

Patricia McKeown shines in first year as BTC president



Patricia McKeown took over as president of Bellingham Technical College during a tough time; in the span of three years the college has lost 38 percent of its state funding. Isaac Bonnell | BBJ

by Isaac Bonnells

In her 27 years at Bellingham Technical College, Patricia McKeown has been the dean of every department and been involved in the development or expansion of many of the college's programs. So she was a natural choice to replace Thomas Eckert as president of the college in December 2010.

Her first year on the job was a busy one, with increased enrollment and shrinking financial support from the state. BTC lost 38 percent of its state funding over the past three years and may have to endure another 13 percent cut this year. But McKeown said she tries not to focus on bad news.

"I stay positive by thinking about our faculty and the amazing students who go through these programs," she said. "We're really making a difference in their lives."

With the drop in state funding, McKeown has focused on bringing in grants to make up the difference. Of the current budget of about \$18 million, \$2.3 million of that is grant money.

"We used to get just a few state grants. Now we aggressively look for grants," she said. "But you have to be careful with grants because they come with a lot of strings attached. So you have to make sure they line up with your mission."

The college also relies on partnerships with public and private organizations. One such partnership with Bellingham-based aerospace company Heath Tecna, the Department of Commerce, the Northwest Economic Council and several other agencies was given the 2011 Governor's Best Practices Award for Workforce and Economic Development.

The program started in the spring and put 380 new production employees for Heath Tecna through a two-week training course. The program was hailed as "a model of private and public investments that gets laid off workers back to work quickly and efficiently, helping local families and a local company thrive," according to the award announcement.

These types of partnerships "are at the core of Bellingham Technical College," McKeown said. "That is what makes this college as excellent as it is."

"In addition to possessing impeccable credentials for the position of president, McKeown possesses considerable knowledge and understanding of the college and the challenges faced by our institution as a result of the economy," Cartwright said.

McKeown has acquired federal and state grants for BTC totaling more than \$5 million dollars over the last five years. She has also served in a number of statewide leadership roles including the chair of the Washington Community and Technical College Instruction Commission and numerous state task forces and committees.

She currently serves as a board member on the Northwest Workforce Development Council, and the Northwest Economic Council. She is also a member of the Manufacturing Institute Education Council, Sustainable Strategies Council, and the Alcoa Community Advisory Board, among others.