

President's Report
Dr. R. Scott Ralls
State Board of Community Colleges
Thursday, November 18, 2010

Thanksgiving.

Just hearing the word conjures up the sights and sounds of family and friends and the tastes and smells of home-cooking. No doubt everyone in this room has a favorite Thanksgiving story or a favorite Thanksgiving recipe. I love being in the mountains dozing off with a belly full of turkey, in front of a roaring fire, and a meaningless Detroit Lions football game.

While the traditions of Thanksgiving are important and memorable, I don't think we can let them overshadow the events that gave birth to this oh-so-American tradition. When hardscrabble Pilgrims broke bread and held a celebration with the Native American neighbors, it was a celebration of thanksgiving that their efforts to found a new world were seeing glimmers of success. These were folks who, in the face of grave adversity, looked inward and to their neighboring brothers and sisters for help in finding a means to succeed. And then they took time to give thanks.

Over the last several years, our community colleges and our folks here at the System Office have often struggled with budget and personnel reductions and significantly added responsibilities as our customer demand has increased approximately 25 percent since the recession started. This coming year, with a potential \$3.5 billion state deficit, doesn't promise to be any easier. But like our ancestors in the 1600s, our community colleges and our system office continue to succeed, and we do it in large part because of the individuals who simply won't take no for an answer or who just always seem to find a way. And, today I'd like to give special thanks to a few of those "pilgrims".

I recently had the honor of recognizing two of these individuals during our Employee Appreciation Week. Thanks to the work of Jane Phillips, our HR Director, and various staff volunteers, we had a week of low-key but important events marking the appreciation we feel each and every day for the men and women whose passion and dedication drive the success of our system office and our colleges. On the Thursday of that week, we held a gathering in our fifth floor conference room to recognize our "anniversary awards," those state employees who earned their 5, 10, 15, etc. year honors as well as the President's Award for both Outstanding Service and Public Service. It's always a day filled with smiles, applause and laughter – a real community college day – and, despite the gloomy budget news, this year was no different.

Our recipient for the President's Award for Outstanding Service is Mike Flynt. Mike is the System Office's Network Administrator. He maintains our Novell NetWare and GroupWise servers, as well as firewall administration and Windows administration and patching. He's also the go-to person on Blackberries, to which many of us are always connected, and so much more. Mike goes about his work each and every day with quiet resolve and extraordinary efficiency, but when it comes to solving an email/IT issue, he is simply relentless. He will work with you to seek out every possible solution and every avenue of success. The words of those whose testimonials were a part of his nomination said it best:

"I always look in his office as I walk by in the mornings. I am immediately set at ease to see him sitting there. I know that he will handle anything that comes up that day. If I go to him with an issue, he usually has already seen the problem, and it is resolved by the time I notify him."

Another testimonial said, "Most of all Mike is very proactive. He stays in constant touch with the System Office personnel to assess our needs, upgrades, and/or any problems we may be experiencing. Some weeks when we have not cried for help, he will just stick his head in the door and ask, 'Is everything alright?' If we say yes, he quietly disappears. If we need help, he patiently listens and offers solutions. Mike Flynt has the perfect attitude and aptitude to make our entire agency technically efficient and sound."

One nominee said, "In my decades of experience in both the private and public sectors, I have found it to be a rarity to work with a colleague who tackles every task with enthusiasm as well as professionalism. Mike is definitely one of those rare finds."

And lastly, "Mike is always there when you need him. He will stop whatever he is doing to help, even if you stop him in the hall with a question. He never complains or says he is too busy. You can count on Mike to be responsive, courteous, and completely dedicated to the System Office. We are very lucky to have Mike as a member of the System Office team."

Believe me when I tell you that there is not a day that goes by that someone somewhere in the community college system isn't giving thanks for Mike Flynt's ability, tenacity, professionalism and dedication. And I'd like to ask you in joining me to thank him again today.

Our 2010 President's Award for Public Service is an incredible example of how the passion people bring to their work in our system spills over into passion-filled work for their communities. Darice McDougald, administrative assistant for our college tech prep program and a Central Carolina graduate, is deserving of an award based simply on the great work she performs and the outstanding customer service she provides every day. The folks who nominated Darcie for the public service award noted her day-to-day work in glowing terms, "Resourceful, dependable, diligent, friendly and helpful" to list a few.

But this award was in recognition of the work Darice does after her 8-to-5 job. It seems that Darice steps out of her office at 5 p.m. and turns from System Office Employee Extraordinaire into Volunteer Extraordinaire. Just allow me to walk you through the series of outreach efforts she has championed and led.

In the early 1990's Darice cofounded and operated a community thrift store in Lillington that offered clothing, furniture and appliances at affordable prices. Working in conjunction with Harnett County Social Services, Darice provided professional business clothing at little to no cost for individuals to wear to job interviews. She also worked with troubled children in elementary and middle schools, providing afternoon tutoring and group sessions in the back of the store. Darice's enterprise developed into an outreach mission within the community.

Darice has been active in outreach to the senior citizens in Harnett County through weekly food delivery. Together with her mother, Darice made the rounds to area restaurants, bakeries and food banks for more than five years, picking up and redistributing food to needy families in the various communities in her county.

Darice also "fed" the self confidence and self-esteem of young women through the annual fashion show she organized. For seven years, young teens and pre-teens in Cumberland and Harnett counties learned poise, confidence and public speaking skills by participating in this program.

Recently, Darice has been instrumental in helping to establish the Harnett Betterment Society, a grassroots organization with the goal "to be a blessing to our fellow men and women as they find their way in the working world." Darice has helped recruit and train individuals to be caring, fair minded and people-oriented, in service to others. This group promotes healthy and prosperous communities through community development work such as: working with families, referrals to small businesses and job training education. These efforts have helped educate and connect local citizens with job training and have helped people start and maintain profitable businesses. Darice also assisted with the organization of the annual Fall WE Festival that showcases the products and services of area small businesses.

Darice has an outstanding work record in her job with the North Carolina Community College System. She carries out her duties with skill, efficiency and great courtesy to fellow workers. But above and beyond the call of duty, Darice shows a caring heart and a willingness to work tirelessly to make her community a good place for every citizen.

You know that there are people all over this state and beyond who give thanks every day in every way for Darice's bottomless heart. Please join me in a round of thanksgiving applause for Darice and her unbelievable volunteer efforts.

I am grateful to all the System Office employees who work each and every day to carry out the mission of our colleges, but we think that only getting to recognize two each year is just not enough. We have started a new monthly employee recognition program called the System Office MVP Award. Each month, we'll select an employee who has been nominated because his/her work embodied the spirit of public service and reached beyond the bounds of job roles to do it. And I'll be bringing those folks to be recognized by our State Board each month before my President's report, so you too will have a chance to learn about the outstanding professionals here in the System Office who help fulfill the work you move forward.

But no matter how much we value the work of our great folks, we also know that occasionally, we must let one leave to fulfill other dreams. I did that several years ago when I remember remarking to the Board at that time that I "wasn't leaving the family, I was just going off to college."

Today marks the last meeting that Richard Sullins, our Executive Director of the State Board, will share with us. After five-plus years, Richard has decided that his path is headed back to the college level, and he'll be joining the staff at Wake Technical Community College in a resource development role.

I know that you join me in thanking Richard for his loyal service to this Board, for his work in coordinating and organizing 65 meetings of the State Board, for his love of the history of this institution and the role it plays in our state, and for his efforts in strengthening the bonds between the System Office and each of you. I want to recognize Richard for his service and take this opportunity to thank him publicly for his years here in the System Office.

So next week when I gather with loved ones to honor the spirit of Thanksgiving, and before I fall asleep as part of my highly anticipated, ritualistic Thanksgiving afternoon nap, I will be taking a minute to reflect on the folks here in this room, in this building and around the state who bring tenacity, dedication, passion, commitment, courage and heart to help offer hope, opportunity and jobs to North Carolinians. And I ask each of you to take moment to reflect on the service of the tens of thousands of community college employees who make a difference, who chart the way, who perfect the path and who live our mission daily, weekly, monthly and year after year, and join me in giving thanks for each and every one. And lastly, I wish you all a community college kind of Thanksgiving.