Column: College Community Connection

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An Ongoing Mission and a New Leader

By Dr. Al Roberts

Nelson Mandela once said, “Education is the great engine of personal development. It is through education that the daughter of a peasant can become a doctor, that the son of a mine worker can become the head of the mine, that a child of farm workers can become the president of a great nation. It is what we make out of what we have, not what we are given, that separates one person from another.”

Those sentiments succinctly capture the mission of community colleges to provide opportunities for people to create successes. American society became mindful of community colleges more than a century ago. National leaders embraced the concept as a way for members of the emerging workforce to improve their skills during a time characterized by increased global competition and economic challenges.

Today, community colleges continue to play a vital role. With open door enrollment policies, they provide opportunities to all. Community colleges educate approximately half of our nation’s college students. They welcome low-income, first-generation, and minority students. They offer second chances for adults who were unprepared or unable to pursue educational pathways at younger ages. They serve traditional college students on pathways to baccalaureate-awarding institutions. They welcome transitioning service members, single parents, and displaced workers.

Because the community college mission aligns with my personal values, in 2014 I accepted the challenge of becoming the fifth president at Southside Virginia Community College. My vision and the collective vision of many regional stakeholders has been brought to fruition by a community consisting of faculty, staff, students, and others working together. They are good folks. They create a College family characterized by caring, whether celebrating accomplishments or walking through difficulties. And, they are passionately committed to education and student success.

Renaissance sculptor Michelangelo reportedly said, “Every block of stone has a statue inside it.” During the years of my presidency, I have seen thousands of students discover their own hidden, internal abilities. It has been my joy to cheer at the amazing transformation process that occurs when students break free from constraints and previous limits to realize that they are indeed masterpieces.

On June 30, 2019, I will step into retirement and begin the next stage of my personal journey. Dr. Quentin R. Johnson, currently of Mooresville North Carolina, will become SVCC’s sixth president. His experience includes twenty years in senior leadership roles in higher education. His background in student services and proven capabilities in the areas such as enrollment management and support for nontraditional students will be an asset to the Southside community. I am confident he will lead SVCC into a bright future. I am pleased to be leaving the College in such capable hands.

Dr. Al Roberts is president of Southside Virginia Community College, an institution of higher learning that provides a wide variety of education opportunities to a diverse student population within a service area that spans ten counties and the city of Emporia. He can be reached via email at [al.roberts@southside.edu](mailto:al.roberts@southside.edu).