

## Getting to Know President Jeannine Diddle Uzzi

I always knew I wanted to be a teacher. And I always knew I wanted to read, write, and publish, and live a life of the mind.

When I was teaching, when I was a faculty member it didn't really cross my mind to go into administration at all, but I had a career change, and so I thought about administration, I thought about the skills I had learned, the skills I had amassed from teaching, and from advising students, student support. I did a lot of work in student advising.

And so, I started to apply for jobs in administration, and I really started to imagine what the possibilities were for an academic administrator who was really interested in supporting students and bringing opportunity to more students in education.

I had been watching Thomas for at least 15 years, probably 20 years because Thomas was really hitting it out of the park. And so, I have been watching Thomas for a long time. One of the things I will also bring to Thomas is a lot of joy and gratitude for a job that allows me to do what I love, every day, and also help the State of Maine and increase access to education for Maine students.

At its core, Thomas' mission has been about access to education. One of the most, um, impressive things for me, at this moment in my life, is that I get to be onboarded by an incredibly successful, incredibly generous President who was a first-generation college student herself and she is offering me the gift of her mentorship, and her warm hand-off to the Thomas community, to the Waterville community, to all the communities with whom she partners, and I couldn't be more grateful.

One of my happiest things to do is to row a boat, and my wife and I have a wooden rowboat, it's an Atlantic Skip, and it's small, but it has two sets of oars, and we go and row it on the New Meadows River. Being on the ocean rowing a boat is one the best experiences I've ever had. And to be on the Maine coast, seals come up, and eagles fly over, and it is one of the best things I've ever had the good fortune to do.

I am also very active. Heather and I cycle together, and I love to trail run. My kids are now both out of the house. My son went to college this fall, but both of them participated in a unicycle circus in Scarborough, and so I have dedicated many years of my life to supporting kids in circus arts, and I'll be stepping down this year. But I have spent the last 3 or 4 years as the President of the Gym Dandies Children's Circus Boosters Organization, and I am very proud of that work in that organization, which is an inclusive circus arts organization.

Another thing I am known for in Maine is that I am the pronouncer for the Maine State Spelling Bee. And I have been pronouncing for the spelling bee for 13 years, and that's been a great partnership with Maine Today Media, the Portland Press Herald, and I plan to do that until they tell me my services are no longer needed.

[Laughter]