

## THE COURAGE TO CREATE

Johnette Isham Says “Goodbye” After 18 years



Johnette Isham, and second “son” Chip.

**“As I enter new possibilities with ‘The Art of Healing,’ I take with me all I have learned from you and the powerful difference we have made together in the lives of aspiring artists and designers who change the world.”**

—Johnette Isham, former Vice President for Academic Affairs in her farewell reception remarks

It took nearly two decades, but Johnette Isham finally got to leave Ringling School of Art and Design decked out in the “interview dress” she intended to wear at her first on-campus interview.

At a farewell reception held in her honor last May, Ms. Isham appropriately dressed in the famous “interview dress” to share her “back to school” story—the tale of her arrival in Sarasota and the first impression she made on the faculty and staff she encountered. It was 1988 when she stepped foot onto the Ringling School campus for the very first time. Flying into the Tampa Bay area from Rhode Island for her big interview, Johnette departed the plane, only to discover the airline had lost her luggage.

It was then she remembered her husband’s parting words and the advice she neglected to take: “Just pack your dress and carry it with you on the plane,” he told her. She showed up for her 3-day interview with only the clothes on her back—literally . . . and her Nike sneakers! The outfit she wore to impress her potential employers? A matching, cotton candy pink sweatshirt and sweatpants set.

With her reputation as a person who has helped to lead Ringling School’s transformation during the past 18 years, Johnette’s expertise in planning and process enabled her to excel in multitasking before it was mainstream nomenclature. She had a keen ability to oversee complex projects and help ideas move from possibilities into realities.

Johnette leaves Ringling School, to “follow her heart,” directing an innovative program with The Wellness Community, a non-profit organization that specializes in free programs and services for those affected by cancer.

*“We are absolutely thrilled to have Johnette joining our team at The Wellness Community (TWC.) She has real vision about this partnership and its ‘big idea’ implications . . . her involvement, leadership, and vision will produce profound benefits to TWC’s vital work with cancer patients and their loved ones.”*

—Jay R. Lockaby, Executive Director, The Wellness Community

The project, called “The Art of Healing,” will serve as an international model for the integration of art, design, nature, and environmental sustainability in a new 10,000 square foot facility and healing gardens for The Wellness Community in Sarasota. Ringling School Interior Design students and faculty member Jill Eleazer are creating the design concepts, schematics, and floor plans using evidence-based design.

During her 18 years here, Ringling School of Art and Design evolved immensely from the small operation she joined to one of the leading professional colleges of art and design in the country. While the college and its campus continued to grow, Johnette acknowledged that what has not changed is the “power of the people . . . to make a difference.”

*“In my entire professional career I have never worked with anyone on the executive level who has been so focused, so conscientious, and so thoughtful. Johnette Isham exemplifies a savvy visionary with ‘attention to detail’ precision.”*

—Debra M. Jacobs, President and CEO, William G. Selby and Marie Selby Foundation



- ### JOHNETTE’S TOP 10
1. Established four-year professional BFA curriculum, Liberal Arts Program, and Computer Animation and Photography & Digital Imaging majors.
  2. Led School’s development from Tier 3 to Tier 1 professional art and design college through strengthening and aligning academic departments with the status of their professional fields.
  3. Created Institutional Technology and guided Ringling School’s reputation as one of the most technologically advanced private visual arts colleges by finding ways to fund installation of state-of-the-art technology resources and ensuring their sustainability.
  4. Oversaw a near tripling in enrollment from 388 students in 1988 to 1088 in 2006 due to the strong academic reputation gained by the School under her leadership of the curriculum and faculty.
  5. Led two accreditation cycles for SACS and NASAD (1994-95; 2005-06), with only one recommendation for corrective action.
  6. Instituted and directed assessment, research, and analysis to guide decision-making and measure Student Learning Outcomes and institutional success.
  7. Institutionalized professional practices for faculty recruitment, evaluation and development; significantly increased faculty salaries to make them more equitable while reducing and stabilizing faculty loads.
  8. Developed Continuing Studies into a professional operation while increasing enrollment and net revenue.
  9. Brought an entrepreneurial spirit to Ringling School that inspired and educated faculty and administrators through leadership development and partnerships with major hardware and software producers.
  10. Involved hands-on in the planning and construction of 10 new academic buildings and the renovation of nine.
- Editor’s Note: Special Thanks to Dr. Tina Beer for compiling “Johnette’s Top 10!”