

Transcript for Conversations @ KAFM: CMUnow: Oct 2019

Katlin Birdsall: Remarkable accomplishments are happening everyday on the Colorado Mesa University and Western Colorado Community College campuses. From faculty instruction and research, to student projects and community involvement. CMUnow is a new monthly segment on the KAFM community affairs hour, where we interview faculty, athletic coaches, and students to keep you up to date on all things CMU and WCCC. I'm Katlin Birdsall along with my co-host David Ludlam, and we'll have two guests on the show today. And our first guest is Brigitte Sundermann, Vice President for Community College Affairs. Welcome Brigitte!

Brigitte Sundermann: Thanks for having me.

Katlin Birdsall: Of course, thanks for making the time to be on the show today.

David Ludlam: Yeah Brigitte so let's just jump right in with a question and I think, you know, for those who are not in higher ed, they hear the term university, or college, or community college, and they may not know the difference. So can you describe what is the difference between a community college and a university in terms of the students they serve and what they're trying to accomplish?

Brigitte Sundermann: When I think of the community college I think of, "how do we get people trained, educated, and get them out into the workplace as quick as possible?" So we can do that within sixteen weeks, nine months, or two years. But it's not a longer length of time, and we're really focused on STEM, career and technical education.

David Ludlam: So it's really sort of oriented towards that workforce development specifically, and that's one of the differentiations between a traditional university and a community college.

Brigitte Sundermann: Yes.

Katlin Birdsall: Great. So I actually went to school at Mesa, now I've worked at Mesa for quite a few years. And so I've always known obviously WCCC is a division of CMU. I've been out to the campus, and I've grown to really love WCCC and everything that you guys offer to the community. But, can you maybe talk about that relationship between a four-year institution and a two-year or less institution like WCCC and kind of maybe what's different or unique about having that relationship?

Brigitte Sundermann: I think what's unique about that relationship here in the valley is that, the students that come to the community college can go right into a four year degree quite seamlessly if they go to a Bachelor's of Applied Science. And so, they still walk out with a university degree. So, we don't spend any of our time pointing fingers at each other or who's doing what right or wrong. But we're there to work together and so we do everything together and make it easier for the student as they move through the process.

Katlin Birdsall: And that makes sense, I mean to me that's what I really see now working at CMU is that we really have something for everybody. So whether you are looking to get your Associate's or a certificate to maybe help you move up in your current position or you're a sixteen year old student who's looking at a four-year institution that they want to go to. So I feel like that's the really great part about CMU and WCCC is that no matter what kind of educational opportunities people and students are looking for, we pretty much have it.

David Ludlam: That's right. Well, switching gears a little bit Brigitte, I think the people that know you know that you're an engineer. But first and foremost, you're a member of the agricultural community and you have been your entire life. And I was just wondering, how has that background in agriculture helped you to understand the rural communities that WCCC serves and maybe some of the students who also share that background? What does agriculture mean to you personally?

Brigitte Sundermann: I think anybody in agriculture knows that it takes hard work, dedication, a compassion to the animals, or the crops that you're dealing with as well as the community that you're serving. And in that way I think that community college is the same. So the faculty we have, the staff that we have are all extremely passionate about what they do. They work hard through every aspect of helping the student meet their goals.

David Ludlam: Okay, that's great. And the mobile learning lab is a project that we're kicking off and it's going to be a mobile facility that serves rural communities. Is that an extension of what WCCC does generally is serving those rural communities. Is that an important part of what the community college does?

Brigitte Sundermann: Good point David. I think part of it is, we always want to reach out to these other communities but it's difficult because they can't come to us and sometimes we can't necessarily get to them. And this mode of transportation, it allows us to get to those communities that maybe would never even have a dream of getting a college credit before they graduate high school. We're training for some of those industries that are in those rural communities. So this to me is the epitome of what WCCC is about, reaching out to everybody on the western slope.

David Ludlam: Okay

Katlin Birdsall: I love that. Well you are listening to CMU now on KAFM community affairs and our first guest today is Brigitte Sundermann, Vice President for Community College Affairs. So I love what you guys did at WCCC this last graduation ceremony this past May. You went to the different high schools here in Mesa County and you actually presented certificates to those students who were in high school and were also taking concurrent classes at WCCC. How did that make you feel to be able to be up there and giving these students these certificates at the high school level?

Brigitte Sundermann: That part was pretty amazing. But what was really amazing when you saw those students taking pictures with their grandparents in front of their high school, it gives me goosebumps now. So when you watch these students, and they came back and said “I only have to have one job and my parents each have two because of what I’ve received already before I graduate high school”. I mean, it’s hard to explain.

David Ludlam: And our listeners can’t see, I can see here in the studio the emotion on your face. And I think that’s really a great thing to see that you have that connection to students that really speaks a lot about who you are as a person, as an educator. And I was thinking about too, you know, for you this has been a really big year. I just referenced this mobile learning lab which I know the community is going to learn a lot more in the future. You had the P-Tech announcement, there’s a big grant that you received it was the first of its kind in Colorado. And then a number of other kind of milestone thresholds that I think the community college, with your leadership, has hit this year. What is the future look like? What are your aspirations coming up? You know, in the next year or two, what do you want to accomplish from here?

Brigitte Sundermann: I think it’s always nice to reflect back and stabilize the accomplishments that we have done and do them well. We are looking at other schools and how do we do P-Tech and other programs so students can get their Associate’s before they graduate. And growth, and new programs. So, I’m always looking at new programs. If anybody has an idea I’d love to hear it, and see what else we can add to help this community.

Katlin Birdsall: And I think that’s what’s great also about WCCC and having you as the leader there is that WCCC is very nimble. So you adapt to what are the workforce needs, what are the businesses here in the local community telling you that they need in their workforce? And you guys go out and make that happen and make those programs happen. I think that’s a really great part of WCCC.

Brigitte Sundermann: Thanks, we try.

Katlin Birdsall: Yeah? Well you are listening to CMU now on KAFM community affairs and our first guest today is Brigitte Sundermann, Vice President for Community College Affairs. So we are kind of already getting to the end of our time with you but, I do have another question for you. So, there may be some older adults or maybe high school students who are looking to make a change in their career or in their lives. So, if you could tell them directly if there’s listeners right now listening, why would WCCC maybe be a good option for them?

Brigitte Sundermann: I think it’s an option because we’ll listen. We’ll see if there’s programs that, something that might work for you. If there’s, maybe you don’t know, and we’ll talk you through that as well. And if maybe you just need some excel courses or some classes in beekeeping, to make it work and we have non-credit options as well, where you can just pick courses a la carte. So, just come down and talk to us and let us know what your desires are, and we’ll see if we can help you.

Katlin Birdsall: Great.

David Ludlam: Thanks for being with us today.

Brigitte Sundermann: Thank you very much.

Katlin Birdsall: Alright well, thank you again Brigitte, we really appreciate you coming on this show. Don't go anywhere we are going to take a quick break but we'll be right back with Mickey Wender, the head coach of the triathlon team, and the head coach of the swimming and diving teams.

SEGMENT BREAK

Katlin Birdsall: Welcome back to CMUnow, a monthly show where we talk about the remarkable work happening at Colorado Mesa University and Western Colorado Community College. We'd like to welcome our second guest Mickey Wender, head coach of the triathlon team and head coach of the swimming and diving team. That's a long title to introduce you with.

Mickey Wender: It's a lot of stuff.

Katlin Birdsall: Yeah, well welcome to the show today.

Mickey Wender: Thank you.

David Ludlam: Yeah coach, welcome, thanks for being here. You know the first question from me is, I look at your resume and it's colorful and deep. But one of the things that jumped out at me is you were at West Point. And I'm wondering, one of the most esteemed institutions in the country, what was your journey from West Point to CMU? And why rural Colorado, western Colorado? How'd you get here?

Mickey Wender: We were looking for something unique. We wanted to expose our children to the real world. My roots are in division two when I first started coaching at Cal State Northridge. I worked for a guy named Peter Carty who is the division two coach of the decade, who really taught me a lot about coaching and the sport. And part of it is to honor his legacy, part of it is Grand Junction and the beauty in this community. And to be in a place where we can put down some roots and be a part of our children's lives, and make a difference in an up and coming collegiate program. Feel really excited about the team I inherited. Amazing young men and women that aspire to be great. And facilities here are top-notch. One of the finest swimming pools in the country. One of the best environments to train for triathlon. And it really checked all of the boxes for us.

David Ludlam: Okay. You just said something that jumped out at me. You said your heart is with division two. And people in this community often hear President Foster talk about why he values division two as well. What is it about division two that is important to you or that makes you feel at home?

Mickey Wender: The purity of it. That it's about the student-athlete. It's not about the spectators, it's not about the money, as much as it is about providing opportunities and experiences for young people to develop and compete and have a, you know, top-notch athletic experience. So, I like the purity of it. It's a little bit more fair. You know, in division one you have the haves and the have nots. In division two, there's a lot more purity and a lot more opportunities I think for programs that want to be great. If they work hard enough and do the right things, they are going to have an opportunity.

Katlin Birdsall: Great. Well, so, I'm kind of assuming here that it's a little bit unusual to be the head coach of two programs. And to me that sounds like it's got to be a crazy schedule for you. Especially when balancing when you've got you know, your teams competing at the same time when their schedules overlap. And not to mention, I believe there's about ninety student-athletes between triathlon, and swimming, and diving. So, can you just talk a little bit about what it's like to be the head coach for both triathlon, and swimming and diving?

Mickey Wender: It's a lot. I'm still figuring it out, but I'm very fortunate to have some amazing assistant coaches. And so, I can empower them to do things when I'm not there. Where I know it's going to be done in the right way. And it is long days, we were at the pool at 5:30 this morning and we will be there until 5:30 tonight. And it's just a matter of balancing everything and like I said, empowering the staff and these athletes to live the kind of life that's ultimately going to get them where they want to go. You know, the best training program in the world can't overcome a poor lifestyle. And they're living it, they really are. It's been great to get to know these kids from all over the world you know? We've got ten different countries represented. And just amazing people. You know, I loved West Point, but for thirteen years I kind of coached the same kid. And here, I love that I just sat down with Mahmoud, our Egyptian breaststroker, and talked for a while about how he can make the Olympic team and go to Tokyo this summer for Egypt. And a lot of different things like that, so I love the diversity of it.

Katlin Birdsall: Well good. Well you are listening to CMU now on KAFM community affairs and our second guest today is triathlon and swimming and diving head coach, Mickey Wender.

David Ludlam: Coach, I saw that your triathlon team had won the west region meet. And you were right up there with some big division one names. Did that finish or did that placement kind of project a big future? Or what are your expectations related to that great performance?

Mickey Wender: Just that we're going to work hard every day, and we are going to represent our program and this school the way that we're capable of. I think we are certainly in contention to win a national championship. There are some very good schools, Queens out in North Carolina in particular. Drury University. There are some really solid programs out there. But, it was an affirmation that what we're doing is the right thing. That our people are working really hard and we'll see when we go to Phoenix. But, I like our chances, we've prepared really well. We've scouted the course, we've created some simulated courses here in Grand Junction that have prepared us for the details of what we'll see there. Yeah, it was fun.

David Ludlam: Well you had mentioned earlier, I think something about this is a unique environment to train in, or that you like western Colorado for training purposes. Is that because of the altitude, the topography, or what is it about the area that you feel makes for a strong team in terms of training?

Mickey Wender: It's everything. It's the altitude where we are high enough that you get the training benefit but not so high that it's detrimental. The weather is perfect for it. You know, it's relatively mild. The topography with the monument and the different climbs and places that you can go and ride and run and bike. And you know, we are out in Highline Lake last week with the triathlon team and the swim team. The roads are not crowded. Yeah, it's a perfect place to train. We believe that this can be a mecca for triathlon. In fact, we want to host an event. If anybody out there listening is interested in helping us, one of the things we'd like to do this spring is use our world-class aquatic facility for the swim, and then bike and run at and around the CMU campus as a fundraiser for our programs. And we are looking to build a group of interested people in the community that want to help organize and help us put this on. I think it can be an amazing thing. We went to Montrose last week and they did a pool triathlon. And, it's an easy way for people from six to seventy-five years old to do an event and have fun, and just be introduced to triathlon. So, it's something we plan to do this spring, and every year.

David Ludlam: That's exciting. Yeah.

Katlin Birdsall: Yeah. And I believe, correct me if I'm wrong, aren't our triathlon programs a little bit newer at CMU or have they been around for a while?

Mickey Wender: The collegiate triathlon is brand new nationally.

Katlin Birdsall: Yeah, that's what I was going to say.

Mickey Wender: It's in its third year. We received a grant from USA Triathlon to create this program. And we are one of only a handful of NCAA teams out there right now. And it's an amazing opportunity, it's women only. We have a men's team that's considered club. The NCAA program is just the women. And, these young ladies will be looked at in years to come is really the founding members of collegiate triathlon. It's draft legal. So you get out of the swim and you ride in the pack like a peloton that you see you know, in the bike races. It's different than the triathlons that we've done where it's time trials, you're not allowed to draft. This is exciting, it's criterion-style racing. It's close-contact and bumping and yeah, it's a fun spectator sport too.

Katlin Birdsall: Great. Well you are listening to CMU now on KAFM community affairs, and our second guest today is triathlon and swimming and diving head coach, Mickey Wender. Well Mickey, we are kind of already getting to the end of our time with you so I wanted to throw it over to David to see if he has any last questions before we let you go.

David Ludlam: Well I just wanted to bring it back away from the team for a second and bring it back to you. I see that you have personally competed in two Iron Mans. And that you were a top-ten finisher in what's known as the Eco Challenge. I think that's generally known as one of

the toughest events out there. What is the hardest part of training for one of these if you've never done it? And I mean that maybe mentally, what do you have to do mentally to prepare for something like that, that's so physically taxing?

Mickey Wender: The Iron Mans are different. You know, you need the time on the bike. And you just have to make time for that. I have four children and so, my priorities have shifted a little bit. But in terms of the mental challenge of endurance racing, obstacle course racing, and things like the Eco Challenge that you know, that race you referenced where we were top-ten, and that was eight days, seven hours, and fifty-three minutes of racing. Where you're sleeping two or three hours a night. And that's the hardest part mentally is the sleep deprivation, is not getting the rest and recovery from day-to-day-to-day that you need. And the teams that are the best at this, the people that are really successful, have, I don't know if they've mastered, but they've really done an amazing job with how to rest. You know, for example, we'll do most of our hard-drive pushes at night so we are staying warm and we don't have to carry a lot of gear. We will rest during the day when it's warmer out, so that we don't have to have a sleeping bag or shelter and that kind of thing. But it's that part, it's the sleep deprivation.

David Ludlam: It kind of sounds like a sport that really pushes the human spirit and it allows students to really grow as they're enjoying the sport. So that's neat, thanks for sharing that.

Mickey Wender: Absolutely, yeah.

Katlin Birdsall: Great, well thank you again Mickey so much for coming on the show today, we really appreciate it. Are there any meets coming up here soon so we can let our listeners know about if they want to come out and either come out and watch either the triathlon races or swimming and diving?

Mickey Wender: Yeah, we're in Denver this week. So, University of Denver, we are at BYU next week. And we are out at Western and Air Force Academy. But, November 23rd, we have a big invitational if people want to experience El Pomar Natatorium and see our team in action, that's four-day, prelims finals that we'll be at. And the next time really the triathlon team will be racing at home will be at this event that we have yet to put together. And again if anyone out there wants to help support it, and organize it, we are looking for a committee of people to help us do that.

David Ludlam: Great.

Katlin Birdsall: Great. Well thank you so much again Mickey, we really appreciate it.

Mickey Wender: Oh, thank you!

Katlin Birdsall: So David I wanted to take a few minutes before we end this show today. I know we've got a lot happening at CMU. A lot happening this fall, you know it's the first semester, but we've got a lot of events coming up here in October. It is Mav Month right now.

David Ludlam: It is, yeah.

Katlin Birdsall: But I kind of wanted to kick it off with I know we've got a big event happening tomorrow where the Steamboat Institute, we've partnered with them for an electoral college debate. Can you talk about that a little bit more? Because I think a lot of our listeners might be interested in attending.

David Ludlam: Yeah Katlin, you know I think this debate is a partnership as you mentioned, it's tied to the CMU Civic Forum, which is an attempt to provide civic engagement opportunities for not only students but the community. And so tomorrow night, there is going to be a debate about the future of the Electoral College of Colorado, and by extension of the nation. And these are kind of the issues that are top-of-mind right now for Coloradans, for people around the country, and CMU, I think the Civic Forum, and our partnerships that are able to allow students and the community to engage head-on into these issues and I think it's exciting. And so, people who are interested, it's going to be in the Love Recital Hall tomorrow. They can go to our website and grab a seat before they are all gone. Yeah.

Katlin Birdsall: Yeah. And no I'm looking forward to it. I know that I am going to be in attendance. I love that the university is starting to bring more events like this that are not only available to our students but to the community. Because that is an important part that we play and I think the Civic Forum is really accomplishing those goals.

David Ludlam: Well and speaking of the community, you had mentioned earlier that this is homecoming weekend. Do you have any highlights about kind of what's going on homecoming weekend, what community engagement opportunities are available? What people should be paying attention to for homecoming?

Katlin Birdsall: Yeah, so the whole month of October is Mav Month. And that's really trying to get the community involved and behind and spirited. So I know our Alumni Association is passing out three hundred spirit packets to different businesses and organizations across the grand valley. So if you're interested, definitely reach out to our Alumni Association if you own a business here in town and want to show your Maverick pride in the month of October. I'm sure our Alumni Association can get you a spirit package. As well as, the whole month will culminate in homecoming weekend which is October 25th through the 27th. So you can head to coloradomesa.edu/homecoming for a list of all events because we have a lot. There's athletic events, we have our victory dinner that Friday night, there's a bonfire on campus that I think maybe a lot of community members don't know are open and available to them. And that's on that Friday night.

David Ludlam: They still do those huh?

Katlin Birdsall: Oh yeah. Bonfire, there's a carnival before and that's open to the community. We'll have our parade downtown on Saturday morning. I believe that's at 10:00 am, maybe 10:30. Again, you can head to that website to check out all of the details. And then of course we'll kind of culminate in the big football game, and there's tailgating before in the Alumni Zone. So we've got a lot going on for homecoming weekend.

David Ludlam: It's an exciting month.

Katlin Birdsall: Yeah. And then not only with the Electoral College debate tomorrow, we also have another event on campus that's kind of a big one. We are bringing in NFL veteran Ryan R.K. Russell. Can you talk a little bit about how that came about?

David Ludlam: Yeah, you know he is an NFL veteran. He also is a member of the LGBTQ community. And he's really here to tell a story about not only his journey of coming out, but also his effort to make a comeback to the NFL. And that's a message that I think is broadly accessible for all members of the community. I think everybody has had an opportunity to have a goal that they want to accomplish and do that with challenges. And so I think his message is going to be a good one for student athletes, for students at large, and the community. And I think this opportunity for the community to come down to Brownson Arena, I think it's at 12:00 isn't that right?

Katlin Birdsall: Mhmm. Yep, and that's at 12:00 pm tomorrow which is Wednesday, October 9th.

David Ludlam: That's right, yeah, so a lot going on tomorrow and a lot going on the whole month as you mentioned with homecoming.

Katlin Birdsall: Yeah and so before we head out of here today I am going to pivot real quick to a couple of our theatre and performing arts and arts events that we are going to have coming up here in the month of October as well. I know we've got the choral concert, Pride & Prejudice kicks off, Artober fest, can you talk to us a little bit about all of those or one of those?

David Ludlam: Yeah, you know our Artober fest is one of the staples of the fall at CMU. It's an opportunity for people in the community who might not know much about or that may want to find their voice in doing it. To come down to campus on Thursday, October 17th, and get exposure to things like sculpting, something like sidewalk chalk, those with kids can relate to, to something as ancient and also complex is molten steel pouring. And there's just a huge range of art exhibitions for everybody in the community and no matter what your artistic interest might be. So we encourage the community to take part in that.

Katlin Birdsall: And I know when I've been the last couple of years, I'm always amazed at our CMU students and just the work that they can create and the leadership that they take in that event to really help other students who maybe aren't as familiar with these different art forms to get them involved and get their artistic juices flowing.

David Ludlam: That's right, yeah.

Katlin Birdsall: Mhmm. Well, great! Have we got anything else for our listeners before we head out of here today?

David Ludlam: I think, I'm looking at the clock and it looks like we are just about out of time. But, looking forward to the next show.

Katlin Birdsall: Great! Well this segment airs on the second Tuesday of each month on KAFM community radio. You can also listen to podcasts of today's show at kafmradio.org. I'm your host Katlin Birdsall along with my co-host David Ludlam. And we'll be back next month for another edition of CMUnow on the community affairs hour.

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