

## Dobelle takes office at Westfield State

By DAVE CANTON  
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WESTFIELD — Evan Dobelle joked yesterday that the first executive decision he made at Westfield State College was to close the school.

"I was up at 5:20 in the morning Monday and I called it," he chuckled.

Indeed his first day as the newly appointed president of the state college was pretty much a washout as a Nor'easter snowstorm blew through western Massachusetts dumping up to 10 inches of snow locally.

Yesterday was a more conventional day for the new president. In the office by 8 a.m., Dobelle held his first "cabinet" meeting with administrative staff at 9:30 a.m., had lunch with a fundraiser, held more staff meetings in the afternoon, got an update from his emergency response team on campus preparedness, met with the faculty union president, took a trip to downtown Westfield to tour the future home of graduate student housing on Washington Street and ended the day watching the Owls women's basketball team lose to Bridgewater State College in the Woodward Center.

It is part and parcel of being a college president.

"You have got to like this," he said late yesterday afternoon.

Dobelle's contract and appointment to the post was unanimously confirmed by the Board of Higher Education Friday afternoon clearing the way for his first day Monday. Unfortunately, that late vote did not allow him to speak with school administrative staff prior to this week, something he said "wasn't appropriate," prior to the BHE vote, so he has come to campus cold.

Even though recommended by the campus search committee and approved by the Board of Trustees, Dobelle's selection had to be further ratified by the BHE.

Yesterday's meetings were the

first he has had to gauge the state of the school, but Dobelle said he does not see that as a problem.

"I've been a college president for over 20 years," he said. "You get a certain sense of the lay of the land pretty quickly. All except the culture of the college; that will take a few months to get that down. It will come as I talk with the faculty, staff and students."

Yesterday was a listening day, Dobelle said. That is what will drive his future agenda as president.

"The only agenda I have to listen to what people tell me needs to be done," he said. "Basically what I hear, I have to make happen. I was not hired to dominate the school. I am here to listen to the faculty, the administration, staffers, to the students and to city government. You listen to what is said and you make a plan to make things happen. Being a college president is just common sense."

The City of Westfield is as important as any campus constituency he has, Dobelle said. As a former mayor himself, he was elected the youngest mayor of Pittsfield in the early 1970s, he said he recognizes the importance the school has for the city, and the importance the city

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 has for Westfield State College.

"As a mayor I am very sensitive to local prerogatives," he said. "We are an economic force; we are the largest employer, so we need to do what we can to help the city. I am convinced that what is good for the city is good for Westfield State College."

In the coming months the "learning curve" for the new president will take shape and he will develop his own sense of what needs to happen, he said. In the meantime his agenda is to tell the world what Westfield State College is.

"I need to make sure that people recognize that we have the best state school in Massachusetts; that it is

equal to any school nationally for Bachelors and Masters degrees. I want people to be as proud of Westfield State College as I am. You see, being a college president is very uncomplicated."

The school district is expecting \$779,557 in grants, a \$70,191 decrease over the past year.

"Our low income population, which is free and reduced lunch costs, is down considerably," Witham said. "We have a healthier population, but it hurts us economically in the budget."

General administration expenditures are estimated at \$6.154 million in the coming year. Expenditures by school are: Woodland School, \$2.965 million; Powder Mill Middle School, \$2.953 million; Southwick-Tolland Regional High School, \$4.122 million; and special needs education, \$3.144 million.

Still, talks surrounding the proposed school budget continued to come back to increased costs associated with funding the new kindergarten program.

"We are going to have a temporary shortfall," Petit told the school board. "Do we cut education? Should the town increase its ante? Do we look internally to our reserve funds? If we can't bridge the gap, do we do line item cutting?"

"We need to bridge the gap to fund this program. That's our dilemma. It's the biggest thing we need to overcome."

