

# The Right Man at the Right Time

There is a moment in all challenging ventures when the protagonist realizes a corner has been turned and things will be different from that point on. For Stephen Jordan, that moment was heralded by *Jingle Bells*.

Jordan and his wife Ruthie stood on the porch of their campus residence on a chilly December evening in 1998 and enjoyed enthusiastic Christmas carols courtesy of students in Eastern's sororities and fraternities.

"That's when Ruthie and I knew this was going to work," Jordan said.

Making "this" work was by no means a guarantee when he took the reins as president of EWU in the summer of 1998. Eastern was struggling to shake off the perception that it was a failing university that needed to be bailed out by its bigger sibling in Pullman.

Eastern's community wasn't ready to give up on the school, however, and the University's students, faculty, staff, alumni and friends came together to show things could still work at EWU.

Into that rallying climate came Jordan, and as things seem to happen when dealing with destiny, a happy accident got the collaboration between the community and the new boss off on a good foot.

The EWU Board of Trustees wanted the new president to live in Cheney and even began formulating plans for construction of a huge presidential home. It didn't appear there was any residence in town appropriate for the president's house.

It turned out that was not completely true.



Steve and Ruthie Jordan at home on campus.

## 2003

- Northern Ireland Peace Accord broker and former U.S. Senate Majority Leader George Mitchell is the second speaker in the Presidential Speaker Series.
- EWU sponsors a Civic Breakfast for business leaders in Seattle; speaker Steve Ballmer, Microsoft CEO, calls for better funding of higher education in Washington.
- Academic strategic planning process begins.
- Free bus ridership provided for students, faculty and staff.
- Ground broken on the \$25 million School of Computing and Engineering Sciences building; occupancy to take place in summer 2005.
- EWU opens Early Head Start and Childcare Center in Colville.

## 2004

- Fall quarter sees an all-time high 9,775 students (headcount) enrolled; 2,000 students live in University housing. Sixty percent of the students whose programs are based in Cheney now live on campus or in Cheney.
- *Consumer's Digest* lists EWU among the National Top 50 Best Values for Public Colleges and Universities.
- New Woodward Field press box and donor suites completed, additional seating provided; project funding began with an anonymous donation of \$1 million.
- David McCollough, Pulitzer Prize-winning author and presidential scholar, is the Presidential Speaker Series presenter.

There was the University House on campus, which had once been the presidential residence but had been converted into other uses when Jordan's three predecessors elected to live in Spokane.

After looking it over, the Jordans decided the house "had good bones." He didn't need a new, expensive house, he told the Trustees, and there were better uses for the money it would take to build a new structure. So, University House was quickly retooled into a residence once again, and the Jordans moved in.

"Looking back, we didn't have any idea how much goodwill moving on to campus would generate," Jordan observed.

Taking up residence on campus sent a message that a sense of community was going to be valued by the new administration, and the almost immediate overall cooperation Jordan received from the various Eastern constituencies showed that message resonated.

It also showed he would be accessible and available.

"I don't think you fully realize the extent to which people see you as being there to help them when you make yourself accessible," Jordan said. "And people here certainly aren't intimidated by 'office.'"

Choosing a very public persona carried a risk for Jordan, as it made him an easier target for blame if his plans for reshaping Eastern went wrong – but the risk also carried rewards.

"If you happen to achieve the success you plan for, it gives you the great opportunity to do things differently than they were done before," Jordan explained.

Jordan received a lot of credit for Eastern's successes over the past seven years because of his public accessibility, but he is quick to point out that it was the entire Eastern team that repositioned the University as a model for public higher education in the state.

"I think what makes the turnaround at Eastern special is that this success is not my success – it's the success of the people who work here, teach here and learn here," Jordan said. "It's the faculty, students and staff and their work that did this."

That's why Jordan is so confident that the University's current momentum will continue even as he departs. The people who are leading the growth phase of the University are still going to be in place, one of whom will take over as interim president.

Jordan said Interim President Brian Levin-Stankevich's leadership in the academic strategic planning process, the centerpiece of EWU's restructuring itself for the future, makes him the perfect choice to keep things moving forward until a new, permanent president is hired.

Knowing the University is in good hands as he leaves makes Jordan feel more comfortable with his decision to move on and return to his roots in Colorado (he becomes president of Metropolitan State College of Denver July 1), but he knows there will be moments when the reality of leaving will hit him hard.

"I don't think you can spend – not just the physical time, but the emotional capital – and not continue to have a special feeling for this place," Jordan said. "People develop a great sense of belonging to this University."

He expects that his final act as president, hooding the first doctoral class in Eastern's history (34 doctor of physical therapy graduates), will be especially bittersweet and emotional.

"That first doctorate awarded is a huge step in the life of any university – sharing that with that first class of students is going to be a special highlight I'll carry with me forever," he said.

Reflecting on his years at Eastern, he added a poignant preface to what has become Steve Jordan's best-known declaration: "No matter where I go or what I'm doing, I'll always believe and say, 'It's a great time to be an Eagle!'"

## A New President

A search committee is in place and a search firm hired to assist Eastern in finding a new permanent president – one who could be named as early as this winter and in place by as early as next spring.

"What Eastern is today – our stability, our strength and our reputation – will garner some of the most competent and effective presidential candidates available today," said Gordon Budke, chair of the EWU Board of Trustees. "This is the place to be, and that is well known throughout higher education. I anticipate we will be very pleased with the applicants for the position."

- Eastern offers the only children's studies major in the nation.
- The EWU Business Resource Center is established with a \$94,000 grant from the Jones Foundation.
- EWU and Gonzaga University collaborate to offer a joint degree in law and master of social work.
- Tawanka Commons expansion/renovation completed.
- The Eagles basketball team goes on to postseason "March Madness" NCAA Basketball Tournament play.
- EWU Press' annual *Get Lit!* spring literary arts festival features Dave Barry and Kurt Vonnegut.