

FOCUS ON...
SEIJA DOOLITTLE

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There is a relatively inoffensive ethnic joke that goes as follows: How do you tell an extraverted Finn? When conversing with you, he's actually looking at your feet instead of his own!

As is true of such jokes-and the stereotypes upon which they are based-they tend, with few exceptions, not to apply very well to their intended subjects as individuals. This is certainly true of our colleague Seija Doolittle: she is Finnish, she is definitely extraverted, and she fixes her large blue eyes directly on your own. As the person selected for this issue's focus, it was fascinating to learn about the many places and educational and work settings those large blue eyes have seen.



Seija was born during World War II, which was, of course, a far harsher time for Europeans to endure than for Americans. Although her native Finland suffered none of the damage inflicted by the Nazis across Europe, they had their own foe against which to struggle: their aggressive neighbor to the east, Russia. (Ironically, history indicates that it was a pact with Hitler that emboldened Stalin to dominate Finland and portions of other Baltic states.) It was during this time, as a young child, that Seija had her first exposure to American-made goods-cans of butter-which, she was quick to point out, left much to be desired.

Seija went to a "very strict" Christian boarding school, which she detested; she succeeded in getting herself kicked out. She did eventually graduate and, at 16, went to university. It was here that her first exposure to business principles occurred: 45 people-including her-were selected to be part of an experimental "scientific management" program. Seija chose to concentrate on manufacturing.

Don't assume, though, that she simply found her calling, and then never deviated from it. Actually, Seija's real ambition was to become a doctor. Medical school, however, was not feasible due to time and cost considerations. So she wound up going to Sweden to work as an interpreter, translating back and forth between her native Finnish and Swedish and German. She made great money, so much so that she was able to rent an entire villa on the outskirts of Stockholm. To augment her income and save money, she sublet portions of it to others. Her savings enabled her to finally enroll in medical school, at the university in Erlangen in Germany. Unfortunately, her money ran out when she was a little more than half-way done.

After this, Seija worked for the American embassy in Helsinki. Through a family connection, she was able to emigrate to the United States, locating in Lebanon, PA. She then moved to nearby Jamesburg (near Harrisburg) where for three years she worked at a daycare

center, figuring that this was a pretty effective way to learn English and earn money at the same time.

Subsequently, Seija studied business and economics at Shippensburg University. She also married at this time-a former professor. She completed her degree in business after transferring to Wilson College, and went to work for the Holiday Inn in Jamesburg. She was quickly promoted to assistant manager and then manager of the facility.

Around this time Seija learned of an opening at Hagerstown (MD) Community College for a professor of hospitality. She applied, got the job, and taught therefor seven years. While there, she achieved a master's degree in European intellectual history. After leaving her teaching post, she started and ran her own restaurant for a year and a half.

Seija then relocated to Florida, where she taught economics, money and banking, and other business-related courses at a small private college in the Palm Beach area. In the evenings and on weekends, she worked as the head chef for a very wealthy family, overseeing a staff of six.

It was by now the late 1980s. Somehow-she's not quite sure how-Seija was tracked down and convinced to apply for a newly created position to run Delaware Tech's program in Hotel, Restaurant, and Institutional Management as part of the Wilmington campus' business administration department. The rest, as they say, is history.

Since coming to DTCC, Seija has pulled back on her seemingly daunting list of outside interests of earlier years. One reason may be that she teaches between eight and ten different "preps" during the course of a given year, a fact that is mindboggling even by the standards of a teaching-oriented college. She seems to take it in stride, pointing to the enormous flexibility which has been her life's trademark, and to a great memory which reduces prep time. She believes that, as a foreigner, she is able to identify in a special way with foreign students, though her accent is an obstacle to American students.

To gain balance and restore her energies, Seija indulges in her single most beloved hobby: gardening. Word has it that a tomato, squash, or cucumber from her garden is an unsurpassed treat. She has indicated a willingness to share her expertise with her colleagues about gardening and cooking for large groups. This may be an offer too hard to refuse.