

Giving

OUTSTANDING ALUMNI STRESS THE IMPORTANCE OF COMMUNITY AND PUBLIC SERVICE

Richard H. Carmona, M.D., M.P.H., FACS

Former U.S. Surgeon General

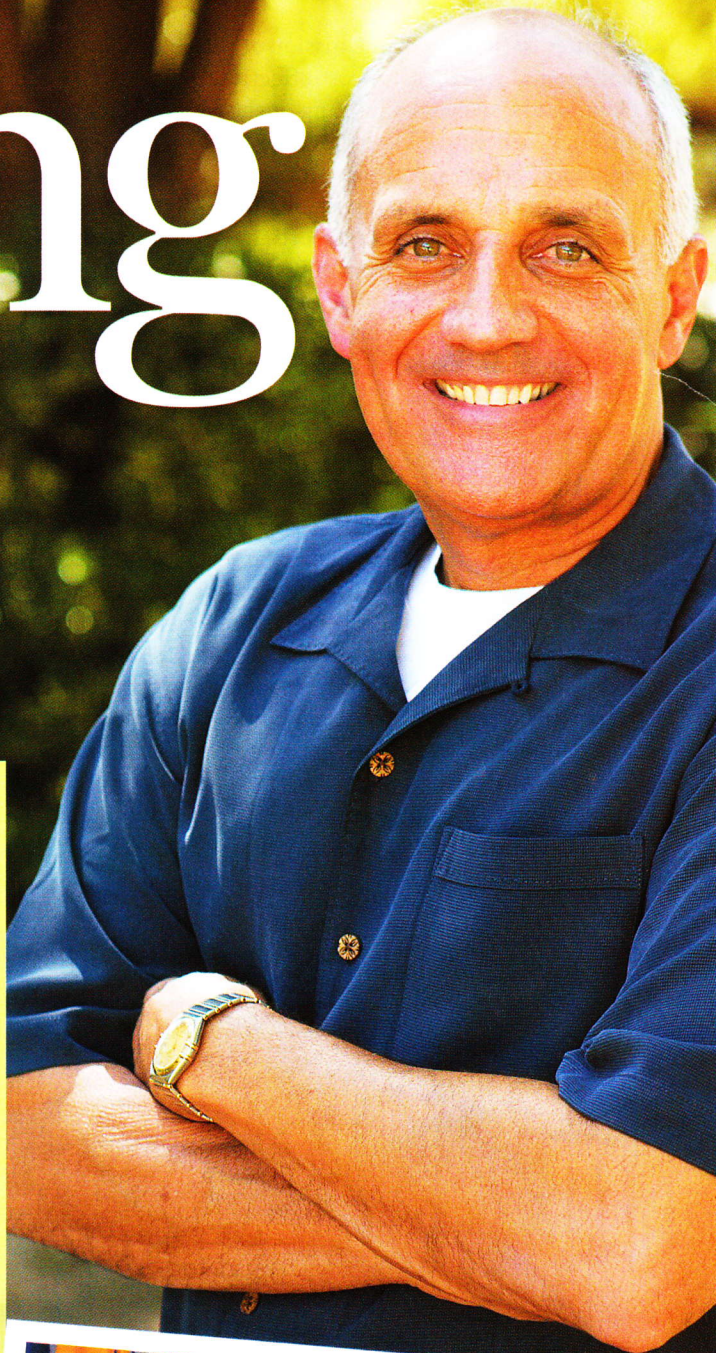
Dr. Richard Carmona, U.S. Surgeon General from 2002 to 2006, says the education he received at Bronx Community College (BCC) provided him with a foundation for success later in life.

“Community college was a really special experience,” says Carmona, now vice chairman for Canyon Ranch, a health and wellness company. Having experienced homelessness and hunger in his own life, Carmona is well aware of the challenges some people face in obtaining an education. “I had come home from active duty in Vietnam with a GED, but I’d never taken SATs or PSATs,” he says. “Community college offered the perfect environment.”

Years later, Carmona urged his own children to attend community college and then transfer to a four-year school. “I’m a very strong proponent of community colleges,” he says. Carmona particularly enjoyed BCC’s small classes and its familylike atmosphere. “I knew all of my professors, and there were lots of other working people,” he recalls.

A tireless advocate for public and community service, Carmona has served for more than 20 years with the Pima County Sheriff’s Department in Tucson, Ariz., with stints as deputy sheriff, detective, SWAT team leader, and department surgeon. He has worked as a medical director of police and fire departments and also teaches public health at the University of Arizona.

“As I bettered myself, I always looked behind to see who was coming. We need to mentor and guide and help each other,” says Carmona. When you “make it,” you have a “good burden” to do something better for your community, your family, and the world, he says.



Back

BY ELLEN ULLMAN

Colonel Eileen M. Collins

First woman to pilot and command an American spacecraft

Eileen Collins believes her community college experience helped her become the world's first woman to pilot and command an American spacecraft. "Thanks to New York's Corning Community College, I was able to take a ton of classes at a reasonable tuition, live at home, and work enough to pay for school and save up for flying lessons," she says.

Later, she earned multiple master's degrees, including one from Stanford University, but says community college was the perfect place to start. "The professors were outstanding, approachable, and really available for the students," she says. "If I did it all over, I wouldn't change a thing. I'd go back to Corning and earn the same degree."

After Corning, Collins went on for her bachelor's degree and entered the Air Force Undergraduate Pilot Training Program in 1978, the same year NASA opened the shuttle program to women.

Collins flew her first shuttle mission, STS-63 Discovery, in February 1995, becoming the first woman to pilot a space shuttle. She also piloted her second shuttle mission, STS-84 Atlantis, in May 1997. In July 1999, she became the first woman to command a shuttle mission aboard STS-93 Columbia.

In July 2005, Collins commanded Space Shuttle Discovery's historic "Return to Flight" mission—NASA's first manned flight following the February 2003 loss of the Shuttle Columbia. A year later, she retired from NASA so she could spend more time with her children.

Since then, Collins has become a popular public speaker, sharing her inspirational tales as a test pilot, astronaut, and space flight commander.





Joseph Phillip Gomer

Major, U.S. Air Force, Member of Tuskegee Airmen

From his days as a pre-engineering student at Ellsworth Community College (ECC) to his days as a fighter pilot with the Tuskegee Airmen, and later as an employee of the U.S. Forestry Service, Joseph Phillip Gomer has always tried to do better. “You can learn any place that you want to,” he says.

In speeches and everyday conversations, “I tell people they are the only ones who can ensure their success. We are all role models to someone, even if we don’t know it,” he says, adding, “Even the littlest things count.”

After graduating from ECC in 1940, Gomer returned later that year when the school partnered with the Civil Aeronautics Authority to offer flight training toward military service. In 1964, he retired from the U.S. Air Force and joined the U.S. Forestry Service.

Gomer says his experience as a member of America’s first black military air unit (www.tuskegeeairmen.org) prepared him for his work with the forestry service. In his role as a personnel officer, he helped the organization diversify; when he retired, he received a Superior Services Award from the U.S. Secretary of Agriculture for his work with women and minorities.

In 2004, Gomer received a Doctorate of Humanities from the Board of Trustees of ECC. He spoke about the importance of education and told the audience that where you come from should never get in the way of where you are going.

These days, the 90-year-old and his wife keep busy through volunteer ministry work. “It is all about learning to listen,” says Gomer, who adds, “We have a responsibility to give something back. I’m not just talking about military service, but about service organizations in general, like the Peace Corps or mentoring our young people.”



Suzanne Lewis

First Woman Superintendent of Yellowstone National Park

Suzanne Lewis manages 400 people, 2.2 million acres, and more than \$34 million annually. Not bad for a woman who began her 31-year career with the National Park Service as a seasonal park ranger at Gulf Islands National Seashore.

Lewis, who believes community colleges are core to any higher-education program, says the schools are a fundamental need in all communities. “Thanks to community colleges, people can live busy lives and still pursue a more affordable and accessible degree.”

Lewis’ years at Oklahoma’s Seminole State College (formerly Seminole Community College) were enlightening. “I had all the same good habits instilled in me that you’d expect from a four-year university,” she says. “There was a lot of emphasis on studying, writing, reading, and presentation skills. It was a great foundation for me to go on to finish my undergraduate and graduate work.”



Years later, Lewis remains in contact with the college; she says administrators there have been avid supporters of her and her work. “When you put someone in contact with a community college, you’re putting them in contact with someone who will help them,” she says. Connecting people with community colleges is a large part of how she gives back.

Lewis serves on the board of the George Wright Society, a nonprofit association dedicated to the preservation of cultural and natural parks and reserves. “Our society faces huge challenges, but this generation is more poised than ever to serve society and our nation at every level—not just philanthropic giving or joining a cause and running off,” she says.

“We’re beginning to build a significant national culture around giving, and it will only get better. We’re realizing that if you give more, you get so much more in return.”

Chad Pregracke

President and Founder, Living Lands & Waters

Chad Pregracke grew up on, in, and around the Mississippi and Illinois rivers. He spent summers working as a commercial shell diver for the cultured-pearl industry and as a commercial fisherman and barge hand. It was during this time he saw how neglected and polluted the rivers were. At 17, he started asking government agencies to clean them up. When his requests were ignored, Pregracke took matters into his own hands. At 23, he founded Living Lands & Waters, a nonprofit organization dedicated to cleaning up and preserving our nation's rivers.

"We work in a nine-state area in the Midwest to remove all the visible pollution, including garbage, tires, appliances, barrels, cars, tractors, and school buses—all stuff we've found in rivers," says Pregracke. Since its inception, Pregracke, his crew, and more than 60,000 volunteers have collected more than 6 million pounds of debris from our nation's greatest rivers.

This year, his organization is raising money to build a barge/floating headquarters that will include a classroom. "We will focus on students, especially high school," says Pregracke. "Schools can come to us for field trips, and we'll be able to accommodate the many teachers who want to get students involved in long-term projects with us."

That Pregracke has added an educational element to his work is not surprising. A former student at Blackhawk Technical College in Janesville, Wis., and Heartland Community College in Illinois, the young environmentalist says his community college experience had a lot to do with his success. "The small class sizes and personal attention were great," says Pregracke.

Pregracke is grateful that he's able to do so much for the community in return. "I was in a hotel recently, giving a presentation to get a new sponsor, and I was thinking how lucky I am," he says. "A lot of people say the government should be doing this type of cleanup, but we are the government, and we the people should be taking care of a problem that we've created. We're doing what anybody should."



Junki Yoshida

CEO of Yoshida Group Companies



Junki Yoshida's company started with a bottle of teriyaki sauce. Today, it is a one-stop shop for people who manufacture or sell products, with distribution offices in 24 locations worldwide.

Not what Yoshida or anyone else expected when he left Kyoto, Japan, at age 19 with \$500 and hardly a grasp of

English. "I arrived in Seattle in 1969. I had failed a university exam in Japan and did not want to wait an entire year to try again," says Yoshida.

Cast out from his family for leaving, the teenager sold his return ticket and bought a used car that he slept in. He took low-paying work as a dishwasher and gardener, was hospitalized twice for starvation, and was chased by immigration officers. Finally, he decided to go to school and get a proper visa.

"I had no money, but I eventually enrolled at Highline Community College (HCC) to study English," he says. A black belt in karate, he traded lessons for classes.

Yoshida was inspired to become a businessman when his first child became seriously ill. "When our daughter was five days old, we rushed her to Seattle Children's Hospital," he recalls. "We had no insurance, but the doctors worked day and night to help her survive. When we left, they gave us a bill for \$250, but said not to worry if we couldn't afford it. I said, 'I will pay these people back.'"

In 1974, Yoshida moved his family to Oregon. Yoshida had been making his family's teriyaki cooking sauce in the basement to give as holiday gifts. Everyone loved the sauce, so he raised \$150,000 and began marketing the product as Yoshida's Gourmet Sauce. As the years unfolded, Yoshida created a conglomerate of 17 diverse companies with more than 300 employees under the Yoshida Group umbrella, generating more than \$180 million in revenue annually.

A big believer in giving back, Yoshida serves as a Port of Portland Commissioner and a board member of Doernbecher Children's Hospital Foundation, Troutdale Booster Club, and Mt. Hood Community College Foundation. He also recently established a scholarship for single mothers at HCC, where he will become a board member this year. "Life is more enjoyable when you give back," he says. And so, he does.