

Community Is Our Middle Name

By Dr. Al Roberts

We are Southside Virginia Community College. “Southside Virginia” describes the geographic area we serve. “College” explains our function as an institution of postsecondary education. But “Community” is what characterizes our mission. Community stands at the core of our purpose and in the middle of our name. Community binds the people and places of our region together as we share our lives, our challenges, and our dreams.

Admittedly, some of the challenges have been significant. But challenges only serve to make us stronger. For example, business start-ups have increased every year for the past three years (from 214 to 308 to 353). Employment rates also show recovery. Regional unemployment stood at 10.5% in 2010, and the most recent Virginia Employment Commission figures peg it at 5.5%. The College promotes regional and individual prosperity through a wide slate of education opportunities. Earlier this year, SVCC awarded Associate of Applied Science, Associate of Arts and Science, and other credentials to more than 1,300 students, opening many doors of opportunity. Furthermore, for the eighth year in a row, SVCC was recognized as a “Great College to Work For” by *The Chronicle of Higher Education*.

SVCC faculty and staff also maintain strong community connections. With more than 300 full-time and part-time employees, the College’s workforce constitutes an armada of volunteers. They serve in areas such as fire departments and rescue squads. They distribute food and clothing, provide health care, and keep our region beautiful by picking up litter. SVCC employees serve on non-profit boards and committees, help out at festivals, and assist in schools, nursing homes, and churches. They help build and repair houses, volunteer as coaches, and give their blood—literally. By example, they lead students into lifestyles characterized by helping others.

SVCC student organizations include the Human Services Club, whose members seek to address needs among the elderly, young, and mentally challenged members of the community. The Student Government Association networks with legislators to find solutions to educational issues. The Minority Awareness Programming Club sponsors an annual African-American History month program and raises funds for charitable organizations. The Automotive Club sponsors car care clinics, and the Wellness Club offers workshops and community outreach programs to promote healthy lifestyles. Student Veterans of America provides encouragement to veterans and spouses of veterans, and members of Student Ambassadors honor the value of giving back to the community through outreach and volunteer projects. These are just a few of many examples.

When SVCC staff and students join hands with neighbors and others, Southside Virginia becomes a place where unity strengthens our relationships and prepares us for the future. SVCC’s Annual Report includes more details about the ways in which the College helps put the “unity” into our Community. If you would like to receive a copy, please contact me at 434-949-1004 or al.roberts@southside.edu.

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.