

Q&A with Dr. McCurdy

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BCCC's New President



Dr. Debra L. McCurdy began her tenure as the 14th president of Baltimore City Community College on May 1, 2019. On April 25, she took a break from moving and sat down to tell us a little more about herself and her background.

You are originally from Canada. What's something people should know about Canada, but don't?

It's not always cold! It's also very clean, conservative, and diverse in terms of people who have immigrated there. The cities are very cosmopolitan; similar to Baltimore, there are many unique cultural enclaves. The major cities are very expensive. Overall, Canada is a great place to live, which is why so many people threaten to move there.

If someone had never been to Canada, what is the first place they should visit?

Toronto or Montreal – each city has all of the cool cultural and entertainment activities as well as all of the professional sports teams. The sports games are quite a draw and very upbeat. On the west coast, Vancouver is nice. Nova Scotia is beautiful. I lived there for a year. The fishing industry is booming, but it's too cold to swim in the ocean.

Where were you born and raised?

I was born in Windsor, Ontario, and then moved to London, Ontario, before leaving to attend college in Ohio. I am the youngest of four - two sisters and one brother. One sister lives in Michigan. My other sister and brother live in Canada.

How did you end up going to college in the United States?

I was married early to a hockey player who attended Bowling Green State University so we went together. Where I grew up, kids were outside ice skating the way they are on the basketball courts in the U.S.

What was your first job?

At 15, I worked in a newsstand that was attached to a fast food restaurant and made hamburgers and French fries. I also worked in a cookie factory one summer – an experience that motivated me to stay in school. I lasted 6 weeks!

When did you know you wanted to work in higher education?

I always knew that I wanted to be in higher education as an administrator. I have great respect for faculty, but there is a role for everybody. I liked the administration side of college.

I'm interested in knowing all parts of an organization and how it works – or doesn't work. Students are the heart. The faculty are the core. I like looking at how you put it all together to function in a healthy way.

What attracted you to the position of president of BCCC?

This job combines everything that I've done. As I talked with Chairman Kurt Schmoke and the board, that was the whole theme – that this is the best of everything I've done. And the toughest – it was an opportunity to see an institution at its finest and its most challenged and work to move it to new levels. You're always striving to get there.

My last three institutions have all been geared toward major change. I like to think that it's like trying to chart a new course – how to get to calmer waters. Even when you are in a leadership role, you aren't the only one making that ship go. Who sets that course and keeps the college moving in that direction? That's where the cabinet comes in.

Also, I asked myself can you make a difference? And I think yes, I can. With a team, I can. I can't do it by myself. It's going to take the leadership and the team.

Change is ultimately about the human spirit that drives the organization. People need to want to make the organization a better place. .

What do you think is BCCC's greatest strength?

Its greatest strength is our visibility. It is the community's college. Being the city's only community college means the spotlight is on us. Everybody is watching us. This is a tremendous strength. The College is in the heart of the city, and it is the heart of this city. And, it needs to rise to that strength. BCCC hasn't yet realized the strength that it brings to this community and this city. BCCC has all the right stuff, but we need to reposition many of those things so we can realize our full potential. That was what realignment was about – we have all the ingredients, but they were not aligned effectively. It's like a car – you have to keep everything in alignment, so it runs smoothly.

What is your favorite food?

Italian food – pastas. My favorite desserts are lemon pie, lemon tarts, lemon squares.

Have you had steamed crabs yet?

No, I don't like to dig for food. However, I do like crab cakes especially on a Baltimore club sandwich. Bacon is good on anything.

What book are you currently reading?

Renee Brown's *Dare to Lead*. The Bible is open at all times.

What is your favorite sports team?

I have a home in Atlanta, where I lived for many years while at Clark Atlanta University and Georgia Perimeter College, so I love the Falcons. I might have to switch to the Ravens. I am a big football fan and can't wait to attend a Ravens game.

What was your favorite class in college?

Psychology. I was working with peer advisors with Upward Bound for several summers. My psychology and sociology classes helped me understand the kids better.

What is your favorite place to visit?

Savannah. I'm drawn to the water because it's so peaceful. I like being out and about, doing something water-related (like sitting still, watching the water, not swimming or kayaking!)



- Are you an Early Bird or a Night Owl?
They say I don't sleep, so I guess I'm both!
- I have never . . .
gone scuba diving.
- I love it when things are . . .
natural.
- I would never jeopardize . . .
my integrity.
- The most important decision I have made in my life was . . .
coming to BCCC!
- The thing that makes me laugh is . . .
a spontaneous, funny, clean response.
- There is nothing I enjoy more than . . .
having fun or doing something fun – travel, long walks, long rides, boat rides, dinners out with good company and good food – taking in culture and entertainment and being casual and taking long walks. I have a highly stressful job so it's nice to be able to wind down and relax by doing some of nothing and some of everything.
- When I think of prunes, I think . . .
shriveled, wrinkly, but good. It doesn't have to look good, but just has to be good.



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