

'It's the greatest job I've ever had'

Darrell Neufeld says working at the college is 'such a noble enterprise'

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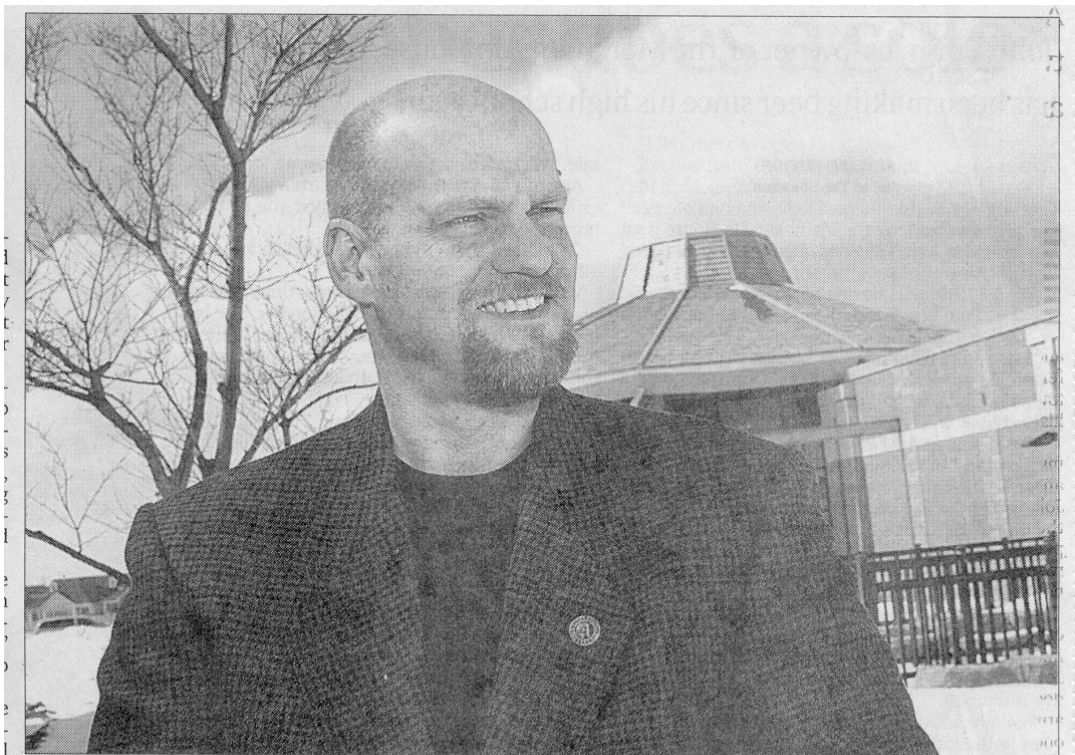
Darrell Neufeld figures he's discovered how to live the good life. He'll tell you the secret lies in appreciating simplicity and achieving balance. But he'll also admit that's easier said than done.

As manager of corporate communications for Niagara College, Neufeld's job keeps him busy juggling many responsibilities. A typical day at work involves planning meetings, editing publications, updating the college's website, handling interviews and making pitches and presentations on behalf of the college and its president.

"Really, my job is to help the college manage all the relationships it has with its various stakeholders - students, employers, staff and countless others," Neufeld says. "And it's the greatest job I've ever had."

"Working at a college is such a noble enterprise... We're giving people opportunities to grow, learn and be successful by giving them the skills and tools they'll need. So when you're in the business of altering lives like that, it's very rewarding."

After five years with Niagara College, Neufeld says he's finally learning how to market what he calls "the college story." Even with the challenges of limited funding and resources that every business must face, he believes colleges can provide a unique service, not only to the education sys-



Darrell Neufeld outside new additions to Niagara College Thursday.

STAFF PHOTO BY DENIS CAHILL

tem, but to the community as well.

In March, the college opened a new \$8.5 million, state-of-the-art culinary institute on its Glendale campus, designed to boost enrolment and interest in the school's hospitality program. Neufeld estimates that within the next five to 10 years the majority of new jobs in the region will be tourism-related, creating a need for qualified workers with specialized skills and knowledge of Niagara's position in the industry.

And it's his job to get the word out. Neufeld says his approach isn't all that complicated, though.

"I think people appreciate the straight goods," he says. "The role of the communicator is not to apple-polish. Timely, open, honest, factual communication - these are the cornerstones of good communication strategy."

This philosophy comes from years of experience in journalism, government communications, consulting and public relations, where Neufeld "cut his teeth" - first in Manitoba as a reporter and later at Queen's Park working under Ontario Liberal leader Lyn McLeod in the mid-'90s.

"Having suffered the debacle of many elections, there came a time when I'd had my share of opposition politics," Neufeld says. "It was time to move on."

Or in his case, move back.

A "country boy at heart" who grew up in Niagara-on-the-Lake, Neufeld happily returned to his Niagara roots, settling in Vineland

with his wife, Carol. Now married for 17 years with two daughters, ages 8 and 11, Neufeld, 41, appreciates the quietness of the countryside and the merits of living in a smaller community.

"To be honest, I'm a very simple person. I don't have a huge list of wants and desires. I take contentment in my job, my family, my social life and my hobbies," he explains.

Yet Neufeld's home life is no less hectic than his life at the office. While his wife argues that he spreads himself too thin at times, Neufeld considers his home "a place of refuge with an ever-changing maze of schedules and activities."

Working as a nurse at St. Catharines General Hospital, Carol Neufeld, 39, marvels at how she and her husband have been able to cultivate balance in their day-to-day routines.

"He will sometimes come home and vent about a few things, but it's always over quickly," she says. "In fact, he might say I have a tendency at times to see the glass as half empty. But living with someone like Darrell, who's such a positive person, I believe I have grown to appreciate the glass as being half full."

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Darrell Neufeld

As a devoted father, keen photographer, skilled handyman and sports enthusiast, Neufeld is passionate about his pastimes. He speaks enthusiastically about his local photography business, his experiences building furniture and his dedication to playing hockey three times a week in Jordan.

In some ways, he's one part Pierre Trudeau, one part Red Green. Over the winter months this year, Neufeld has been building a cedar-strip canoe in his garage, consulting with a neighbour who's a master carpenter. "I've gotten interested in more adventurous camping, having sort of discovered Algonquin Park in the last few years," he says. "I've been going up by myself a couple of times a year, just for some quiet time and personal reflection..."

"Last year, I took my kids out paddling. I think the moment crystallized for me when we were out on the lake early

one morning and it was completely misted over. We were the only ones out there, cutting through this mirror-like water in a graceful canoe. I thought to myself, 'I need one of these, badly.'"

So after doing some initial research, Neufeld bought a kit and got to work. He hopes to launch his canoe this spring.

Beyond his hobbies and individual pursuits, though, Neufeld believes it's equally important to be involved in community affairs. He participates as part of the advisory committee for the Niagara Community Foundation, volunteers with the Grimsby-Lincoln Association for Community Living to manage group homes for disabled people and acts as treasurer for a public relations association representing Hamilton and Niagara.

"There is much in the world to explore and enjoy," he says. "I love trying new things and challenging myself. So when

someone asks me to get involved in a project, I guess I haven't yet learned the art of saying no."

Neufeld may be humble about his accomplishments, but he has established very clear goals for his future. He pictures himself continuing to work in communications, refining both his personal and professional relationships.

Besides bringing some order to the stacks of paper on his desk, Neufeld muses, "There's really only one thing I can think of if I had to come up with a way to improve my job: I'd create a window in my office.... It's a little tragic, actually."

Even his boss, Niagara College president Dan Patterson, agrees.

"That's one thing about Darrell - I can really appreciate his dry humour," Patterson says. "But I also value his sage advice and commitment. He's a great problem-solver and he's someone who isn't con-

tent with the status quo. I'd say he thrives on that kind of challenge and diversity."

Yes, but what about Neufeld's so-called window of opportunity?

"Well, I'll tell you, my wife was in his office the other day," Patterson continues "and she mentioned the same thing to me. So some day down the road, we definitely have to look into getting Darrell a window and getting him into the light."

Until then, Neufeld will keep on counting his blessings.

"You know, there's the old saying that you create your own luck," he says. "And yes, sometimes things just fall into place."

"But ultimately, it's a combination of things that makes one successful. Once you realize that, you can't take things for granted. That's a mindset and approach you have to learn early on... I think that's what makes me tick."