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# The Sentinel

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## From Classroom to World Stage: Retired ECC Professor Helps Out Obama



*Mark Pelczarski greets President Barack Obama during a campaign stop.*

**by Gary Christenson**

On election night of 2008, ECC professor Mark Pelczarski stood in Grant Park with nearly half a million other supporters to hear acceptance remarks from the president-elect, Barack Obama. All had turned out to witness for themselves what only a short time before had seemed an impossible dream: the election of America's first African-American president.

For Pelczarski, a still more elusive dream, one he was unable yet to imagine, was how his

talents in programming and computer science would be tapped by this new president during the 2012 re-election campaign.

It started in 2011, when a call came to ECC from the Obama campaign, asking if there might be students willing to work as interns at the Democratic headquarters in downtown Chicago. Realizing that his own retirement was imminent and that he wanted some "new adventure" to pursue, Mark offered his services.

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**PRESIDENT'S MESSAGE**

Dear Colleagues,

It is my sincere wish that you are having a great semester. It is rapidly approaching the last stretch, and that means we'll get busier. For the ECCFA leadership, it has been business as usual.



We continue to deal with the negotiation of additional extra contractual compensations. There are still several items that, even though they were already approved by the Senate earlier this month, were pulled from the Board of Trustees' agenda for its November 13 meeting.

At the earliest, it will be at the Board's meeting in December when these compensations could be voted on and, hopefully, approved. The EFFCA has expressed its desire to meet as soon as possible to continue to work on this negotiation, and we are waiting for the administration's response.

On another note, there have been some reports from faculty about D2L being very slow lately. I have personally been a witness to that. The ECCFA has been in conversations with members of the administration to find out what

is happening with D2L and what can be done to solve the problem. We were informed that the contract for doubling the bandwidth on campus is currently under review.

Please save the date of December 7 for the ECCFA's End of the Semester Party. There will be more information to come soon.

The Annual Giving Campaign has been extended until the end of the year. Please consider donating what you can to support our students. No donation is too small, and every dollar counts.

Finally, on behalf of the ECCFA leadership, I want to wish you a Happy Thanksgiving. Whether you will be hosting it, being a guest at someone's table or doing nothing at all, please enjoy the holiday break and take some time to relax.

In Unity,

**Luis Martinez**  
**ECCFA President**

**Gerdes Publishes Book of Poetry**

In January, Eckhard Gerdes, adjunct instructor in the English Department, will have his first book of poems published. The collection is titled, *23 Skidoo! 23 Form-Fitting Poems*.

The book contains 23 different poems of different forms, including a sestina, a villanelle, a sonnet, a haiku and others.

"It feels great to finally be publishing a book of poems. I began writing poetry before high school, but then in my senior year of high school, my attention changed to prose. I have published quite a few novels over the years, but to finally have a book of poems coming out is the fulfillment of one of my childhood dreams. I am elated," Gerdes said.

Finishing Line Press, known for their work with female poets, is publishing the book.

***PELCZARSKI CONTINUED...***

As he'll tell you, he spent a great many hours over the next summer and fall working for the president. At night, though, he would repair to his home away from home, the Marina Towers condo that he and his wife own.

It didn't take long for campaign officials to realize that Mark could do a lot more than the average worker. Soon, Mark had five assistants helping with half a dozen simultaneous projects he oversaw—involving data mining, and he wrote many, many apps for internal use. He also worked on some research for debate preparation, was involved in the convention details, streamlined a lot of their compliance and vetting processes, and worked with analytics, tech, and voter protection (legal) to get what they knew, to where it was needed. In addition, he worked directly with the voter protection field staff in most of the battleground states.

Mark explained some of his work this way:

“I wrote a polling place simulation that they took around to all the targeted counties in the battleground states to make sure they got adequate machines and poll workers to avoid lines (and walk-offs). And we worked on a system for Election Day to handle voter incidents through a crowd-sourcing tool, using text analytics to prioritize incidents for immediate response and action. What made it so interesting was that while researching, I realized that had this stuff been adequately in place in 2000 and 2004, it would have easily changed the results in Florida (2000) and Ohio (2004), changing the outcomes in both elections overall.”

Mark also found one part of the job to be happily familiar, working with campaign interns, which he likened to teaching. In one case, he had

brought an intern far enough along to be able to turn over supervision of a project to her. The young woman voiced her amazement at playing such a significant role in the campaign.

The job also gave Mark a front seat to history. Earlier in the year, when Obamacare was upheld by the Supreme Court, he watched alongside political staffers David Axelrod and Jim Messina as the decision came down.

“They had both worked hard to support the bill,” said Mark, “and it was interesting to see how emotional they were as they talked to the staff about the decision.”

Mark's work at the headquarters also allowed him to meet or at least see a number of political dignitaries and celebrities who passed through the offices. Vice-president Joe Biden showed up one day to thank the workers for their time and efforts.

“What would you do,” asked Mark in one email, if you turned the corner in the office and came face to face with Scarlett Johansson?” Each day brought new surprises.

Of course, the president himself visited several times.

On a post-election visit to the downtown offices, President Obama gave a last impromptu talk praising the campaign staff and posed with them for pictures. On Mark's Facebook page is a photo of the president giving him a big hug.

With the president headed back to the White House, where does Mark go from here?

“I guess my retirement actually will start in mid-November,” he said. “But who knows? I may follow some other adventure this life has to offer.”

## ECC HOSTS INTERNATIONAL VISITORS



**From left: Eeva--Liisa Metsaluoto (Finland), Birgitta Mulder (the Netherlands) and Irmgard den Boer-Nijman (the Netherlands).**

Three ECC faculty members recently hosted visiting instructors from the Netherlands and Finland.

Eeva-Liisa Metsaluoto from Finland, Irmard den Boer-Nijman and Birgitta Mulder, both from the Netherlands, arrived on October 13 and were here for two weeks. The exchange is a part of the Illinois Consortium for International Studies and Programs (ICISP).

Faculty who hosted the guests were Kimberly Tarver, professor of physical therapist assistant, Christina Marrocco, professor of English and Lori Clark, professor of English/Journalism.

ECC is also hosting two guests from China, Mo Xiaoping and Xie Zewen. They have been here since September 5 and will leave on November 21. They are being hosted by Dr. Carol Cowles.

"It was beneficial to see my community through the eyes of an outsider," said Tarver. "It gave me fresh perspective,

and while I am very aware of how exceptional the resources and facilities at ECC are, I lack understanding of what it would be like to teach without the benefit of them. It was also very exciting to talk about politics, education and healthcare on a national level."

The purpose of the exchange is to give faculty members an opportunity to learn about school systems in different parts of the world. ECC also has a partnership with China.

Along with learning about the different school systems, Tarver said the program has had an even greater benefit for her.

"The most powerful and meaningful experience for me has been getting to know the colleagues I work with everyday on a more personal level. I work with some truly amazing people. How odd that it takes a visitor to bring us together."

In May, Tarver and Marrocco will visit the Netherlands, while Clark will visit Finland.

## Veterans' Webinars at ECC

The Veterans Support Team has recently purchased webinars through the American Counseling Association. The series is called *Counseling Our Troops, Veterans, and Military Families: Cutting Edge Strategies*. The webinars will provide information to assist faculty and others on how to work with veterans returning to college. The next webinar will take place on Wednesday, November 28 at 1:00 in B120, the Counseling Center conference room.



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**Sentinel Calendar**

**December 10**

Deadline--December 6

**Just a Buck!**

**ECCFA SCHOLARSHIP DONATIONS**

If every faculty member at ECC donated just \$1 per paycheck, we would be able to raise more than \$10,000 a year to contribute to the ECCFA Student Scholarships.

As we approach the end of the Foundation’s Employee Giving Campaign (which has been extended until the end of the semester) please consider a \$1 or \$5 or \$100 contribution to this important scholarship.

For more information,

**2012 Senate Meetings**

**November 28--C120**

**December 12--C120**

**Save the Date!**  
**The ECCFA End-of-Semester party will take place on Thursday, December 7. Details will be forthcoming.**