

# Timing was right for Burke's move

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Michael Burke announced Tuesday that he's resigning from North Idaho College, where he has served as president since June 1998.

We think he can look in the mirror and say, "I'm leaving this place better than it was when I first came here."

And that's about the best any of us can hope to say when it's our time to move on.

Dr. Burke is leaving to become president of San Jose City College in northern California, an institution with more than twice NIC's full-time student population. Officials there obviously saw a diligent, resourceful leader whose strengths matched their needs.

We've been critical of some aspects of Burke's tenure here, but we would be seriously remiss if we did not also recognize his assets. And they're substantial.

Dr. Burke helped lead NIC through its own enrollment growth, both for credit and non-credit courses. During his presidency at NIC, for-credit enrollment grew from just over 3,500 in 1998 to 4,600 this past fall, while non-credit enrollment grew from just over 7,700 to more than 13,500.

Dr. Burke, his administrative team and the Board of Trustees have also done a good job guiding the institution over a variety of budget barriers, holding together a strong faculty despite some years without pay raises, dealing responsibly overall with numerous property tax challenges and funding formula dilemmas.

As a crowning achievement, Dr. Burke will leave the campus with a state-of-the-art health and sciences building that's the envy of the entire state.

This newspaper feels a particular appreciation for Dr. Burke for the Scripps National Spelling Bee partnership he helped develop with Hagadone Newspapers. Were it not for Dr. Burke's passionate support of the program, tens of thousands of North Idaho students wouldn't have the opportunity to compete for a chance to challenge the best young spellers in the nation every year in Washington, D.C. NIC hosts the regional bee and handles virtually all of the organization of this now massive event encompassing all five northern Idaho counties, thanks to Dr. Burke's leadership and commitment.

Any person holding a high public position of responsibility is a target of criticism, and Michael Burke wasn't an exception. He took his share of public relations broadsides, and despite some bad feelings that might never heal, we believe Dr. Burke did his best to move on in the best interest of his institution and the community.

College presidents seemingly never last long. Dr. Burke outlasted the norm and, we think, had reached the limit of what he was able to do at North Idaho College. We commend him for having the wisdom and the courage to turn over the reigns to someone who can take NIC upward and onward from here. We also wish him nothing but the best at San Jose City College and whatever future adventures await him and his family.