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Passionate about the Liberal Arts

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Linfield College

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Linfield's 19th president

Passionate about the liberal arts

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He's curious about the world around him and has a multitude of interests. He has changed careers several times, yet remained connected to higher education. He's a graduate of a small liberal arts college and has been on the faculty at a similar institution. He's been an academic administrator and a foundation executive.
When he becomes Linfield College's 19th president on April 3, he will bring a broad background of academic experience and passion to the position.

“I believe fiercely in the transformational power of undergraduate college education, especially liberal arts education,” Hellie said. “I believe it both elevates and transforms undergraduate college education, especially liberal arts education.”

Hellie, 52, was attracted to Linfield for a number of reasons, including its reputation for academic excellence. He was intrigued by the college's successful undergraduate program with a liberal arts core coupled with programs that are professionally oriented.

“I'm very interested in connecting the liberal arts to the professions and I’m impressed by Linfield's success in that area,” he added. “I am also pleased that Linfield programs include service to others. In some circles we describe this as the call to vocation, the call to serve others through our work as well as our volunteer activity. I am eager to emphasize the relationship between the philosophical values of the liberal arts and the practical value of professional programs.”

Hellie is bright, intellectual and dedicated to students, say people who have known and worked with him for years. He has a quiet, calm persona that belies an energy and enthusiasm for his work. He is loyal, generous and patient, and has a great sense of humor. He's not afraid to laugh at himself.

“He believes strongly in the liberal arts,” said Robert Larson, professor of theatre at Luther College and one of Hellie's former teachers. “He will be very supportive of the professional programs and a very student-centered president. He understands the dynamics and culture of the place where he lives. He will be careful of Linfield and respect that culture.”

When Tom Hellie was growing up on a farm in southwestern Minnesota, he had two key illusions that he would become a farmer. Although he worked in the fields and tended the livestock, both he and his father knew his heart just wasn't in it.

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Hellie said his own liberal arts education helped him adapt to different situations and circumstances. He learned to be sensitive to other cultures and perspectives and to think on his feet.

“When I was an undergraduate, we were asking big questions about what matters in life, we were challenged to think about what we stood for, who we were and what we were called to do,” he said. “My education didn't always give me answers, but it helped me identify and articulate the questions. It enriched my life in many ways.”

Hellie is interested in how the liberal arts can challenge students today through internships, experiential learning and critical thinking, just as he was challenged as an undergraduate. He firmly believes prospective students and parents need a better understanding of how the liberal arts prepare students for the professional world.

“We've already seen that careers and professions are rapidly changing,” he added. “If someone is trained with a particular skill, that's well and good if it leads to a job. But if they have not learned how to learn and have not developed a broad set of skills, they could be in trouble as their field changes or disappears. Few careers move in straight lines, and the majority of people are not working in their original major field by the time they are 35 or 40.”

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Bill Mackie ’71, professor of physics and member of the search committee, said Hellie’s combination of experience at liberal arts colleges and his foundation and fundraising background will serve him well at Linfield.

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He is new to the Northwest, but “when Hellie arrived on campus, it was clear that ability to engage with faculty and give him a strong understanding of academic issues and concerns,” Mackie said.

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Julie Olds
Julie Olds acknowledges that she lives somewhat
anonymously in her local neighborhood in Chicago.
She anticipates that changing once she moves to
McMinnville and her hus-
band, Tom Hellie, begins his
duties as Linfield College
president.

“Our neighborhood has a small-town feel, and we
like that kind of interaction,” she said. “We recognize
people and notice changes. But I am used to people
don’t recognize me or really caring what I do. I guess
that may change!”

Despite the celebrity that may come because of her new
state, Olds is excited about moving to
McMinnville and living on campus. She and Hellie
lived adjacent to campus when he was a professor at
Hiram College and she was working for a children’s
theatre company.

“I loved living on campus,” she said. “I love the
atmosphere and I look forward to getting involved in
campus life.”

Since then, Olds has reinvented herself in several
different careers. After completing her bachelor’s
degree in theatre at Hiram and her master’s of fine arts
at Case Western Reserve University in Cleveland, Ohio,
she worked as an actress in the Cleveland area
for several years.

“When Tom got the position in Chicago, I decid-
ed it was time to get a real job,” she said with a laugh.
“I had been a working actress in Cleveland, but once
you start in a new town, you have to start from
scratch.”

She took a sales job in a wallpaper and blinds store
and worked her way up, eventually managing several
stores. Looking for a new challenge, she became direc-
tor of housekeeping and management in a nursing
home. Although she didn’t like the housekeeping and
laundry part, she found she loved working with senior
citizens. She moved into admissions and marketing and
ultimately secured her license as a nursing home
administrator. She’s now director of assisted living at a
senior community and she loves the position.

“Some people have a knack with kids. I guess I
have a knack with seniors,” she said. “I just love work-
ing with them. They have so many interesting stories,
but they also have a different outlook on things.”

Olds doesn’t yet know if she will pursue that career
once she moves to McMinnville, but she does plan to
play an active role in the life of the Linfield and
McMinnville communities.

Olds and Hellie will be accompanied to
McMinnville by their gray-bearded cat, Falstaff, one of
many cats they’ve had over the years, all named after
characters from Shakespeare’s plays. Olds also vows to
learn how to cook, once she arrives.

“Tom has been the main cook in our family, and
he’s quite good,” she said. “I’ve always been the ‘throw
the leftovers in a pot and add cheese’ sort of cook. This
should be interesting, and I hope the smoke detectors
in the house aren’t too sensitive!”

An avid runner, she has competed in seven
marathons and may take a crack at next fall’s Portland
Marathon. She, like her husband, loves to read — con-
temporary fiction and mystery novels — as well as trying
culinary and theatre productions and
gallery hopping. And she’s a big fan of blues-based rock
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Julie Olds looks forward to return to campus life

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Marvin Riehberg, left, interim president, introduces Thomas L. Hellie and Julie Olds at a campus and community reception held during their visit to Linfield in January.

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Hellie also organized and led faculty development
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Elizabeth Hayford, president of ACM and Hellie’s
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“He doesn’t impose his own ideas,” she said. “He lis-
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His personal skills are the most important, she said.

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Humility. I think humility is one of the most important standing the issues and the people he’s working with,” she Illinois, said he takes the time to learn about an organi- serves as dean of students at Lake Forest College in But his favorite part of the job was administering the kemper Scholars Program for 80 undergraduates at 19 participating colleges. He served as a mentor of some of the scholars, a teaching opportunity he had missed since leaving Hiram. Matt Huels, one of the stu- dents he mentored, has remained close to Hellie since completing the program. He said Hellie took an active interest in his develop- ment, both personally and profes- sionally.

“He is a powerful listener and a compassionate person,” Huels said. “He is a man of faith who works very hard at what he does. He will take an interest in the people he works with, and will take a particular interest in the students.”

Huels and others who know Hellie well agree that his greatest asset is his ability to ask probing questions and listen to what people have to say.

“At Kemper, he was a leader who learned what people were doing and what they had to contribute,” Huels said. “Then he was able to add his own flair and not effective in seeking funding for projects. Kemper Insurance. As executive director of the foun- dation, Hellie took the time to learn about an organi- nation, respect and understanding of the business sector.

“I believe it both elevates the students,” Huels said. “And it’s a great com- munity!”

They anticipate little difficul- ty adjusting to the community. Even though their address is Chicago, they consider themselves part of a small neighborhood community where they interact with local resi- dents and business owners.

Although traditionally college presidents begin their term in the summer, Hellie opted to come in April to have a chance to meet this year’s graduating seniors and to engage with the faculty prior to commencement. His initial goal is to get to know the institution as well as he possibly can, including students, staff, faculty, trustees and alumni.

“To understand the institution, I need to do a lot of listening, and that’s going to be important during my first few months,” he said. “I need to hear from as many people as I can. Once I do that, I will be better prepared to enunciate goals and work with others to devise a plan to meet those goals.

“The last two presidents and everyone else at the college have dramatically strengthened the college and elevated its profile,” Hellie said. “This is a great opportunity for any new college president. I just happe- n to be the lucky one.”

— Madi Mileham

Del. Hellie is eager to hear from alumni and others about their Linfield experiences and their views about the college today. He can be contacted at newy2@linfield.edu. If he receives an overwhelming response, he may be unable to personally respond to all messages.

H ellie and his wife, Julie Olds, are not strangers to McMinnville. Before being approached about the Linfield presidency, they had vacationed in the area, pursuing their inter- est in wine. They were enchanted with McMinnville, Oregon and the Pacific Northwest and considered it as a possible place to retire.

They are excited about coming to McMinnville and about moving into the president’s house. They rented a house adjacent to Hiram College when he taught there. They look forward to taking an active role in the community as well as immersing themselves in the life of the college.

“I loved being part of the community and I’m looking forward to returning to a residential college,” Hellie said. “I’m near so many people who are part of the community. And it’s a great com- munity!”

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Winthrop W. Dolan
1968 and 1974

Win Dolan, professor emeritus of mathematics, took the reins of Linfield on two separate occasions, serving as interim president in 1968 and 1974. Following his retirement from Linfield in 1984, he continued teaching part-time for 10 years. He served on the Linfield Board of Trustees until 1989 and since then as a trustee emeritus. He served on the housing authority, the school board budget committee and a county land-use committee. He appeared in more than 20 plays and musicals at McMinnville’s Gallery Theatre. He also founded Pendleton Pastry, a senior lunch pro- gram backed by local churches, which operated prior to the opening of the McMinnville Senior Center. Throughout the years, Dolan has remained an active member of the First Baptist Church, singing in the choir for more than 50 years.

Charles U. Walker
1975–1992

Charles Walker has maintained an extraordinary commitment to community service since retiring. During his 17 years as Linfield’s leader, he built a reputation for community involvement, and his retire- ment has proven no different. He has been prominently involved in the Ford Family Foundation, serving as vice chair of the board and help- ing to design the foundation’s two major initiatives: the Ford Scholars Program and the Ford Institute for Community Building. He is now a special advisor to the board.

Walker is chair of the Oregon Cultural Trust, which makes grants to cultural organizations in addition to raising funds toward a $200 million permanent endowment. His interest in education led to Walker’s involvement in the Chalkboard Project, designed to help strengthen K-12 education in Oregon. The project is run by Foundations for a Better Oregon, which he chairs, and is made up of the Ford Family Foundation, the Meyer Memorial Trust, the Collinos Foundation, the Oregon Community Foundation and the Jeld-Wen Foundation.

Walker, a classical music enthusiast, also started Neskowin Chamber Music in 1994 and combines his interest in interna- tional education and travel to lead tours around the world.

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Gordon C. Bjork
1968–1974

Gordon Bjork, Linfield’s 16th president, accepted the position at age 32, moving his young family into the president’s home in 1968.

After leaving Linfield in 1974, Bjork went on to a distinguished aca- demic career at Claremont McKenna College in California, where he was the first Jonathan B. Lovelace Professor of Economics and taught until his retirement in 2003. In addition to teaching, Bjork created BankSim, a commercial banking course for which he was twice honored by the Freedoms Foundation. Bjork was appointed to the Environmental Protection Agency’s National Advisory Council on Environmental Policy and Technology. He is the author of four books on economics and has contributed to 10 others.

He and his wife, Susan, live in Santa Barbara, Calif., near their four children and eight grandchildren.

Charles W. Walker
1975–1992

Charles Walker has maintained an extraordinary commitment to community service since retiring. During his 17 years as Linfield’s leader, he built a reputation for community involvement, and his retire- ment has proven no different. He has been prominently involved in the Ford Family Foundation, serving as vice chair of the board and help- ing to design the foundation’s two major initiatives: the Ford Scholars Program and the Ford Institute for Community Building. He is now a special advisor to the board.

Walker is chair of the Oregon Cultural Trust, which makes grants to cultural organizations in addition to raising funds toward a $200 million permanent endowment. His interest in education led to Walker’s involvement in the Chalkboard Project, designed to help strengthen K-12 education in Oregon. The project is run by Foundations for a Better Oregon, which he chairs, and is made up of the Ford Family Foundation, the Meyer Memorial Trust, the Collinos Foundation, the Oregon Community Foundation and the Jeld-Wen Foundation.

Walker, a classical music enthusiast, also started Neskowin Chamber Music in 1994 and combines his interest in interna- tional education and travel to lead tours around the world. He is president of his local library board, serves as a board member of the Tillamook County Futures Council and works as an evaluator for the National Endowment for the Humanities.