, teaches part-time middle school and high school English and is a freelance writer.

This variety of jobs, degrees and interests culminated in his presidency, Jones said, managing more than 10,000 students in Lee County. And on a daily basis, the position is as varied as their coursework. Like a conductor, Jones helps orchestrate the relationships between professors and students to local businesses involved in health care, business, education, public service, and the arts.

"These are our major employers," he said. "And our major partners in designing and meeting the local needs...Everything that we do is about making (our programs) responsive

to community needs, relevant to our student's employability, and the ever changing nature of our various programs."

He uses partnerships - such as help from Lee Memorial Health Services in designing a new four-year nursing program, or working with FGCU to make sure students are placed correctly - to meet a growing challenge: higher enrollment coupled with less funding from the state. That funding is essential because, Jones said, your tuition only pays about one-third of the actual cost.

The college now has the 20th largest nursing program in the country, is in the top 100 for number of associate degrees, and is planning on adding more four-year degrees. But the stumbling economy has meant less sales tax revenue, and therefore less funding for public schools.

"It's ironic to have a shortfall in the appropriations at the same time you're serving more students," Jones said. "Everybody is going through this. Everybody is finding creative ways to meet the demand. This is when these partnerships with the business communities really find cost savings and you really find ways to serve the students, sometimes with less recourses. These things go in cycles and we certainly have prepared for the rainy day, but it is raining pretty heavy."

Jones admitted it's a very absorbing job, and that the work of a campus president is with him almost always. But he still finds time for fishing, boating, kayaking and scuba diving in the Florida Keys.

"I will say that I'm not always a college President," he said. "When I'm at Home Depot with my ball cap on and my tennis shoes I'm the fix it guy or I'm the girl's dad. But I do tend



Dr. Robert R. Jones COURTESY PHOTO

to live the work, and I'm very appreciative of my wife and my family because they like being part of the college and they're very supportive of a husband and father who kind of lives his work...Most of the folks here saw my kids grow up from the time they were crawling under the table...I think there's still even some Crayolas in the drawer over here from when my daughters were little.

"Because I have so many interests there is no other job that I could envision that I could touch music, architecture, business, economics, academic student life... I could have gone many different directions...I certainly could have been more in a corporate structure - health care, finance - and I enjoy being able to speak to those kind of partnerships. But I wouldn't trade places with any of them.

"I really like the variety of this, and I think because I did a lot of different things both in college and in my work prior to higher education that I can really confirm that this is the best spot that I can image. I can imagine a lot. It's pretty much what you make it into." ■

COMMERCIAL SPACE FOR LEASE

Now Leasing

BELLA VILLA SHOPS

Available September '08

8890 SalRose Lane (Corner of Daniels Pkwy & Apaloosa Ln)
20,000 Total Sq Ft Rent at \$21 to \$24 PSF Net
CAM \$3.93 PSF (2008) + \$5.98 Est (2009) Includes Build-out

Available

BELLA ROSA SHOPS

Available Now

8911 Daniels Parkway
1,600 Sq Ft at \$19.50 PSF CAM \$5.98 PSF Est
Store was recently a coffee/ice cream shop. Now vacant, counters, sink, etc. in place can be converted to any use.

COMMERCIAL PARCELS FOR SALE

Build Now

DANIELS FRONTAGE

Three Commercial Parcels for Sale

Parcel A • 1.25 Acre, corner lot, \$1,450,000
Parcel B • 1.10 Acre, \$1,189,000
Parcel C • 1.40 Acre, zoned for bank and restaurant, \$1,525,000

Water and sewer to site. Roadways and CPD in place for all parcels. Parcels are fully useable with retention off-site.

ALL OFFERS WILL BE CONSIDERED

Call Sal Basile (239) 281-1323
Brokers Welcome - Commissions Gladly Paid

You Can't Predict the future ... but you can prepare!

Did you know?

Having Life Insurance Can Pay For:

- Funeral Expenses
- Estate Admin
- Debts
- Expenses
- Estate Taxes
- Your Mortgage

Automatic Online Quotes
GuardFinancial.Com

GUARD FINANCIAL
exceptional insurance

CALL 1-877-22-GUARD

Comm. Prop. Management Offers Professional

- "Hands On" Property Management of your Shopping Center/Industrial Property
- Full P & L Accounting
- Frequent "On Site" Inspections-Vendor Control

Contact **Allan Fox**
Licensed RE Broker
239-425-2654
40 Years in the Business