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THE COMMUNITY WE CREATE

New Provost Marten L. denBoer Embraces DePaul's Mission

by Christian Anderson

From his high-rise office on the Loop Campus, Marten denBoer can see a large swath of Chicago. On a clear July day, the city glimmers in the sun.

"This university has such a deep connection to its city," says denBoer, DePaul University's new provost as of July 1. "The way in which the university has expressed its values in the city has been key to its success. It's what DePaul is known for and one of the things that attracted me to this position."

In announcing denBoer's appointment, the Rev. Dennis H. Holschneider, C.M., president of DePaul University, cited his record of leadership at previous institutions, most recently as provost and vice president for academic affairs at California State Polytechnic University-Pomona, where he oversaw more than 150 academic programs for 22,000 students. "His past work with faculty to support scholarly initiatives and his attention to the development of degree programs that adapt to market needs are exemplars of a tested leader," Holschneider says.

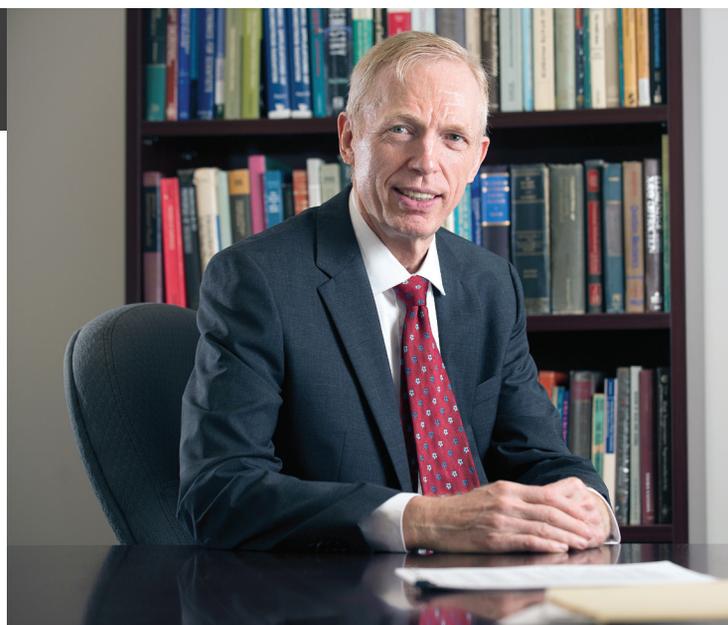
Yet denBoer says he didn't originally aspire to work in administration, preferring the quiet life of a teacher and research scientist. A life-threatening accident that occurred when he was on the faculty of Hunter College in New York changed his perspective: he was training for the New York City Marathon when he was hit by a car.

"When they brought me to the ER, I was unconscious," he says. "I had no identification on me—you know, I was just going out for a run. One of the people in the emergency room happened to have been a student of mine and recognized me. She contacted the university." He spent three months in the hospital (interestingly, St. Vincent's) and was told he might not walk again.

"I survived and recovered because of people—friends, colleagues and family who kept me going," denBoer says. "It changed my life. It made me realize that what really matters is the community we create, what we do for each other and for our students, how we transform lives."

Thus, denBoer got involved in initiatives to revise degree requirements and programs at Hunter and became chair of the physics department. Not long after, he was asked to serve as associate provost at Queens College in New York. "I needed to overcome my introspective tendencies a bit," he says, "and it turned out that I had some talent for this kind of work."

The provost is responsible for collaborating to develop and sustain educational programs that respond to the needs of students and



society. Among the challenges faced by higher education and DePaul today, denBoer says, are dramatic changes in the legal profession that have led to decreased law school enrollments nationwide, dynamic shifts in many fields, funding cuts for research and financial aid, and a national decline in the number of traditional-age college students.

DenBoer believes that DePaul is well-positioned to address the challenges. "DePaul's mission lines up with these demographic challenges," he says. "For instance, the greatest growth in college-age students is occurring in communities of color, and DePaul has always been committed to serving the educational needs of those communities." DePaul's commitment to expanding global perspectives and actively encouraging diversity also plays in its favor, he says. "DePaul's strengths and proven ability to respond to change make me optimistic that it will continue to thrive."

DenBoer earned his doctoral and master's degrees in physics from the University of Maryland in College Park and a bachelor's degree in physics and mathematics from Calvin College in Grand Rapids, Mich. His research focused on the use of X-ray absorption spectroscopy to investigate materials for energy storage and conversion, such as batteries and fuel cells. He has published more than 70 peer-reviewed articles and is a member of the American Association for the Advancement of Science and the American Physical Society.

Of Dutch background, born in France and raised in Toronto, denBoer has a love of languages and is taken with his new city. "Chicago has an incredible vitality. Its density and vibrancy stimulate interaction and creativity."