

President's Report

Dr. R. Scott Ralls

February 19, 2010

The NC Community College Family: NC's Volunteer Militia

Throughout my years in the NC Community College System, I've had the pleasure of seeing the impact of the work of our colleges, our faculty, our staff, our presidents, our System Office and our students in every corner of our state. I have met nurses, emergency workers, teachers, mechanics, machinists, biotech workers, policemen, politicians and more who have all been touched by the hands of education and training extended by our 58 colleges. I've always been impressed but recently I've discovered a new side to the work we do and the contributions we make to North Carolina...our volunteer militia.

I participated in an aerospace education meeting last week in Eastern North Carolina and across the table was an outstanding faculty member from Guilford Tech, Ed Frye. Ed didn't have to be there, as head of the aviation programs at Guilford Technical Community College, he has plenty of things to do...it wasn't his college or programs we were discussing...he didn't have to travel three hours each way to lend a hand but he did and he added great value to our work. Perhaps more importantly, he added value to our family...to the way we perceive, work and contribute to one another's success.

One might say, "Well, that's expected. That's what we do." But with budget cuts, 27,000 new students, and an overflow of new challenges, some folks might have chosen to stay home. They might have said I have too much to do. They might have, but I often find our community college family digging deep to help one another. Yesterday while we were in our committee meetings, representatives from 29 of our colleges were enthusiastically working together on our 5th floor to plan and discuss the opportunities from a green technology curriculum improvement project that we will submit to you soon.

And that digging deep extends to our communities. Let me give you a few examples:

At Asheville-Buncombe Technical College, more than 400 students perform thousands of hours of volunteer work through the guidance of faculty and staff including building houses in New Orleans for Habitat for Humanity and working in elementary school dental clinics providing dental care for students.

At Brunswick Community College, the nursing faculty and students assist school system nurses annually in screening school-age children for vision, blood pressure, height and weight, and the faculty and staff volunteer in a wide range of activities from running marathons for the Wounded Warriors program to feeding the homeless.

College of the Albemarle family has a strong focus on Relay for Life and the American Cancer Society as do Piedmont and Robeson Community Colleges among others.

Edgecombe Community College faculty have launched positive behavior programs, worked with animal rescue groups, served as guardian ad litem, provided pro-bono tax work, and volunteered for 4-H.

Forsyth Tech rehabilitates bikes for the Salvation Army's Toy Drive, supports the Food Bank of Northwestern North Carolina, reads to elementary students and works with the Arts Council.

Isothermal Community College supports March of Dimes and runs a campus-wide coat and food drive each year before their winter break.

Duplin County can thank James Sprunt Community College for cleaner highways, Meals on Wheels volunteers, tutoring projects, and even a Mardi Gras party for residents of a nursing facility.

Johnston Community College faculty judge senior projects in high schools, donate to the Smithfield Rescue Mission, contribute to the PolioPlus campaign and raise funds for local and international causes such as earthquake relief in Haiti.

Lenoir Community College is the host site for Region 10 of the NC Science Olympiad which means that about 80 faculty and staff and 50 students come out on a Saturday to support this effort involving more than 500 middle and high-school students.

Mitchell Community College employees are a key part of "Weed and Seed," an innovative, comprehensive, multiagency approach to law enforcement, crime prevention and community revitalization.

Rockingham Community College joins Southeastern and other colleges in supporting local chapters of the American Red Cross with food drives, fund-raising activities and blood drives.

A recent survey at South Piedmont found 13 employees had donated 3,600 hours of community service in 2009 to a variety of local, national and international causes including Juvenile Diabetes Research and the CROP Walk for community and world hunger.

Wake Tech's baseball team paired up with children with special needs to assist them in playing baseball as part of the Miracle League.

Children in Craven County can thank the Craven Community College Student Machinist Club for their rebuilt playground.

Wayne Community College's Team WCC of 35 faculty, staff and students participated in the Really Chili Challenge for the Community Soup Kitchen. Not only did they have representation from nearly every curriculum area but they also won second place in the People's Choice vote for chili and first place for best booth decoration. Even when we volunteer, we volunteer to Create Success.

Western Piedmont along with nearly all of our campuses participated in the Martin Luther King Day of Caring. What a wonderful tribute to Dr. King's philosophy to have educators and students across the state joining hands in volunteer efforts.

And the spirit of giving overwhelmingly continues in the System Office where staff, like our colleges, has also been hit with tight budgets, furloughs and staff reductions. And despite the challenges of the Great Recession, our System Office employees topped their contributions to the United Way Campaign by 4 percent over last year, in a year when the state average decreased 11 percent. But their community caring didn't stop there. It extended to blood drives, food drives, care packages for soldiers in Iraq and hundreds of hours of volunteer service.

But you, our State Board, helped set the example by declining to receive more than \$8,500 in travel reimbursements in an effort to bolster our dwindling coffers. We thank you for your leadership and your giving during this difficult budget environment.

This is not a comprehensive list. It's only a snapshot of what our students, faculty, staff, presidents and System Office employees do every day, every year for North Carolina. In many philosophies and religions, the highest form of charity is to give and not expect anything in return. Our community college family is a living example of that level of giving.

We're more than the seam in seamless education. We're bigger than North Carolina's economic emergency room or the pathway for the road to recovery.

Every day, members of our community college family go over and beyond the requirements of their job descriptions to do whatever North Carolina needs; we do what our communities need; and we do what our citizens need to fill the space in our cities and towns. In doing so, our community colleges demonstrate that community is the most important word in our name

Our family reaches out because we know it's necessary, particularly in these times. We reach out because it is as much a part of who we are and of Dr. Herring's philosophy of "taking people from where they are as far as they can go" as books, computers and lesson plans.

And people notice. Recently, a senior staffer from the General Assembly said how impressed members were that we were doing our jobs, moving forward in our communities and not complaining about how hard we have it. That was a high compliment for our system, and one that made me extremely proud. Yet, I'm sure the highest praise comes from all the recipients of that volunteer militia's work, from all the faces that turn to us to just say thank you for these gestures of kindness.

Just in case I don't say it enough, let me add my thanks and my appreciation to North Carolina's volunteer network that has no equal, our community college family.