

## **President's Report**

***Dr. R. Scott Ralls***

State Board of Community Colleges

*Friday, March 19, 2010*

You all are some dedicated, hard working folks, and at each meeting throughout the course of a year of board meetings, you approve a myriad of programs, policies and budgets that set the directional course for our great system. Every item that comes before you is important in its own right, but sometimes there may be an item that has implications greater than what may appear on the surface – an item that, without a moment of pause and reflection, might not reveal the significant future implications that it may have for our students and the communities that we serve.

The one I want to call attention to from today's meeting is your approval of the new program, Aerostructure Manufacturing and Repair Technology. This is a new program you approved for our system today, which on the surface may not appear a big deal, just one of the many programs you approve and not even our first aviation program. But if we look at the background behind the agenda item, I think you may agree with me that it is, indeed, a very big deal.

Being "First in Flight", our state has a rich aviation history. The list of our aviation employers have both long-time North Carolina organizations such as Fleet Readiness Center East in Havelock and Timco in Greensboro, as well as more recent additions like Cessna and Honda Jet in the Piedmont-Triad, and Turbomeca in the Charlotte region, DRS Technologies in the Northeast and many others throughout the state, all of which we have assisted through our customized training program. A couple of years ago, our System was in the thick of the recruitment for a cutting-edge aviation composites company, Spirit Aerosystems. Since gaining their trust and investment in North Carolina, we have developed a great series of job training programs to assist Spirit in creating 1,000 aerospace production jobs in Kinston. Today, you approved our latest endeavor, the Aerostructure Manufacturing program, initially set for Lenoir Community College.

And to me, it is a milestone, a culmination of several years of work that has involved the input of multiple colleges, support from organizations such as the Golden LEAF Foundation and a true team approach. But it is much more than a milestone. It is a new programmatic baseline for us as we attempt to complement and build our aerospace production capabilities for the purpose of enabling North Carolinians to prosper from jobs in an industry that is now an export leader for the United States.

I feel the same about the approval of the Aerospace Manufacturing program today as I did almost ten years ago when I was Vice President of Economic and Workforce Development. Through the great work of some System Office employees and the initial championing by Vance-Granville Community College, we brought to this Board a course approval for a continuing education course we called BioWork. BioWork was not just any course; however, it was in fact the starting point for our System-wide focus on biotechnology job training. It was born through industry support and multi-college collaboration, outstanding opportunities provided by the North Carolina Biotechnology Center, and the leadership of Joanne Steiner, one of our innovative board members, who led the initial industry advisory committee that drove our success.

Today, we have BioNetwork, the leading biotechnology workforce training program in the country supporting the third largest biotechnology industry cluster in the nation. Where we had nine degree programs and 311 students in 2002, today, we have nearly 1,200 students in 20 specific biotechnology-related programs. All of this is in response to business demand in an industry that actually grew by 1% last year in North Carolina during the heart of the Great Recession. But we are not sitting on our laurels. The BioProcessing Center at Pitt Community College is providing a significant update to the original BioWork program, and the BioEd Center at Gaston College is creating 3-D learning objects, computer simulations of equipment or processes, for use by faculty in many subject areas via distance learning courses.

The National Center for Biotechnology Workforce, located at Forsyth Tech, is one of three finalists for a MetLife National Community College Award next month,

and support from the Pharmaceutical Center at Forsyth and Guilford community colleges played a key role in the recent decision of Ameritox to create 220 jobs at their new facility in Greensboro.

When I attended the opening of the new Novartis vaccine facility in Holly Springs, one of the nation's largest, a manufacturing manager noted to me the impact our System made in their decision to locate in North Carolina -- the assistance they received in recruiting top-notch biotech graduates from our programs around the state and then refining their skills at the Wake Tech-supported Capstone Center on the NC State Centennial campus.

And beyond aerospace and biotechnology, the innovations to support job growth in other emerging industries are occurring at community colleges throughout our state and with System-wide collaboration.

In healthcare, which prior to the recession was growing at a rate of 2.4 percent a year over the previous decade, you, our System presidents and local trustees helped "create success" last year in advocating for a 48 percent increase in weighted funding for our health care programs. And with that help, innovation and expansion are flourishing. Pitt Community College remains in the running to lead a multi-college, multi-state collaborative for the Southeastern United States in the emerging area of health information technology, and as we saw on our recent SuccessNC Listening Tour, Catawba Valley Community College will soon open the largest simulated hospital on the East Coast, allowing them to double the enrollment of their nursing program with a 45 percent reduction in requirements for hospital clinical sites.

Manufacturing is an area that is not often seen as an emerging industry, particularly in a state that has suffered staggering layoffs recently in this sector. But as some aspects of manufacturing have been decimated, other areas are surviving and even thriving. The thriving advanced manufacturing employers in our state are doing so through technology investments and productivity enhancements, and, like these manufacturers, we are also leading the way at looking at how we do things differently. In August, we anticipate having Emily DeRocco, the former Assistant Secretary of Labor now with the National

Association of Manufacturers, to present to you as part of an issues luncheon why Forsyth Technical Community College was selected as one of four pilot colleges in the nation, and why we are one of four pilot states to undertake efforts that could be on the leading edge of systemic changes to traditional manufacturing education.

Finally, you have heard a great deal about our Code Green initiative which focuses on making our colleges more sustainable but also on making us leaders in energy efficiency workforce development. In a couple of months, we anticipate bringing to you a Curriculum Improvement Project proposal that I will predict today will be the most dynamic, grass-roots-driven, multi-college, change-oriented CIP in our history. I believe it will mean good things for the North Carolina's workforce of the future as we attempt to make strategic changes to multiple technical programs to provide our students with the skills they will increasingly need.

I started down this path today simply because I did not want the importance of your approval of the aerostructures manufacturing program to go unnoticed. And, perhaps more importantly, to notice that, at a time when issues swirl around us and when our colleges face unprecedented challenges of exploding enrollment growth and declining budgets, they continue to push forward with advancements, innovation and collaboration in aerospace, biotechnology, health care, advanced manufacturing, green technology and a host of other emerging job areas. Why? Because we – our colleges, our System, our trustees and our Board -- are focused on jobs, which is where the people of North Carolina expect us to be focused. Because this is the unique legacy of North Carolina community colleges, and because our System is laying the pathway for North Carolina's road to recovery.