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Celebration of SVCC's 50 Years Begins

Fifty years ago, a ground-breaking event was held to begin construction of Southside Virginia Community College; a monumental moment in improving educational opportunities to area residents. In celebration of the anniversary, the college hosted a kick-off event on October 9, 2019 on the Christanna Campus in Alberta to honor and remember the accomplishments of the college, key figures in its' history and to salute the future.

Dr. Quentin R. Johnson, the sixth president to serve SVCC, welcomed those in attendance. He also recognized the contributions of two former presidents, Dr. John J. Cavan and Dr. A. Allison Roberts. He announced that a tree will be planted in honor of each to include a commemorative plaque recognizing the enormous impact of each on the college's success.

"It was truly an honor to have our two previous presidents, Dr. Cavan and Dr. Roberts, along with the very first student to apply to SVCC, join us for this historic 50th Anniversary Celebration! We were also honored to have our Local Board along with a host of SVCC faculty, staff, retirees and community supporters in attendance which helped make this celebration extra special!!"

Another honoree was Bill Steed of Warfield who was the first person to complete an application for admission to the college. He was farming at the time in northern Brunswick County, but since the day was gray and cloudy, he decided to drive to Lawrenceville where the president of the college had an office in the Perkinson building. With the help of the first President, Dr. Kenneth Dawson, Steed completed his application, was accepted and is a graduate of the SVCC class of 1972.

During the year-long celebration of the 50th Anniversary, items will be collected for placement in a time capsule to be buried and opened at the 100th Anniversary of the college. Items will represent the years from 1969 to 2019.

In 1966, the Virginia General Assembly enacted legislation to establish the statewide system of community colleges. Called the Great Gateway of Opportunity, for the first time, higher education was in easy and affordable reach to Virginians.

In the 50 years in operation, a grand total of 14,882 students have received diplomas, degrees or certificates from SVCC.

Dr. Kenneth E. Dawson was the first president hired to plan and conduct the opening of the college to students in 1970. Since Dr. Dawson (1969 – 1974), the college has been led by some extraordinary men, Dr. Max Wingett (1974 – 1979), Dr. Bryan Brooks (1979 – 1983), Dr. John J. Cavan (1983 – 2014), Dr. A. Allison Roberts (2014 – 2019)a, and now, Dr. Quentin R. Johnson who came on board July 1, 2019.

The Christanna Campus in Alberta opened for classes in the fall of 1970 and the construction of John H. Daniel Campus followed with classes being offered there in the fall of 1971. Campus construction stalled until about 1999 when ground was broken for two

workforce development centers on each campus. Bulldozers arrived on the John H. Daniel Campus in 2013 to begin construction of the beautiful Learning Resource Center and in 2020, a new Student Services and Learning Resource Center will open on the Christanna Campus.

The idea of taking the college to the people due to the large service region (about 1,000 square miles smaller than the state of Connecticut) initiated the establishment of outreach centers. Campus Without Walls opened in an old bank building in Emporia in 1985, Higher Education Center started in a single-wide trailer in South Boston in 1986 with classes held at the high school, and later, moved into a Lowe's building and in 2001 to the current Southern Virginia Higher Education Center. Also in 2001, the first classes were offered at the Estes Community Center in Chase City, the Occupational Technical Building at Pickett Park officially opened in November of 2003 and that same year, the Lake Country Advanced Knowledge Center opened in South Hill. The current Emporia facility, Southside Virginia Education Center opened in 2008.

In the beginning, tuition was $60.00 per quarter for 12 credits or $5.00 per credit and today's price is $156.50 per credit, which is still very affordable. Innovative new programs have been added over the years to meet Workforce demands, such as Practical Nursing, the entire two years for Associate Degree Nursing, Truck Driver Training, Power Line Worker, Emergency Medical Technician, Information Technology, Machining, Advanced Technology, and much more, not to mention transfer guarantees to many colleges and universities in the state.

Dr. Johnson notes that the future is bright for SVCC as he leads the college into the next half-century - Panther Pride, Catch It!