

President's Report
State Board of Community Colleges
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North Carolina Community Colleges have always been noted for their flexibility and responsiveness. But the foundation of flexibility and responsiveness is not just attitude as sometimes may be assumed, but equal parts leadership and preparation.

One of our Issues Luncheon speakers, Dr. Gary Green, recently exemplified this maxim when his responsiveness was credited with one of North Carolina's most significant economic development announcements.

Forsyth Tech received significant credit when the heavy equipment manufacturer, Caterpillar, announced they will build a new \$436 million parts manufacturing facility and create 510 new full-time jobs in Winston-Salem.

In the press reports following the late July announcement held on the campus of Forsyth Tech, David Plyler, Chair of the Forsyth County Commissioners, commented, "As far as I'm concerned, the main reason we are here at Forsyth Tech is because Caterpillar heard Forsyth Tech say "We can do the job" and nobody else could say that."

Fellow county commissioner and college trustee, Beaufort Bailey was quoted in the papers to say, "North Carolina community colleges are above Alabama and South Carolina. When they went over to visit Forsyth Tech, they were supposed to have gone somewhere else but they stayed there the whole day. (Forsyth Tech officials) are the people that brought Caterpillar."

Finally, Governor Perdue noted that, "When he (Gary Green) kept Caterpillar here all day, he didn't offer them wine and cheese. He offered them good business training and promises of good education for its employees."

Bev Perdue is not only Governor, but she is also a shrewd economic developer, and her comment indicated her understanding that what influenced Caterpillar on their day at Forsyth Tech was not just hospitality and salesmanship. It was the fact that they had something to sell – or as an experienced economic developer might say, "they weren't selling from an empty cart."

They could sell excellent technical education programs with top-notch instructors and good facilities. They could sell a coherent workforce development system that integrated degree and non-degree programs. And they could sell nationally recognized leadership in fostering training opportunities validated by industry recognized credentials, which you heard about earlier this morning in the report from the National Association of Manufacturers.

And what Forsyth Tech demonstrated in their responsiveness on that day – a day that influenced the decision to create over 500 jobs and make over \$400 million in investments – was that the ability to respond requires both preparation and leadership.

From a macro perspective, our System's responsiveness to the significant economic impacts of the recession, which cost over a quarter of a million jobs in our state, was made possible by years of preparation. With so many people around the state laid-off from jobs, North Carolinians needing new skills for new employment found that opportunity at our community colleges as a result of that preparation.

During the recent recession, almost 80% of the lay-offs have been to males and many males have looked for new skill opportunities in the traditionally male-dominated technical education fields. For several years when those programs faced declining enrollment, our System did more than just worry about it, we also took proactive steps to ensure that these programs, that are essential for a healthy economy, survived and in some cases even thrived through equipment enhancement, new program development and weighted funding. Consequently, our System last year was able to support a 25% increase in our technical program areas because we didn't give up on this important element of our mission.

Also during the recession, when so many folks needed non-traditional approaches to skill development to try and quickly accelerate back into the workplace, we were able to respond in a proactive manner through the JobsNOW: 12 in 6 program funded through the American Recovery and Reinvestment Act. Through this funding and our previous preparation, we could quickly create this opportunity because we had already developed the statewide Career Readiness Certificate, because we had already focused efforts on training for industry-recognized credentials, and because we had for years provided opportunities for individuals to gain employability skills through our unique Human Resources Development program. Combining these different elements into a program opportunity so quickly was possible not just because of the funding, although that certainly played a big part, but also because of the previous preparation of our system.

Consequently, in just 18 short months, over 16,000 people have started training in a JobsNOW program, 8,600 have completed one or more program components. Over 6,000 people have gained Career Readiness Certificates, 1,139 have earned State-regulated credentials and 862 have received Industry-regulated credentials. In a recent analysis of 12 JobsNOW programs by the Golden Leaf Foundation, who provided equipment resources to complement the effort through their Golden Leaf Opportunities for Work grants, 484 out of 975 JobsNOW students had already found employment in their field of training resulting in an estimated economic impact of \$14.3 million.

My point again, is that the ability to provide meaningful response is not just because of attitude, but also preparation. But don't get me wrong, the right attitude is important as well.

That attitude was exemplified by our System's response to creating the School-Age Care certificate which thanks to this board's approval today, will enable all 58 colleges to provide professional development for individuals working in increasingly important afterschool programs. When calls came forward from the public school community for a program to be developed, our System was responsive in

answering and our responsiveness has been noted by leaders such as John Dornan of the Public School Forum.

Being responsive when North Carolinians call is one of the great hallmarks of our System, and it is demonstrated in ways both large and small every day.

Case in point, one of my favorite college stories was repeated at a student/faculty session that I moderated for the North Carolina Association of Community College Trustees at their conference in Asheville last week. Gary Westmoreland, the welding instructor at Tri-County Community College told of how the welding program had grown to approximately 150 students, tripling in size in recent years, because of the ability to place students in lucrative job opportunities, almost all outside of the economically devastated area and sometimes outside of the country. He told of one student, an Iraq War veteran, who recently returned to the mountains after his first-year of employment bragging that his salary that was greater than the college president's annual take-home pay.

But my favorite part of his story is when he related having recently received a late-night call from one of his former students, a soldier now stationed in Afghanistan during a barrage of incoming artillery fire. Hearing the commotion and noting the lateness of the call, Gary inquired of his nervous former student as to why specifically he was the one he sought out for comfort. "Because you were the only one I could think of to call" was the response.