



CEI prez candidates make their pitches

Posted: November 29, 2017 5:22 p.m.



Ryan Carstens speaks to audience members during a forum with candidates for the President of the College of Eastern Idaho on Tuesday. John Roark/ jroark@postregister.com



Rick Aman speaks to audience members during a forum with candidates for the President of the College of Eastern Idaho on Wednesday. John Roark/ jroark@postregister.com



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By *NATHAN BROWN*
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NAME: Anthony Paustian

CURRENT JOB: Provost and chief administrative officer, Des Moines Area Community College - West Campus, Iowa.

PROFESSIONAL BACKGROUND: President/owner of A.D. Paustian Design Group, Inc.

EDUCATION: Doctor of philosophy in higher educational psychology and administration, University of Iowa; master's of business administration, Loyola University - Chicago; bachelor of business administration in marketing and finance, Eastern New Mexico University; associate of science in management, Eastern New Mexico University; associated of applied science, aircraft technology, Community College of the Air Force.

NAME: Ryan Carstens

CURRENT JOB: Strategy and special projects associate, Washington State Board for Community and Technical Colleges.

PROFESSIONAL BACKGROUND: President of Spokane Community College, Spokane, Wash.

EDUCATION: Doctor of education in educational administration, University of Texas, Austin; master of science in curriculum and instruction, Oklahoma State University; bachelor of science in German, Oklahoma State University.

NAME: Rick Aman

CURRENT JOB: Interim president, College of Eastern Idaho.

PROFESSIONAL BACKGROUND: President of Eastern Idaho Technical College.

EDUCATION: Doctor of philosophy in community college leadership, Oregon State University, master of business administration, Golden Gate University, bachelor of science in education, Western Oregon State College; associate of science in computer applications, Mount Hood Community College, Gresham, Ore.

NAME: Richard Pearce.

CURRENT JOB: Vice president for Learning and Student Success, Heartland Community College, Normal, Ill.

PROFESSIONAL BACKGROUND: Vice president for Learning and Student Development, Illinois Valley Community College, Oglesby, Ill.

EDUCATION: Doctor of philosophy in educational administration and foundations, Illinois State University; master of arts in Asian History, Illinois State University; bachelor of science in history and social science education, Illinois State University; associate of arts in secondary education, Illinois Valley Community College.

The College of Eastern Idaho's faculty and students got a chance this week to meet the four people vying to run the place.

Whoever is chosen will lead the college during a pivotal time as it transitions from being the former Eastern Idaho Technical College to a full-fledged community college. Bonneville County voters approved the change, which meant creating a new taxing district, in May 2017.

The four forums, one with each candidate, were held Tuesday and Wednesday in the Healthcare Building on the college's campus and drew an audience of university faculty and staff and others. Idaho Falls Mayor Rebecca Casper and Ammon Mayor Dana Kirkham moderated. The topics that came up were largely the same at all four, including working with the Legislature, finances, relations with faculty and with the College of Eastern Idaho Foundation, and branding the now-community college. Audience members were given cards to submit questions and forms to write down their evaluations of each candidate.

The four candidates are Rick Aman, the college's interim president and the former president of EITC; Ryan Carstens, who works for the Washington State Board for Community and Technical Colleges; Anthony Paustian, the provost and chief administrative officer at the Des Moines Area Community College - West Campus, in Iowa; and Richard Pearce, the vice president for Learning and Student Success at Heartland Community College, in Illinois.

The board is expected choose a president within a week, barring some unforeseen delay, said college spokesman Todd Wightman.

Aman started by asking the crowd, many of whom work at the college and would have been involved, to think back on everything they did to make the transition to a community college, such as getting financial aid in place and getting accredited.

"All of those things had to be in place for us to open in August of this year in order to have a community college in place," he said. "To go from virtually nothing to where we are is phenomenal."

Aman said he expects CEI to eventually become the second-biggest community college in the state after the College of Western Idaho, in the Treasure Valley. He said the college needs to make sure, as it rebrands and promotes new offerings, it also preserves its reputation as a place for career and technical training. In response to an audience question about countering any public perception that the college's technical side has been diminished, Aman argued this perception isn't accurate while

pointing to tech areas where the college could expand, such as welding, diesel and nuclear technology.

“Those are all things unique to our area that we can support business and industry in,” he said.

Pearce said he is passionate about the mission of community colleges and their ability to change people’s lives, and is excited by the opportunity to get in on the ground floor and be part of the process of one’s development. In response to a question about how the college can keep its tight-knit environment as it grows, he said this would happen if the people working on campus have a shared vision of how they want things to develop.

“It happens when we’re all in it together,” he said.

Paustian moved from the private sector into education almost two decades ago, when he helped to design the campus where he still works as provost and chief administrative officer. One of the college’s focuses, he said, should be on rebranding now that it has switched from being a technical college to a full-service community college with liberal arts and general education offerings. Changing people’s perception, he said, takes more than just changing the name and logo.

“Any brand-building endeavor takes time,” he said.

Carstens compared the college to a business start-up, and said it has an opportunity now to decide what it wants to be and how it wants to sell itself.

“We have a quality experience that can be competitive to anything you do in eastern Idaho here in higher ed. ... This college is the source of opportunity to connect you to your future,” he said.

Paustian said he doesn’t know what he would change or what his top priority would be — his first two to three months, he said, would likely be spent learning about the college and its culture. He emphasized that he believes in teamwork and building partnerships.

“I am passionate about inspiring people,” he said.

Carstens worked at the former EITC almost two decades ago, leaving a job at a bigger college to be closer to family. He left for a job in Texas to be closer to his parents but said he has visited Idaho regularly since then. He said he has bought a home in Idaho Falls and plans to stay in the area whether he gets the job or not.

“I’m excited to be here,” he said. “This is an 18-year-old opportunity that I had hoped to have one day.”

All four have experience working with government to make sure their college’s needs are met. Paustian talked about working with state legislators and the City Council in Des Moines, and Carstens has worked with lawmakers in several states where he has been a community college administrator. Pearce has done the same in Illinois.

“It’s not just to get your face in front of them,” Pearce said. “It’s to get them to share the vision of what we want to do as a college.”

Aman pointed to the relationships he has already established with local lawmakers and the governor and talked about how all four community college presidents in Idaho meet regularly. He said they are looking at ways they can support state goals such as economic development and increasing college go-on rates when making their funding pitch to lawmakers in 2018.

“We’re going to go before the Legislature as a group,” he said.

Each candidate also talked about being careful with money.

“Public funds are sacred,” Carstens said. “We’re entrusted to spend funds that are not ours to benefit people that are not our family,” but to help the community.

Paustian said he has never gone over budget at Des Moines, prioritizing projects and raising money from private donors.

“I treat finances as if they’re my own money,” he said.

Pearce, too, said he tightened the purse strings when he joined Heartland about five years ago and said he wants to make sure any spending support the college’s objectives.

“You want to make sure you’re spending that money wisely,” he said.