

## **President's Report**

Dr. R. Scott Ralls

State Board of Community Colleges

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Last month, I met the exception to the rule. His name is Jeff Benes. I met him when Wake Tech President Steve Scott allowed me to join him in presenting the 2009 Business Champion of the Year Award to Jeff and the members of Catalyst Manufacturing. Wake Tech and Business Leader Magazine sponsored the awards presentations.

Jeff's story is a unique one that embodies our "Creating Success" slogan. Turns out that Jeff and his colleague, Bob Mackowiak, were lay-off victims of the dot-com bust seven years ago. As thousands of North Carolinians are doing today, Jeff and Bob turned to a North Carolina community college for help. Specifically, they turned to the Small Business Center at Wake Tech where they received assistance in developing a business plan to start their own electronics contract manufacturing company.

They then hired six new employees – all former laid-off workers -- and looked to Wake Tech for help with the initial employee training. That's where the exception to the rule comes in, and my friends at Wake Tech reminded me that I actually had a small role in this unique story when I worked at the System Office as Vice President of Economic and Workforce Development. At the time, our guidelines called for at least 12 trainees before we would sponsor a customized training project, and with only six employees, Catalyst Manufacturing was a little small for our program. But the good folks at Wake Tech were unrelenting advocates, and the story of former laid-off workers banding together to start a new business with community college assistance was so compelling – well, we decided to go through the process of granting an exception to the rule.

It turned out to be a good decision. Today, Catalyst Manufacturing has over 400 employees at three locations in the U.S. and Mexico. Half of those Catalyst employees, who all came from the ranks of the formerly unemployed, work here in North Carolina. The company has announced plans to hire 50 more employees at its Morrisville site this year.

Now, the Catalyst Manufacturing story is admittedly unique, but it is not uncommon. Our community college training programs have an economic impact on all corners of our state. In fact, just last week, I was in one of those corners, touring Tri-County Community College in Murphy when I stopped in the learning lab to talk with one of their students, an older non-traditional student named Dave. Dave, like Jeff and Bob, had been previously dislocated and had returned to Tri-County to pursue a degree in machining. Dave was excited to tell me about

an upcoming business expansion in Cherokee County that offered him the possibility of putting his new CNC machining skills to immediate work.

Turns out the company that may offer Dave and other Cherokee County residents a new opportunity is also great community college “Creating Success” story. Five years ago, Tri-County began upgrading its manufacturing-related programs. One year ago, changes made by the General Assembly and this Board allowed Tri-County to provide customized training programs to Snap-On Tools Company as they upgraded their production lines. Tri-County’s efforts really paid off. Snap-On recently announced they will add 40 new, high-paying manufacturing jobs in one of our most rural mountain communities, currently facing a 17% unemployment rate.

Most of the North Carolina community college success stories happen one student at a time, one worker at a time and one business at a time. While perhaps not as dramatic as the media coverage of multiple jobs being announced all at once in communities that badly need them, it is the cumulative force of the one-by-one success stories where community colleges have their greatest impact.

Take Randolph County and the impact of this wonderful community college as an example. Dr. Daryl Hill, who today owns a private dental practice in downtown Asheboro, graduated from RCC in 1993. Sherriff Maynard Reid earned his associate’s degree in business from RCC in 1972. Ashley Fetner began working with former White House photographer Artin Haig immediately after earning his photography degree here at RCC, and today, Ashley runs his own studio in Asheboro.

Yajaira Owens is a guidance counselor at nearby Eastern Randolph High School. She recently earned her master’s degree from North Carolina A&T but started at RCC with her associate’s degree in 1997. And Katherine Davis found her way through RCC after ending up on a fixed income and not initially pursuing college after graduating from Asheboro High School. In 2001, she graduated from the RCC’s Early Childhood program. Today, she is the director of The Growing Place Childcare Center at the First Baptist Church.

Now, that’s the fabric of the community – and it demonstrates how our community colleges are so very often the weavers of that fabric. The community colleges are the place where community successes and community contributors find a beginning. That’s true across our state and truly exemplified by our great hosts at Randolph Community College.

Sometimes our successes begin locally and grow internationally, like our Business Champion, Jeff. And sometimes the beginnings of success come from statewide leadership and partnership like the JobsNOW: 12 in 6 initiative that Governor Bev Perdue announced yesterday, and you all gave final approval on today. This program offers short-term training for 12 or more jobs in 6

months and was made possible using federal recovery funds directed by Gov. Perdue, Secretary Crisco and Commerce's Division of Workforce Development. It provides another example of the tremendous partnership that community colleges share with the North Carolina Department of Commerce and the Workforce Development Boards across this state. It also shows Gov. Perdue's emphasis on the role of community colleges in our state's recovery.

The availability of these job-training dollars couldn't come at a better time for our budget-strapped, very full colleges. These new resources mean that all of our community colleges will have funding to initiate short-term training programs. Thousands of recently laid-off and unemployed citizens across our state can earn the North Carolina Career Readiness Certificate and entry into new occupations. Identified training areas include welding, nursing assistant, plumbing, heating and air conditioning, maintenance, medical coding and other employment areas as determined by local needs. Individuals across our state will be able to access these and other workforce opportunities through the JobLink Career Centers.

JobsNOW will give our citizens an extra hand in working toward new employment opportunities. It will give our businesses the workforce they need to succeed, and it will offer our communities and their economies the boost of newly employed workers. JobsNOW will offer even more North Carolinians the chance to become the next employed health care worker, the next skilled technician, or just perhaps, the next Business Champion. Like so many students before them have proven, the opportunity for success rests just inside the doors of a North Carolina community college.