

**The Open Door:  
A History of Tacoma Community College**

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**By Dale Coleman**



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## Foreword

Congratulations, Tacoma Community College, on your 50<sup>th</sup> anniversary. What a privilege it has been to serve as president here for almost eighteen of those fifty years.

From our very beginning, this college has been dedicated to serving all members of our community who seek fuller lives through education. We are distinguished from other types of higher education institutions by that community-driven mission. We have spent the last fifty years listening to our community and responding with offerings that combine opportunities for intellectual growth with career preparation.

A supportive community and our highly gifted faculty have made a first-rate education possible for all people, including those of limited means. We pride ourselves on an open door policy which ensures that people get a second chance on being successful as students. Our student services staff, and for that matter all staff throughout the College, provide a welcoming and supportive environment where students receive the resources they need to be successful and to reach their goals. We seek excellence through inclusion—through helping people progress from wherever they are—rather than



by exclusion, accepting only those who have the highest likelihood of success.

There are those who mistakenly believe that an open door leads to lower standards, but that has never been the case at TCC. While some students must travel further than others to meet our standards, the standards themselves are never compromised. When our students go to work in health care settings, business offices,

technology firms, legal firms, or human services agencies, they must be ready to meet and exceed the professional standards of their employers. When they transfer to universities to complete their bachelor's degrees, they must be fully competitive with the students they encounter. And they are. Year after year, our students who transfer graduate at the same rate and the same GPA as the students who were admitted to these highly competitive universities as freshmen.

The celebration of our 50<sup>th</sup> year provides a timely opportunity to reflect on the rich history of accomplishment that has brought us to where we are today. I hope you will enjoy this engaging story of the people and events who have shaped TCC.

Pamela Transue, PhD  
President

## Chapter 1: A Community College in Tacoma

### City of Destiny

Incorporated in 1875, Tacoma, Washington, earned the judicious nickname “City of Destiny,” as the terminus of the Northern Pacific Railroad. Planted along the banks of Commencement Bay, in the shadow of Mount Rainier (or Mount Tahoma, as it was known to the native Puyallup Tribe), Tacoma has a deeply ingrained history as a workers’ city –a city of factories and smelters built by labor, lumber and longshore. It is a military town, the home of two major military bases (merged, in 2010, as Joint Base Lewis-McChord, Tacoma’s largest employer) and the business hub of the South Puget Sound Region. Romanticized or derided, depending on your disposition, as “Grit City” by some, Tacoma is a place that owns its roots as a city of longshoremen and factory workers and embraces its present and future as a unique and growing metropolis in the midst of a cultural and economic renaissance.



Tacoma, WA, 1914 (A.H. Barnes)

Over the last 50 years, the influx of skilled labor and information work has had a transformative effect on the city. With large local employers like Boeing, Multicare, Franciscan Health and the proliferation of the technology industry to our north, demand has never been higher for local skilled workers. According to labor

historian and original TCC faculty member Ron Magden, “Tacoma was famous for being the factory city of workers –of dead end jobs– and the coming of the College signified that there was a chance for growth in other ways.” In many ways, the growth of Tacoma Community College has paralleled the growth of the city, continuously transfiguring itself to reflect the needs and aspirations of its citizenry.

### **The Community College Movement**

The impetus for the junior college was born amidst the Progressive Era social reforms of the early 20<sup>th</sup> century. An increasing demand for higher education in the United States grew alongside a shifting view of the role of public education in American society. “The Wisconsin Idea” championed by U.S. Senator Robert M. La Follette Sr. and embraced by the University of Wisconsin in the early 1900s, extended the mandate of public higher education to the edification of all institutions and individuals within the state’s borders. Public higher education was intrinsically linked to the improvement of the political, social and economic conditions of the state. President Theodore Roosevelt praised forward-thinking Wisconsin as “a laboratory for wise experimental legislation aiming to secure the social and political betterment of the people as a whole.” It wouldn’t take long for the Wisconsin Idea to spread throughout the nation.

Washington’s first junior college opened in 1915 on the top floor of Everett High School with 21 students. The College shuttered in 1923 due to a lack of enrollment. There were 15 students in the 1925 inaugural class at Centralia Junior College (now Centralia College), which is Washington’s oldest surviving 2-year institution. At its inception the junior college movement spread throughout the state’s population centers as small, self-supported college preparatory ventures, providing an academic bridge to Washington’s four year universities. It wasn’t until the Great Depression produced a flood of unemployed and unemployable young workers looking for a leg up in an oppressively tight job market that the vocational and technical training, commonly associated with two-year institutions, began to gain a foothold.

In spite of being primarily housed within public high schools and run largely by school district faculty and administration, junior

colleges would struggle to receive any type of state funding throughout the 1920s and 30s. It wasn't until 1941 that the passage of House Bill 102 provided official recognition and state financial support to junior colleges in Washington. In 1945 additional legislation allowed existing junior colleges to merge with their local school districts, increasing their funding and support exponentially. Perhaps most significantly, these newly recognized institutions gained the ability to acquire capital construction funding in order to build their own dedicated buildings. This set the stage for the rapid expansion of the junior college in Washington State. Unfortunately, it would take nearly two decades for Tacoma to be permitted to participate in this expansion.

A troublesome legislative caveat prevented new junior colleges from opening in counties that already contained four-year universities. Pierce County is home to two major private universities. Founded in 1888 and 1890, respectively, the University of Puget Sound and Pacific Lutheran University have long-held reputations of providing a quality yet costly education. Many local students who were otherwise able to meet the academic entrance requirements found these schools to be financially prohibitive. They were compelled to leave their home towns in order to pursue an education elsewhere, or, as was often the case, forego the idea of a college education altogether.

At the conclusion of the Second World War, U.S. veterans, as the beneficiaries of the G.I. Bill, began to enroll in American colleges by the millions. By 1947, nearly half of all college students were veterans of the U.S. armed forces. This influx of new adult students dramatically affected existing institutions and signaled the need to develop new ideas for public higher education across the country. As home to one of the largest military populations on the western seaboard, the residents of Pierce County stood to benefit tremendously from this new policy. However, the lack of any state-funded higher education severely hamstrung Tacoma's ability to participate in this boom in proportion to its need.

In 1946, President Truman launched a commission to investigate higher education in the United States. The official mandate was to "re-examine our system of higher education in terms of its objectives, methods and facilities; and in the light of the social role it has to play."<sup>1</sup> The result of the President's commission was a six-volume

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<sup>1</sup> Truman Commission Report on Higher Education. 1947.

study on the American educational system. It was the first of its kind. Widely recognized among academics as a “foundational document for the community college movement,”<sup>2</sup> the Truman Commission Report emphasized the need to expand access and equity to those seeking a college education and encouraged an increased focus on the role of two-year colleges as “community colleges”:

Such a college must fit into the community life as the high school has done. Hence the President's Commission suggests the name "community college" be applied to the institution designed to serve chiefly local community needs. It may have various forms of organization and may have curricula of various lengths. Its dominant feature is its intimate relation to the life of the community it serves. (*Higher Education for American Democracy*)

This subtle semantic shift would have far-reaching implications in the proceeding decades.

### **Ready & Waiting**

The 37<sup>th</sup> Legislature of the State of Washington convened from January 9 to March 9, 1961. During this session the state enacted landmark education legislation in the form of Senate Bill 296 that removed restrictions preventing community colleges from being built in counties with preexisting four-year institutions.<sup>3</sup> Additionally, it changed the legislative language from “junior college” to “community college.” And perhaps most importantly, it authorized the creation of two additional community colleges in Washington State.

For the Tacoma Public School District, this was a moment of eager anticipation. On May 25, 1961, a month *before* the official application regulations were approved by the State Board of Education, the Tacoma School District No. 10 Board of Directors unanimously adopted Resolution No. 245, which served as a “formal application to the State Board of Education for the establishment of a liberal arts community college to serve Pierce County.” The school district administration, led by Superintendent of Schools Dr. Angelo Giaudrone, was determined to seize this previously unavailable opportunity to expand public education in the city.

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<sup>2</sup> Crawford, Charles “A Community College in Tacoma” 2008.

<sup>3</sup> Session Laws, 1961.Chapter 198.[ S. B. 296.]

The son of Italian immigrant parents, Angelo Giaudrone grew up in a family that placed a premium on education. His father worked in the Cle Elum coal mines in the heart of the Cascades, while Angelo focused on his studies. After graduating from Washington State University with a master's degree in education, he quickly worked his way up the ranks of the central Washington public school districts, eventually serving as superintendent of Ellensburg schools. His reputation as an innovator and forward thinking policymaker earned him a fellowship in educational administration at Harvard University, where he completed his doctoral studies in education and served as the director of Harvard's training program for New England school administrators.



TPS Superintendent Angelo Giaudrone (TCC Archive)

When he returned to Washington in 1956 to take the helm of the Tacoma School District, Giaudrone was determined to confront the big problems facing public education in the south Puget Sound. He worked to end the de facto segregation of Tacoma schools and

advocated for the mainstreaming of students with disabilities.<sup>4</sup> Another marquee issue on his reform agenda from the beginning of his tenure was the establishment of a community college in Tacoma. In 1959 he appointed a planning committee to begin to lay the necessary foundation for such a college.

The official application regulations were approved by the Board of Education on June 28<sup>th</sup>, 1961. The very next day a coordinating committee with representatives from each Pierce County school district met for the first time to create an action plan. The following day, on June 30<sup>th</sup>, 1961, Giaudrone submitted another formal application along with supporting data for the establishment of a community college in Tacoma. His letter ended with the following appeal:

Our study of the need for this facility indicates the existence in the Tacoma area of several thousand students being denied a full opportunity to benefit from education beyond high school because of financial barriers. Tacoma is the only one of the four metropolitan areas in the state in which students do not now have the opportunity to attend a low-cost state supported college. We believe the need that exists for a community college on the basis of population alone, merits serious consideration.

For all their speedy effort, Giaudrone's pitch on behalf of the school district would prove unsuccessful. The Board of Education approved the applications for Highline Community College in Des Moines (King County) and Big Bend Community College in Moses Lake (Grant County).

### **Building a Case**

While the State Board of Education did not see fit to approve Tacoma's application for a community college, they clearly recognized the legitimacy of their claim. In July 1961 the State Board assembled the 22-person "Pierce County Advisory Committee on Community Colleges," to be chaired by Giaudrone and counseled by the newly appointed Assistant State Superintendent for Community Colleges, Dr. Lloyd Elias. On July 24 the Committee issued the following statement:

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<sup>4</sup> "Giaudrone Recognition" Tacoma Weekly, 1998.

The Committee unanimously recommends that Pierce County needs three community colleges, preferably to be located in Tacoma, Clover Park and Puyallup, but that the first one of these we believe should be in Tacoma.

Giaudrone also moved forward at the school district level, appointing the former director of Ketchikan (Alaska) Community College, Dr. Thornton M. Ford, as Director of Extended Education. Ford would spearhead the school district's planning efforts for the establishment of a two-year college.



TCC's First President Thornton Ford (TCC Archive)

The public got their first official chance to weigh in on their support of a Tacoma community college in March 1962. A bond issue sought to earmark \$500,000 in funds to be matched by the state to build the first buildings for a college, with an additional \$70,000 to be used to acquire a site. Giaudrone knew they had the support of the city's most influential local community groups, including the Pierce

County Central Labor Council AFL-CIO and the Veterans Advisory Council, but this was the first real opportunity for voters to speak at the ballot box. The bond issue passed with 71 percent of voters voting in favor; the community was officially on board.

With state approval still pending, college planners initiated the site selection process. Securing an optimal locale for the campus grounds was a critical component of building a lucid case for the legislature. The school district, led by Giaudrone, Ford and the Advisory Committee, compiled volumes of survey and census data, map analysis and real estate reports in order to select a central location that could efficiently serve the greater Pierce County metropolitan area. Long range planning indicated that, in order to account for expected growth over 25-30 years, a minimum of 100 acres would be necessary for a permanent site.

Sunset Park was 40 acres of undeveloped Scotch broom, on the corner of South 12<sup>th</sup> and Pearl Street. In November 1962, The Metropolitan Park District agreed to grant the land to the school district to use as a site for Tacoma Community College, with the caveat that 10 acres be set aside to be developed into a children's playground. While this was significantly less than the 100 acre recommendation, college planners considered it to be an ideal spot, due to its centralized location and proximity to the Tacoma Narrows Bridge and the planned freeway expansion of PSH 14 (renamed State Route 16 in 1964). The deal was finalized and the school district immediately went to work, negotiating for the surrounding undeveloped land, in order to bring the campus site to the recommended 100 acres. Over the next nine months, the school district successfully negotiated land agreements, bringing the total size of the site to 147 acres.<sup>5</sup>

Another strong local advocate for a community college in Tacoma was the local paper, the *Tacoma News Tribune*. The Tribune ran lengthy editorial and feature articles on the fight to bring a college to the city. "Life in the Space Age is growing increasingly complex." declared a Saturday morning editorial on December 8, 1962. "Automation already is cutting a wide swath into the ranks of the blue collar worker." This is language that would resonate with the workers at the Asarco smelter or down on the docks at the Port of Tacoma. "The task before us in Pierce County is getting together and agreeing

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<sup>5</sup> Small, Dan "Determined Local Support", TCC Fall Schedule. 1980.

to carry the fight to those who move mountains in Olympia with imagination and vigor. Pierce County legislators must be able to speak as one mind on a common goal if the fight in Olympia is to succeed.”<sup>6</sup>

In June 1961, as the first application was being submitted to the state, News Tribune reporter Don Hannula ran a three-piece feature series entitled “Quest for a College,” which was an in-depth account of the efforts of Giadrone and the school district to establish a college in the City of Destiny. Hannula told the story of 19-year-old Dave Emery, a Lincoln High School graduate who was one of the 282 Pierce County residents that had to commute between Tacoma and Bremerton, 35 miles north on the peninsula, to attend Olympic College. Emery was unable to afford the tuition for PLU and UPS, and his choices were limited by his mid-level high-school academic performance. He paid his way through Olympic by working part-time in Tacoma. “But what about the other Dave Emerys?” Hannula asked. “There are probably enough potential Dave Emerys to launch a 1000-student junior college in Tacoma almost immediately... if the finger of the State Board of Education points in the right direction.”<sup>7</sup> When a second opportunity arose in 1963, the entire community was determined to make sure that the finger of the Board of Education pointed directly at that Scotch broom field on 12<sup>th</sup> and Pearl.

### **1963: A Critical Need**

Washington’s 38<sup>th</sup> legislature officially codified the criteria for establishing a community college. Any community that wished to build a college had to first demonstrate that it possessed sufficient population concentration, total school enrollment, serviceable high school graduates, growth potential and probability, financial support and non-overlapping educational services. Additionally, considerable local interest and a tentative plan for programs, facilities and staff were required.

The school district used these criteria as section headings in their 72-page “Data Supplementing an Application for a Community College in Tacoma.” This comprehensive report represented the sum of collected data and analysis gathered by Tacoma Public Schools and the Advisory Committee for Tacoma Community College, a new lay

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<sup>6</sup> *The News Tribune*. December 8, 1962.

<sup>7</sup> “Quest for a College” *The News Tribune*. June 26, 1961.

committee formed by Tacoma's business and labor leaders to replace the old state-appointed group. The report begins with a brief letter to Louis Bruno, President of the Washington State Board to Education, from Angelo Giaudrone, in which he clearly restates the position of the school district and the Tacoma community.

The need for a community college was clear in 1961. Today it is critical. We have endeavored in this revised application supplement to advise you of this critical need and of the considerable progress made by both the professional educational staff and the voters of School District No. 10 during the past two years.

The Advisory Committee Chairman, Ernest A. Messenger, added a philosophical plea: "Committee members recognize that a healthy productive community is dependent upon an educated citizenry. The members agree that each individual, regardless of economic or ethnic circumstances, has a right to develop himself to his fullest potential."

In order to convey their vast public support, the school district included letters to the Board of Education from the mayors of the City of Tacoma and the Town of Fircrest; the Citizens' Committee for School Support (who were instrumental in rallying backing from local community groups); Central Labor Council, AFL-CIO; Veterans Advisory Council; Tacoma Real Estate Board; Tacoma Parent Teacher Association; South Tacoma Business Group; American Legion; Kiwanis Club; U.S. Naval and Marine Corps Reserve Training Center; Soroptimist Club and several neighborhood improvement clubs. Each of these organizations offered their formal endorsement of the College, emphasizing the prospective benefits regarding their specific needs. The months of research, analysis, media coverage, legislative advocacy and community stumping had succeeded in rallying the Tacoma community.

The school district, the advisory committee and the people of Tacoma were rewarded for their efforts when, on July 9, 1963, the State Board of Education granted authorization for new community colleges in Auburn, Shoreline, Spokane and Tacoma. In a final act of legislative perplexity, Auburn and Tacoma would be required to wait until the 1965-67 biennium before opening their doors. This added a bittersweet tinge to an otherwise celebratory occasion.

Giaudrone, Ford and the school district were so confident in the inevitability of the acceptance of their application that they had

actually gone ahead and accepted over 300 tentative applications for enrollment to the yet-to-be-approved college. When word came that the College couldn't be opened until 1965, Giaudrone quickly announced that the school district would provide counseling and assistance to the 300 prospective students who would undoubtedly have to scramble to find a school to attend in the fall.<sup>8</sup> Consequently, this would give the district time to begin the first phase of construction on a permanent site, instead of attempting to start classes in a temporary off-site location.

Hubristic blunders aside, there was much cause to celebrate. Through coordinated effort, steadfast leadership and grassroots support, the Tacoma community finally had their college. The port town of smelter stacks and paper mills was at last able to provide an affordable education to anyone who was interested in taking at face value the promise of the "City of Destiny." The battle had been won, and it was time for the building to begin.

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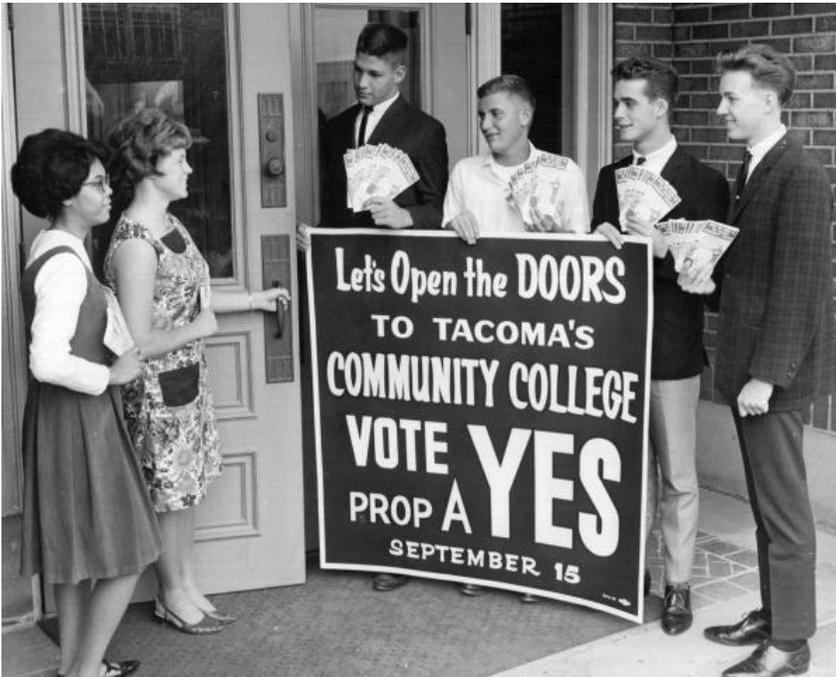
<sup>8</sup> "Tacoma to Aid 300" *The News Tribune*. July 11, 1963.

## Chapter 2: The Opening Door

### Time to Build

After years of concerted community effort, the fight to bring a two-year college to the City of Tacoma had ended in victory. The well-deserved celebrations would be brief, however, as Giaudrone, Ford and the Tacoma School District immediately set about building a college suitable for the aspirations of the City. They had their mandate. It was time to build.

The first two attempts to gain construction funding approval, in March and May 1964, ended in failure, but in September of that year, Tacoma voters, by a margin of 4 to 1, approved a \$4.1 million special levy, with \$750,000 set aside for community college construction. This funding would be reinvested into the community by contracting a local firm, Strom Construction Co., to begin work on the first phase of construction.



Young people campaign to fund TCC construction. (TCC Archive)

The man tasked with designing Tacoma Community College was local architect Lyle Swedberg. A Minnesota native and veteran of the Army Construction Division during the Second World War, Swedberg had established a reputation as an innovative local designer and architect. His design of the Redi-Gas Co. Building in Parkland had won him acclaim among his peers and recognition in a number of architectural journals.

Swedberg, in cooperation with Ford, developed a comprehensive vision for the campus grounds. “The campus has been planned with particular attention to shapes and positions, which are scaled to human size,” Ford said, in a January 1964 interview for the *News Tribune*. He told reporters that by scattering the initial buildings throughout the 150 acre site, they would allow for a more holistic expansion over time, avoiding the “old campus/new campus” dichotomy that is a common feature of many colleges. Swedberg took a more philosophical view. He felt that tall towers and multi-story buildings could be “intimidating” to students, who would benefit from the “communities of learning” created by a collection of smaller, more widely dispersed buildings. (A later study, conducted under the administration of TCC President Pamela Transue, would find that Swedberg’s design had the opposite of this intended effect<sup>9</sup>).

The practical result of this vision was a sprawling, “California-style” campus, with buildings peppered throughout the breadth of the newly acquired property. The diffuse manner in which the first campus buildings were constructed led to an enduring college myth that the project was helmed by a Californian architect, who lacked an awareness of the particular demands of the Northwest climate. In truth, Swedberg, a Tacoman-by-way-of-Minnesota, was largely following popular architectural trends, while adding a bit of his personal brand of high-minded design flourish.

Another commonly held view, this one more substantial and verifiable, was that the College was simply built “on the cheap,” to quote TCC’s first Director of Information Systems, Gary Sigmen. Sigmen, who was hired to teach business and economics in the fall of 1968, became very familiar with the campus’s architectural infrastructure, over the years, as he oversaw many attempts to upgrade the College’s technology infrastructure. “[In 1964] the school district was having a hard time getting the money, getting the voters

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<sup>9</sup> “Students purchase expansion of campus center” *TCC Campus Vision*. 1:1 Fall 1998.

to approve money to build a campus. So they took what money they could get. Low cost was the driving, deciding factor in everything they did.”<sup>10</sup>



TCC Campus 1965 (TCC Archive)

### **Stepless College, Sea of Mud**

Despite Swedberg’s intentionality of design, the campus plan was not without some major oversights, which might seem particularly conspicuous in retrospect. For example, considering the average regional precipitation and moisture levels in the Puget Sound Lowlands, the campus design was marked by its lack of covered walkways connecting the various buildings. To further complicate matters, ubiquitous construction and shoddy drainage meant that one healthy autumn rain could transform the campus into a “sea of mud”. Makeshift plywood walkways stretched over treacherous mud ponds, considerably raising the stakes of inner-campus travel.

Disproportionately affected by the external hazards on campus were people with mobility impairments and physical disabilities. This was a bitter source of irony for Giaudrone, who had devoted the bulk of his career in Tacoma to normalizing and advocating for disabled students. Ron Magden cites the Tacoma School district’s pioneering

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<sup>10</sup> Gary Sigman Oral History. TCC Archive. 2013.

reputation for equitable disability services as his primary impetus for relocating to the City.

“It became known nationally as ‘The Stepless College’ in its early years,” recalls Magden. “The military had posted people to Tacoma because they knew the school district had an excellent mainstreaming program. And that carried over to the College.”

A former Executive Vice President of Academics and original college English faculty, Frank Garratt, had a more nuanced assessment of campus accessibility during those early years. “The College, I think, was designed for people with disabilities –for wheelchairs,” Frank recalled, adding “It wasn’t designed very *effectively* for people with wheelchairs.” Frank, who has seen vast improvements over the years, navigated the TCC campus in his wheelchair starting in 1965. “It’s common, when people build things for individuals with disabilities, that they look to the regulations, but they don’t talk to very many people with disabilities. You know –the people who are going to use those facilities. They could learn a lot from them.”



Frank Garratt (TCC Archive)

## **First Faculty and Academic Programs**

Helming the effort to recruit and hire TCC's pioneering faculty was the College's first Dean of Instruction, John Terrey. Terrey was a Chicago native and Western Washington University graduate who spent 15 years as an English teacher in Washington high schools before completing his doctorate in education from Washington State University in 1964. In May 1964, Terrey set about recruiting a team of educators and instructors who were capable of meeting the community's enthusiastic expectation.

Under the leadership of Terrey, a threefold instructional program was created for TCC. Each instructional area was meant to fulfil a specific aspect of the College's broader mandate to provide open access to quality educational services throughout the Tacoma-Pierce County area. The College's early years would be characterized by a refinement and restructuring of these programs, as TCC endeavored to establish and define its role as a community institution. Even as they were being created and recreated, the principles and vision underlying these programs would remain fairly consistent over time.

Transfer education was the first of the three prongs in TCC's academic program. This was the most basic principle of the junior college, which persists today. Students at TCC could expect to gain the equivalent experience of the first two years of a four year baccalaureate program. Credits earned in 100 and 200 level courses offered at TCC could be transferred to a four-year university. Because of its proximity to Tacoma, the University of Washington in Seattle immediately became a popular transfer destination for academically minded students. In fact, it was so popular that, in the mid-1990s when UW was considering locations for a Tacoma extension, the undeveloped half of TCC's campus was among the finalist spots. TCC would work closely with UW and the University of Puget Sound to ensure a (mostly) smooth transition for academically minded students.

For the students who intended to earn a two-year associate degree in science, liberal or fine arts, Terrey and his team created the General Studies program. The earliest incarnation of this program was a catch-all for students who would not be transferring to a four year school. An early collaboration with Tacoma Vocational-Technical Institute (renamed Bates Vocational Technical Institute in 1969 and Bates Technical College in 1991) allowed students to combine credits at the

two institutions in order to obtain technical associate degrees. This short-lived partnership would eventually strain and break as TCC began developing its own vocational programs in conjunction with local employers.

The community services program was the third facet of TCC's instructional agenda. Connecting directly to the community was a critically important piece of the College's mission. This program was created to serve the educational needs and interests of the community at large. The bulk of these offerings were in the form of short courses, public forums, seminars, lecture series, writing workshops and other less formal methods of group instruction. These programs could be built around current events or contemporary community interest and were open to anyone who was interested. Much more than an institutional afterthought, the community services program was seen as a central service of the College.

### **The Opening Door**

Tacoma Community College opened to the public September 13<sup>th</sup>, 1965. Prospective students filled building 18 (one of the College's two completed buildings) to meet with their new advisors and complete the registration process. Aside from its inaugural significance, the 12-day registration event was noteworthy only for its lack of complication or strife. "The Motor is purring, all the parts are performing perfectly and the great college machine is off to a smooth start," read the lead in the first headline story in the *Campus Reporter* (to be renamed *The Collegiate Challenge* that spring). "Students and faculty had no idea the road could be so trouble-free the first time around." Students were registered simply by order of application – first come, first served. It was the open door in its most literal sense. Dean of Students, Richard Falk oversaw the process that, by all accounts, went off without a hitch.

By the time classes began, on September 27<sup>th</sup>, 1965, TCC had enrolled 1084 students. In terms of demographics, male students outnumbered females by a two-to-one margin, ethnic minorities made up only five percent of the student population, and the median age was under 21, with 88 percent entering the College directly out of high school. Eighty-five percent of the first quarter students expressed the intent to transfer to a four-year college or university. Eighteen percent were part-time enrollees.

From the beginning, there was something of a disconnect between the College's explicit commitment to provide equitable access to education, regardless of gender, ethnicity or socioeconomic standing, and the fact that the overwhelming majority of TCC's first-year students were white, male, transfer hopefuls fresh out of high school. During the social tumult of the late-1960s, this would become an increasingly contentious issue. The topic will be explored in greater depth in the next chapter, but, from the beginning, TCC's student body had an enrollment that was as diverse as the population of the South Puget Sound, even if it was not proportionately represented.

Lilly Warnick counted herself among the non-traditional students who attended TCC in the autumn of 1965. She was a 32-year-old mother of four who had decided to return to school to pursue a career as an educator. A first-generation student, Lilly deferred her studies at the University of Washington during her freshman year to start a family with her husband, Jack. She saw TCC as an opportunity to step back into the academic environment that had inspired her as a youngster.

"I always loved school" she said, reflecting on her childhood in Bellingham, WA. "I was the one that would stay after school and wipe off the blackboard for the teacher, or hang out on the last day because I didn't want to go on summer vacation." While she found domestic life to be a deeply rewarding experience, she confessed to always "feeling an emptiness" after shelving her educational pursuits. So, when Lilly Warnick arrived in Art Martinson's Washington State History class, in the newly constructed (and aspirationally numbered) "Building 15," it represented not only the fulfillment of the College's promise to the community, but of Lilly's promise to herself.

"It was a very good course... very rigorous," she recalled. Art Martinson, who would go on to become a prolific local historian and professor at Tacoma's Pacific Lutheran University, held his students to a high academic standard. It was an evening course, which afforded Lilly some flexibility to balance her multiple roles and responsibilities. She made friends with the 19-year-old students, some of whom would come over to babysit so that Lilly and Jack could enjoy a rare night out.

The diversity of background among TCC students, while perhaps not as pronounced during the inaugural year, would grow to be one of

the College's defining characteristics and most cherished assets. This heterogeneous community of broad learning simply did not exist in Tacoma before TCC. The College was by no means a social utopia, but it provided an opportunity for interaction between seemingly disparate social, ethnic and economic groups. It was literally a common ground in which to have honest, sometimes difficult, but very necessary, conversations.

### **Esprit de Corps**

"In the beginning, there was no distinction between the staff, faculty and administration" said Ron Magden. "From youth to experience, the people who could carry the College did." There was a spirit of camaraderie during those formative years that united the staff and faculty in the pursuit of the College's mission. In many ways, it resembled a modern start-up business environment, with a singularly focused group of enthusiastic employees, who were as committed to each other as they were to the success of their organization.

Much of the early success and easy working relationship among staff and faculty could be attributed to the work of John Terrey. In addition to selecting the faculty and curriculum, as Dean of Instruction, Terrey handled internal relations among faculty and between faculty and administration. "John Terrey ran the faculty very, very well," said Magden, who was a great admirer of Terrey's ability to maintain a working environment that was virtually-free of internal strife. "John always said, 'the faculty are the continuity of [TCC]; Presidents will come and go.' And they did."

Many of the original staff and faculty recall the after-school gatherings at the Cloverleaf Tavern, just a few blocks from the College, on Sixth Avenue. "There were days when we would go over to the Cloverleaf after class, maybe 3 o'clock in the afternoon, and leave around 10 at night," Frank Garrett said. Staff and faculty were often joined by some of the older students, who would mix it up into the wee hours. Garrett recalled having an important epiphany, regarding the Cloverleaf, during that time. "I remember coming to the hard realization that I couldn't stay out until 2 o'clock in the morning and still teach an 8 o'clock class."

This genuine esprit de corps was not restricted to the staff and faculty. During the College's early years, the student body enjoyed an easy working relationship with their professors and administrators.

They were afforded a high degree of autonomy, especially when it came to student government and organizations. Formed in April 1966 (even before the faculty association had written their bylaws) TCC students organized an associated student government. Over the decades, Associated Students of Tacoma Community College (ASTCC) would experience fluctuating cycles of enthusiasm and decline, but in 1966 they were the vital epicenter of student activity. Reflecting on the 1966 conference of the Washington Association of Community College Student Governments, President Ford boasted that the 10 student representatives from ASTCC roamed the event freely, maximizing learning opportunities, as they saw best, while other student delegations were “being herded around by a ‘big brother’.” This benchmark of student autonomy and self-determination would sometimes prove to be a greater challenge to the College administration as the decade marched on, but during the fledgling years of the institution it was heralded as a cardinal virtue.

### **The Collegiate Challenge**

The virtue of student autonomy would find a comfortable mode of expression in the pages of the new student newspaper. TCC’s first newsprint publication came in the form of the “Tacoma Community College Progress Report.” Published on September 13, 1965, this prosaically titled publication led with a story on the impending registration period, and an inspirational message from President Tom Ford, in which he hailed the landmark establishment of the College and encouraged students to make full use of this new institution.

I would urge you to make strenuous demands of your College, and strenuous demands of yourselves. The teachers, the library, the laboratories, the lounges will become valuable parts of your college year to the extent you place demands upon them. The buildings and faculty are here because our community has worked half a decade toward this opening day. The reputation, the image and the traditions which will characterize Tacoma Community College will begin with you. Best wishes for a successful year.<sup>11</sup>

With this presidential mandate in mind, TCC students swiftly took up the work of establishing their own unique institutions.

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<sup>11</sup> Ford, Thornton “President’s message” *The Collegiate Challenge*. 13 Sept 1965.

Choosing a suitable name for the College paper would be a campus-wide effort. For weeks, the paper's nameplate remained shrouded, as the editorial staff solicited suggestions from the campus community. Jim Simpson, the paper's first editor-in-chief would tease readers with suggested titles, such as *The Mercury*, *Mountain View*, *The Portal* and *The Stone & Chisel*. On April 13, 1966 *The Collegiate Challenge* was unveiled as the official name of the College paper.

In the years that followed, *The Challenge* became an integral component of college life at TCC. It was the binding thread of an increasingly diverse student body. During the tumultuous years of the late sixties and early seventies, *The Challenge* was a cultural sounding board and a political platform. Student writers protested the war in Vietnam and advocated for civil rights. They stumped for environmental change and commented on local legislation. It was a place for students to air their grievances with the faculty, administration and other students. In later years *The Challenge* would be used to explain and discuss Watergate, the Iranian Revolution, Reaganomics, the AIDS epidemic and the Internet. *The Challenge* and its staff would be recognized repeatedly, winning multiple state honors for excellence in collegiate journalism, in print and, after 1997, online.

**The Collegiate Challenge**

May 3, 1966      Tacoma Community College, Tacoma, Wash.      Vol. I — No. 6

## Officers Thank Voters, Assume Duties, Plan for Future

With elections over, the Government of Associated Students of Tacoma Community College is taking shape.

**NEWLY ELECTED** officers are beginning to assume the duties delegated to them by the students. Along with these duties, go plans for the future and gratitude to the students for their support.

"Basically," said Mike Fuller, ASB president, "I am interested in serving the student body to the best of my ability. I hope to fulfill all the interests of the students and help lead Tacoma Community College on the way to a most successful and prosperous future. I am very proud of our fine institution, the administration and the most patient and dedicated students. All I ask is the cooperation and support of the student body."

**DAN BIRNEL**, ASB vice president, commented, "Frankly, I want to promote anything that will induce interest and spirit in the student body and pride in our school. I hope the students will support our work."

**NEW REPRESENTATIVES**—Named Associated Student Body representatives in recent elections were (left to right) Diane Pellegrini, Shirley Coleman, Dave Lantz and Jan Henderson.

**MIKE FULLER**      **DAN BIRNEL**

**CHRIS COLYAR**      **DONNA-LEE MASSOTH**

The Collegiate Challenge, May 3, 1966. (TCC Archive)

From a historical perspective, *The Challenge* offers a robust record of the student experience during one of the most dynamic and transformative eras in modern history. It offers a surprisingly thorough account of the TCC's social history—the music and fashion, the movies and books, the heroes and villains—all told through the lens of a segment of the population that, without the College, would likely go unheard. Each volume is quickened with a sense of honesty and urgency from a lineage of students who have recently discovered the power of their voice within their community.

## The Arts

Even before TCC students formed a student government, they formed a jazz band. Under the guidance of music instructor Robert Dezell, a talented and well-regarded orchestral conductor from Lincoln High School, TCC's first stage band was created. "Our ambition is to develop the band program to the stage, at which [point] we can offer it as a curriculum subject," Dezell told the *Campus Reporter* in December 1965.<sup>12</sup> The following year the College had a concert band and a choir, open to all interested students, with an optional college credit. They played concerts at the North End Kiwanis Club and Hunt Junior High School, establishing a tradition of travelling performances throughout the community. By 1968, the College had a 60-piece chamber orchestra, with a full touring schedule and varied performance program.

On February 15, 1968, TCC dedicated its new Fine Arts Building to Angelo Giaudrone. This building would become home to TCC's budding fine arts program. It would eventually grow to be one of the College's most distinguished programs, inspiring local artists and featuring talent from around the world. The dedication ceremony featured stirring performances by the College's concert band and choir. An emotional Giaudrone addressed the crowd, in the building bearing his name, on the campus that was little more than a worthy idea just five years previous. "Anyone with a name like Angelo Giaudrone obviously wouldn't aspire to have a building named after him," he said with a wry smile. "I'm very happy that you did this, but I'm sure this building means more to the community than to me. It will benefit a lot of people with or without my name on it."<sup>13</sup>

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<sup>12</sup> "Musicians form stage band at TCC" *TCC Campus Reporter*. 1 Dec 1965.

<sup>13</sup> Gibbs, Al "TCC building named for Dr. Giaudrone" *The News Tribune*. 16 Feb 1968.

TCC's auditorium, locally known as the TCC Little Theater, was also among the new buildings erected during the post-opening phase of construction. Home to TCC's budding performing arts programs, the Little Theater offered students a place to showcase their talents on campus. In addition to the growing music and choir programs at the College, TCC's burgeoning Drama Club would set up shop in the building. Formed by a collection of aspiring student thespians and stagecraft enthusiasts, and advised by former Lincoln High School Drama Coach Morris Summers, the Drama Club eventually grew into a fully supported program. In 1968, Charles "Chuck" Cline was hired to teach speech and drama at TCC. For the next ten years, Cline's students would perform a successful series of quarterly plays in the Little Theater, garnering the college a measure of local acclaim as an eclectic little hotbed for the dramatic arts in Tacoma.

### **Athletics**

Quickly recognized as an important way to build college spirit and generate positive publicity, the collegiate athletic program was also a foundational component of TCC's earliest years. The College enthusiastically involved itself in interscholastic athletic competition. By 1970 the TCC Titans were competing in five varsity sports: cross country during fall quarter; basketball in the winter; and track, tennis and golf in the spring.<sup>14</sup> A robust intramural athletics program also served as a testing ground for new sports programs, building interest before transitioning them to the varsity level. TCC's baseball, soccer and volleyball programs all started as intramural activities, and continue to be among the College's most successful and enduring programs.

President Ford tapped mathematics instructor Loyd Percy to serve as the College's first athletic director. Before joining TCC's founding mathematics faculty (he would serve as department chair several times during his 21 year career), Percy coached tennis, basketball and football at Stadium High School in Tacoma. Percy, in turn, hired Coach Don Moseid to helm the College's burgeoning basketball program.

Moseid, another local basketball coach, came to TCC from Mount Tahoma High School. As a student he was an All-State forward at Stadium High School. He set scoring records while

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<sup>14</sup> "Titans Sports History" *TCC Press Book 1970-1971*. 1970.

attending the University of Puget Sound. His coaching talents garnered him some local acclaim when he led the 1964-65 Mount Tahoma Thunderbirds through an undefeated season. He was also a political science instructor who enjoyed teaching his students the importance of becoming personally invested in the political process. Hired as part of the rapid staff and faculty expansion in 1967, Modseid would have the opportunity to put his full skillset to use at TCC.

“The only problem with a community college team is that the players all come from different backgrounds and must learn to work together,” Moseid told *Challenge* reporters on November 10, 1967.<sup>15</sup> In contrast to his Mount Tahoma squad, where most of his players were childhood friends and had played together for years, the TCC hopefuls were composed of students of diverse age, experience and background. Military veterans lined up next to high school hotshots; teenagers ran drills with men in their late twenties and early thirties. Students from a variety of racial, ethnic and socioeconomic backgrounds came together, each hoping to be among the first college athletes to represent the mighty Titans on the basketball court. Moseid sought to develop a spirit of camaraderie and teamwork within this diverse group of individuals.

Throughout the 1960s and 70s, Titans Basketball was the College’s flagship athletic program. Moseid, with his assistant coach, Jim Savitz, quickly transformed a disparate group of basketballers into a genuine team of winners that grew more competitive each quarter. The team was led by unlikely standouts, like Tom Patnode, a 5’8” guard who was capable of routinely putting up 20-plus point performances while holding his own against even the most physically intimidating opposition, and Don Martonik, who had played under Coach Moseid at Tahoma and had a devastating shot from distance.

The Titans basketball team placed in the State Community College Tournament every year under Moseid. During the 1970-71 season, Moseid’s Titans dominated the league, brushing aside teams from Wenatchee, Green River, Shoreline, Highline and local rivals, Ft. Steilacoom. Student athletes like Ron Oughton, Bruce Larson, Charles Nicholson and Dean Ecklund frequented the pages of *The Challenge*. Frequently understating his own contribution, Moseid heaped praise on his players. “It’s unusual for a team to play as well

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<sup>15</sup> “TCC Hoop Quintet prepares for action.” *The Collegiate Challenge*. 10 Nov 1967.

together this early in the season,” Moseid told *Challenge* sportswriters in November 1970. With 26 wins and only three losses, the '71 Titans cemented their name in Washington sports history. They would end their season with a 73-58 victory against the Walla Walla Warriors, lifting the State Championship trophy for the first time.



Coach Moseid and the 1971 Titans celebrate their State Championship victory. (TCC Archive)

“This is the greatest and most talented team I’ve ever coached,” Moseid told reporters. “They gave blood.”<sup>16</sup> Throughout his nine year career as head coach, the Titans established a record of 180 wins (a record that would eventually be broken by legendary Titans Basketball Coach, Carl Howell, who racked up an astonishing 363 wins in his 15 year career).<sup>17</sup> In 1974 the Titans would win State again, prompting the Washington State Senate to draft an official resolution of congratulation, in recognition of Moseid, his team and Tacoma’s regional talent:

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<sup>16</sup> Winter, Tom. “Titans state champs bomb Walla Walla” *The Collegiate Challenge*. 12 March 1971.

<sup>17</sup> “Records” [Tacomacc.edu](http://Tacomacc.edu) n.d.

NOW, THEREFORE, BE IT RESOLVED, By the members of the Senate, that we do congratulate the Tacoma Community College Titans, their coach, Don Moseid; that we do hereby recognize this team personifies the best in amateur basketball competition with its excellent all-around team balance and a team attitude which personifies the best in sports competitiveness; and not least, that we from other areas of this state do concede that Tacoma area basketball in quality is at present the envy of other areas of the state.<sup>18</sup>

Over the decades, TCC Titans would distinguish themselves in a number of collegiate sports, each team following the Moseid method. By encouraging diverse, talented and ever-changing groups of student athletes to band together to achieve ambitious goals, TCC Athletics have become not only a source of school spirit and public pride, but an perennial example of the College at its best.

### **Friends of the TCC Library**

Another enduring institution established from the outset of the College was the TCC Library. From its earliest inception, Tom Ford and John Terrey envisioned a college library that functioned not only as the intellectual heart of TCC's instructional program but also as an active laboratory, where students and faculty could access the most modern tools and technologies in a collaborative learning environment. Far from being a mere repository of books and periodicals, the TCC Library would support the burgeoning media services tools that were gaining popularity among higher education's technological elite. Ford and Terrey insisted that they were looking to build "the most outstanding community college library in [Washington] State."

To help realize these lofty ambitions, Terrey hired Doreen Amoroso (née Faure) and Morris Skagen. Amoroso had worked as the librarian at Mt. Tahoma High School for 14 years, and Skagen was a recent graduate of the University of Washington's School of Librarianship. Together they laid the groundwork for what everyone hoped would be the intellectual jewel in the crown of the College.

Even while in library school, Skagen was particularly keen on working in a community college library. "My eye was always on a

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<sup>18</sup> Washington State Senate Resolution 1974-247.

community college position because many of those students were similar to me,” recalled Skagen, who, lacking any financial support, worked his way through a BA, MBA and MLS at the University of Washington. “So many students in my graduating high school class really couldn't go on to school because of economics. [People] who would have made perfectly successful students, they didn't get that chance.” When Skagen saw that the Tacoma School District was hiring librarians for their newly approved community college, he leapt at the opportunity.

“It was a tremendously exciting thing, being on the ground floor of something brand new, and seeing all the steps being taken to build a college,” Skagen said. He and Doreen met frequently to develop a coherent vision and action plan for developing a modern academic library. They referred to the American Library Association's recommended books for two-year colleges, developing a collection that focused primarily on two-year transfer curriculum. They met with the growing college faculty as they arrived, frequently with book lists or even stacks of their own books, already in hand.

In the summer of 1965, piles of incoming books began to amass at the interim library headquarters at nearby Wainright Elementary School. The library team expanded, hiring Diane Porlier, who was working as a reference assistant at the Tacoma Public Library, and Lorraine “Hildy” Hildebrand, who had been Doreen's assistant at Mt. Tahoma. The newly commissioned TCC library staff would set up shop, temporarily, in the south end of Building 18. Meanwhile, a future home in a building more fitting of the institution's ambitions was being constructed as the campus centerpiece.

Shortly after the library commenced operations in its transient home, a local attorney and civic activist named John Binns approached the library staff regarding the formation of a private charitable organization in support of the TCC Library. Inspired by a similar organization at Washington State College (now Washington State University), Binns pitched the “Friends of the TCC Library,” an advocacy group and social club that could promote awareness of the library within the community, stimulate financial and material support and facilitate an ongoing dialogue on the topic of library and information services. It would be the first organization of its kind in support of a community college library. The College gratefully accepted.

After securing a sponsorship from the Kiwanis Club of Marine-Industrial Tacoma, John Binns, along with Terrey and the library staff, recruited the founding membership for the Friends of the TCC Library. Charter members included local business leaders, doctors, lawyers, educators (including Superintendent Angelo Giandrone), activists and religious leaders. The idea was to include as many community stakeholders as possible. A February 1966 article in *The News Tribune* heralded the group's formation, and an editorial the next month kicked off their first major initiative: a city-wide book drive.

Many Tacomans, no doubt, are still scarcely aware of the Tacoma Community College, which opened last fall and is destined to become an important educational and cultural influence in the Tacoma area. One group, however, which is abundantly aware of the new institution, is the newly formed Friends of the Tacoma Community College Library... The local organization has just inaugurated a drive here and Tacomans are urged to look through their [personal] libraries to see what volumes they might be willing to donate. All types of books are welcome, particularly literature, science, art and books of reference of all kinds. Donors are asked to take such volumes to their nearest fire station, where they will be picked up by members of the association and taken to the Community College Library for sorting, repairing if necessary, and cataloging.<sup>19</sup>

Once again, the Tacoma community—individuals and civic-minded organizations alike—were being asked to rally in support of the College. And, once again, they delivered. Books of every variety began to pile up at local fire stations throughout the city. The Tacoma-Pierce County Council of Churches enlisted local reverends to encourage participation from the pulpit. *The News Tribune* ran a Sunday feature, showing the Friends in service of the library carting and shelving volumes into the College's rapidly growing collection. These contributions, along with a sizable allocation from the school district, allowed the library to open with a collection of 12,000 volumes.

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<sup>19</sup> "A Book for the College" *The News Tribune*. 25 March 1966.



Librarian Doreen Amoroso welcomes students to the TCC Library. (TCC Archive)

## **The Pearl A. Wanamaker Library and Instructional Center**

In February 1956, *Time* magazine published a feature on Pearl Wanamaker, recognizing her 15 years of service as Washington State's Superintendent of Public Instruction. The article opened with an anecdote that illustrated the dedication and determination evidenced throughout her career as a steward of public education.

Among U.S. public-school men there is a favorite story which, though apocryphal, keeps making the rounds. Some years ago, it seems, a certain school construction yard in the state of Washington was the victim of nightly raids by a mysterious band of lumber thieves. No one knew how to cope with the situation—until the matter came to the attention of the state's new school superintendent, a doughty housewife named Pearl Wanamaker. Pearl simply took out her shotgun, parked herself in the yard for two nights running. The raids ceased; the lumber was saved; Pearl once again emerged as public education's Fighting Lady No. 1.<sup>20</sup>

As Superintendent of Public Instruction for Washington State from 1941-1957, Wanamaker fought to meet the increasing demand

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<sup>20</sup> "Fighting Lady." *Time* 67, no. 6 (February 6, 1956): 62.

for college and vocational education. During her tenure, state support for public education increased from 11 percent to over 50 percent.<sup>21</sup> Her determination and single-minded focus made her one of the most important architects of Washington State's postwar education system. She was also among first and most fervent advocates of the community college system in the state.

When the Tacoma School Board met on Thursday, October 27, 1966, Board President Frank Gillihan officially moved that the TCC Library, still under construction, be named in honor of Pearl Wanamaker, "because her name has been a symbol of forward strides in Washington education since the beginning of World War II, placing this state's educational system as one of the most outstanding in our country."<sup>22</sup> His motion passed unanimously with enthusiasm from the Board.

On December 7<sup>th</sup>, 1966 the Pearl Wanamaker Library and Instructional Center was formally named and dedicated. Mrs. Wanamaker was present at the dedication ceremony, along with many school district and local government officials. Reflecting on her years of advocacy for public education in Washington, Pearl had this to say:

I think this day sort of puts the top on a very interesting life. I couldn't help but think that it's a team job, and that I just happen to be the lucky one to have my name associated with this honor. There are a lot of people that belong on the plaque with me for the work that they have done, and I'm really touched by it. It is a great honor and a responsibility, too.<sup>23</sup>

Now that honor and responsibility would be conferred to Tacoma Community College. Continuing along the path forged in earnest by Pearl Wanamaker and a host of dedicated champions of public education was an important task that would require vigilant leadership and attentiveness to both the way forward and the animating purpose. It would continue to be a "team job," as it had been from its earliest design. Tacoma Community College was now a reality, its classrooms filled with students who were eagerly reaching for the promise of opportunity and advantage. Protecting the integrity and inclusiveness

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<sup>21</sup> Hood, Michael. "Wanamaker, Pearl Anderson (1899-1984)" HistoryLink.org 26 Sep. 2009.

<sup>22</sup> "Library cornerstone will be set Dec 7." *The Collegiate Challenge*. 1 Dec 1966.

<sup>23</sup> "Wanamaker Library dedicated" *The Collegiate Challenge*. 16 Dec 1966.

of that promise would mark the next phase in the history of the College.

## Chapter 3: Independence

### Community College Act of 1967

The purpose of this act is to provide for the dramatically increasing number of students requiring high standards of education either as a part of the continuing higher education program or for occupational training by creating a new, independent system of community colleges.<sup>24</sup>

After the 37<sup>th</sup> Legislature loosened restrictions regarding the establishment of community colleges in Washington State, the emergent institutions grew rapidly. By the mid-1960s, as Tacoma Community College was opening its doors to a multitude of eager new learners, it was already becoming clear that these institutions would inevitably outgrow their role as auxiliary functions of the local public school districts.

On April 3, 1967, Governor Daniel J. Evans signed into law House Bill Number 548, the Community College Act of 1967. This legislation transferred control of the state's community colleges from their respective local public school districts, placing them under the auspices of a newly-created State Board for Community College Education (known today as the State Board for Community and Technical Colleges). As an independent institution in Washington's higher education system, community colleges would have a new governing board at the state level. The new community college districts were to be governed locally by a Boards of Trustees.<sup>25</sup>

The first meeting of the Tacoma Community College Board of Trustees took place on May 31, 1967. The five state-appointed Trustees were Charles Edmunds, a local labor leader and former president of the Retail Store Employees Union No. 367; Frank Cooper, who had recently left his position as president of the Bank of Tacoma; Maxine Myers; Lewis C. Hatfield; and John H. Binns, a nationally respected attorney and former superior court judge, with a deep personal passion for public education. According to the minutes of the first meeting, board leadership was determined by lottery, as mandated by the legislation. "By unanimous vote Mr. Edmunds was

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<sup>24</sup> Washington State Community College Act of 1967.

<sup>25</sup> Terrey, J. "Washington Community Colleges: History and Present" *Community College Journal of Research and Practice*. 1997.

elected chairman and Mr. Cooper was elected vice chairman for the coming year.”

The first act of the TCC Board of Trustees was to issue an official vote of confidence to President Tom Ford. His continued leadership as college president under the new regime was never in question. New faculty contracts would need to be issued (the old contracts were held by the school district), but the salary improvements under the new system ensured a smooth transition for all instructors currently working at the College.



TCC’s First Board of Trustees (TCC Archive)

Reports on the internal reaction to the split were generally positive. Dale Wirsing, who was hired in 1967 as the College’s first public information officer, recalled the split being “universally applauded” by TCC employees, who would, by and large, receive better pay and attention.<sup>26</sup> Additionally, the formation of a dedicated college Board of Trustees meant that college leadership at the highest levels would be better equipped to address the specific needs of the College, without the multiplicity of competing interests faced by the public school boards.

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<sup>26</sup> Dale Wirsing Oral History. TCC Archive. 2013.

The separation, however, was by no means painless. Throughout the state, school districts were divested of their hard-won institutions, largely without recompense. The amount of time, attention and (perhaps most controversially) immense capital investment on behalf of the school districts made parting with these schools by state mandate a thorny issue.

“The local school boards were hopping mad,” recalled retired TCC administrator Gary Sigmen, during a 2012 interview.<sup>27</sup> “They didn’t get any compensation for the land or the buildings.” While the bulk of the press surrounding the split heralded this transition as a great victory for higher education in Washington State, there were residual antipathies that would linger for decades.

### **An Independent Academic Institution**

By January 1968 Tacoma Community College had grown into a thriving, fully-accredited, independent educational institution. “Phase III” campus construction was complete and 19 buildings now populated a site that, just three years previous, was 150 acres of scotch broom and mud. Total enrollment was at 2,630 and rising, and the professional staff had grown from 43 to 117.<sup>28</sup> The College’s academic and community service programs were rapidly expanding with new fields of study being added quarterly. The library collection now consisted of 26,000 volumes and 400 periodicals, setting up shop in the newly-completed 48,000-square-foot Pearl A. Wanamaker Library and Instructional Center.

Academic programs at the College initially focused heavily on transfer degrees. A majority of students were interested in transferring to four year institutions, so the College’s initial curriculum development efforts centered on creating a broad liberal arts education that could serve as the first two years of a four year program. In conjunction with the open door policy, a comprehensive set of academic offerings would characterize TCC’s very first curriculum design ethos.

In addition to the academic focus, there was also an overt effort to directly connect the educational process to the world around them, both formally and informally. Richard Perkins would take his science

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<sup>27</sup> Payne, Rachel “Staff/Faculty Profile: Gary Sigmen” *The Bulletin* 20 March 2012.

<sup>28</sup> “Facts about Tacoma Community College” *This is your Tacoma Community College*. January 1968.

students to local wilderness spots like China Lake to conduct empirical research and environmental restoration projects. When English Professor Georgia McDade (hired in 1970) learned that many of her students had never taken the 33 mile trip north to Seattle, she remembers being shocked. “I had what I called the Seattle day. And there were students who wanted to come, but they didn’t have transportation. So I got a commercial driver’s license, so I could drive to Seattle, with a busload of students.” In 1971 McDade would use her license to take interested students to the Ashland, Oregon Shakespeare Festival, beginning a tradition that would continue for decades.

### **Career Programs**

The College’s new dean of instruction, Paul Jacobson, set about the task of exploring new ways to expand TCC’s educational offerings. In a manner consistent with the early community college ethos, Jacobsen went directly to the Tacoma-Pierce County business and services community in search of opportunities for collaboration.

This strategy proved to be successful. During the 1968 academic year, TCC was able to add five “career related programs” to their academic offerings, each in conjunction with local agencies. A program in corrections and behavioral science was created in cooperation with McNeil Island Federal Penitentiary. The Tacoma Police Department helped the College develop and Associate Degree in law enforcement. And a partnership with St. Joseph Hospital Schools helped launch the College’s first ventures in nursing and allied health, with cooperative programs in nursing, x-ray technology and medical records.

Richard Perkins, a founding member of TCC’s science faculty, had a hand in everything from curriculum design to the construction of the laboratory space. “I got chewed out a number of times for spending as much money as I did on microscopes,” Perkins recalled. “I thought that was very important for every student to have their own microscope.” Perkins also insisted on limiting labs to 24 students (easily divisible into six groups of four) and lectures to 75. “My philosophy in teaching was that I wanted to know the names of every student,” said Perkins, who felt that the community college system allowed for a more personal approach to instruction. Perkins worked closely with the students, instituting non-traditional teaching

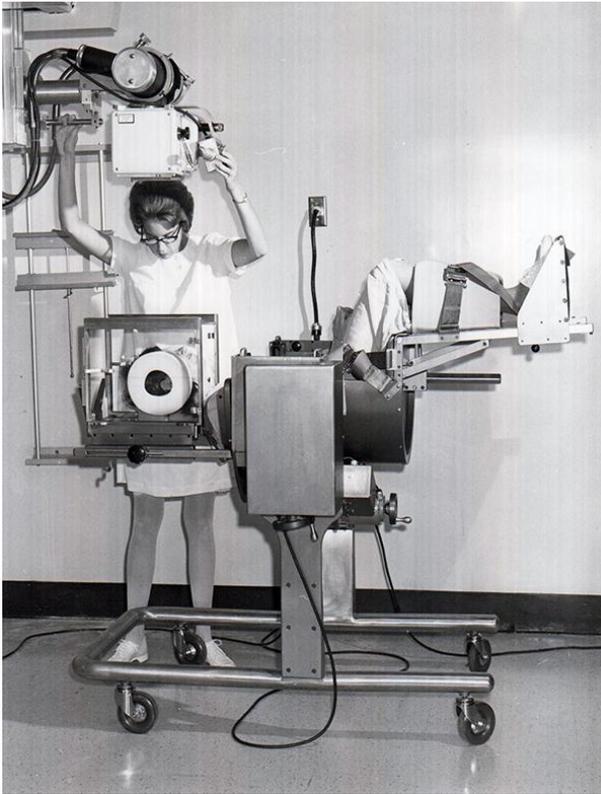
techniques, like eschewing mid-terms and finals for bi-weekly quizzes and self-evaluations. His teaching philosophy became well-known at the College, if not quite as well-known as his microscope philosophy. “The president of the College reminded me often that I had spent a lot of money on microscopes.”

Ivonna McCabe was among the new faculty hired in the recruiting frenzy that followed the College’s separation from the Tacoma School District. After overcoming her initial reluctance –she had recently settled into a faculty position at the newly founded Mount Tahoma High School—McCabe joined the burgeoning TCC science faculty. She was the first woman hired in the science department. “I was hired to teach primarily anatomy and physiology,” McCabe (now Anderson) said. “And most of the students in the class were nursing students from St. Joseph's Hospital Nursing School.” By the time TCC launched their own full-fledged nursing program, McCabe was chair of the biological sciences department, and she was nationally recognized by the “Outstanding Educators of America” for her contribution to the field.<sup>29</sup>

The influx of nursing students from St. Joseph and Tacoma General Hospital had a transformative effect on the College. It was a first glimpse at the massive potential and unique purpose of the institution. It was a positive test case, confirmation of the idea that a community college could directly impact the quantity and quality of skilled workers in high-demand career fields. These programs laid the foundation for what continues to be one of Tacoma Community College’s most enduring and mutually beneficial relationships.

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<sup>29</sup> “McCabe chosen Outstanding Educator in national award” *The Collegiate Challenge*.



Allied Health Students (TCC Archive)

When the St. Joseph School of Nursing ceased operations in 1971, TCC began the transition into its own nursing associate degree program. In the 1972-73 academic year the College enrolled the first group of students in what would grow into one of its most competitive and well-regarded programs. By 1983, *The Collegiate Challenge* reported that Washington State nursing programs rank third in the nation, and TCC ranked first in the state.”<sup>30</sup> Buoyed by a growing selection of allied health occupational programs, from medical records and respiratory care to radiology and emergency medical technician, the College was carving out an important niche within the community. Over the years, these programs and others like them would provide students with affordable pathways into the skilled labor professions, pathways that simply did not exist prior to the founding of the College.

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<sup>30</sup> Malloy, Karla. “TCC’s nursing program best in state, maybe U.S.” *The Collegiate Challenge*. 13 May, 1983.



Nursing Students (TCC Archive)

## Getting the Word Out

During the College's early years, generating publicity was relatively effortless. Due to the novelty of the school and its implicit public interest, local news media were proactive in seeking out coverage. The extended fight to bring a community college to Tacoma was an inherently compelling public drama, and, in the wake of TCC's founding, a honeymoon period ensued between the College and the local press. Reporters roamed the campus in search of stories.

While under the auspices of the Tacoma School District, college public relations was handled largely on an ad hoc basis by the district's director of publications.<sup>31</sup> After the College gained autonomy under the Community College Act of 1967, it quickly became apparent that, in order to effectively communicate with its interested constituency, TCC would need to hire a full time publicist.

In 1967, Dale Wirsing, a former *News Tribune* reporter who was teaching journalism part-time at the College, was hired as the first public information officer. Wirsing's ties to the local journalistic community dated back to his years as a copywriter for Clover Park

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<sup>31</sup> "Self-Study Report for Accreditation" 1967.

High School's *Cloverleaves* newspaper. He attended the University of Puget Sound on a journalism scholarship and went on to receive his advanced degree in Journalism from Stanford, before returning to his hometown to work for the *Tacoma News Tribune*.

Wirsing was among the first local reporters to cover the fight to bring a community college to Tacoma in the early 60s. "I decided to interview all five of the Tacoma School Board members at that time [and ask them] 'what do you think of the idea of having a community or junior college [in Tacoma]?'” Wirsing recalls. "I don't think they had ever dealt with it out in the open as a school board, and I got all five of them on record in print as favoring [a community college in Tacoma]." Upon reflection Wirsing is proud to have had a hand in the effort to establish Tacoma Community College.

In his new position as public information officer, Wirsing would use his journalistic acumen and connections with local news media to further establish the College in the hearts and minds of the surrounding community. For years Wirsing released news on every symphonic performance and play, the basketball and volleyball scores, new hires, new programs and campus speakers. He handled internal communication, establishing a campus bulletin. He also advised administration on public relations issues during times of crisis—an unenviable tradition passed on through the decades.

After the establishment of the College, getting press was not always easy. During times of crisis and controversy, a *News Tribune* reporter always seemed to be on hand for a comment, but courting good press took more effort. "We've always had to scrap and claw for every two inches of coverage in the News Tribune," said Dan Small, who started his career at TCC as the College's public information officer, in 1978. Between 1978 and the year 2000, Dan would transform college information and publications into a PR machine, fighting diligently to inform the public of TCC's story. In 1967, however, it was just Dale Wirsing with his typewriter and Rolodex. And, during the ensuing chapter of the College's history, he would have plenty to cover.

## Chapter 4: The Times They Are a-Changin'

### Vietnam

Tacoma Community College opened its doors just four weeks after the United States launched their first major ground offensive in Van Tuong, South Vietnam. A budding antiwar movement spread across the developed world, prompting protests in major cities from Seattle to Rome. As TCC students prepared for their first midterm exams, Alan Ginsberg coined the term “Flower Power” at Berkeley, and Robert McNamera advised President Lyndon Johnson that he could expect casualty rates of 1000 American soldiers killed per month.<sup>32</sup> All this was happening in the midst of a maelstrom of shifting social mores, civil rights, women’s liberation and a slew of social, economic and political unrest and upheaval. The world seemed to be changing rapidly, and, above all, the specter of war loomed heavily in the American consciousness.

“In a student body in which 65 percent are men, one is likely to hear worried comments about ‘the draft’,” read the lead on the front page of the October 1, 1965 issue of *Campus Reporter*.<sup>33</sup> The article goes on to describe, in considerable detail, the step-by-step process TCC students must undergo in order to obtain draft deferments. Though the draft lottery wouldn’t be instated until December 1969, selective service was a hot topic on campus from day one. The students were worried about the war; everyone was.

“We had a number of students at the College who were here to avoid being drafted,” Frank Garratt said. Garratt believes that the Vietnam War and the early struggles with race relations were the two definitive experiences of the College’s early years. He remembers one student in particular who was struggling to perform in his literature class. When the student dropped by Garratt’s office to discuss his performance he was very candid. “He said he said he didn’t care much for the subject and that he was going to college because he hoped his student deferment would prevent his having to fight a war he opposed,” recalls Garratt. This led to candid conversation regarding the quality of options available to this student.

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<sup>32</sup> “The War in Vietnam: escalation phase” *The American Presidency Project*, UCSB.

<sup>33</sup> “Selective service offers list rules” *TCC Campus Reporter*. 1 Oct 1965.

“He could continue at TCC and graduate and probably avoid being drafted. Or he could flee to Canada, where numerous other candidates for the draft had gone. Or he could continue on his present course, which would most likely lead to his flunking out, ending his student deferment and getting drafted.” According to Garratt, the student was not too keen on any of these choices. They weren’t great choices, but, by virtue of geopolitical circumstances far beyond the control of an English professor and his struggling student, they were the only available options. “As it did for many young men, the war and the draft triggered in this student a stark, sobering existential realization. I was not unsympathetic.”

TCC’s proximity to two major military installations meant that as the military went, so went the community. The United States Armed Forces have long been among the region’s top employers. In addition to providing critical jobs and economic activity, military transplants have contributed to every significant population boom in the South Puget Sound since the end of the Second World War. This meant that a significant number of TCC’s students came from military families or were armed services veterans or active duty soldiers themselves.

Beginning in the 1966 academic year, TCC began offering non-credit courses on the war in Vietnam. A variety of student organizations invited speakers to campus to give guest lectures on the escalating conflict. The College maintained a liberal guest speaker policy, allowing student groups to bring virtually anyone to campus to speak, without prejudice to their point of view. A relentless dialogue permeated the ongoing campus conversation. Lilly Warnick recalls professors holding impromptu discussion forums during her lunch hour, and eschewing their syllabi in order to use class time to discuss the war. *The Challenge* ran broadsheet ads with a smiling Richard Nixon promising to end selective service, contingent upon his re-election in 1968.

While the conversation churned and tempers sometimes flared, the College campus was spared from any violence in relation to the antiwar movement. (Other social issues did spark violence on campus, but more on that later.) That is not to suggest that the College was isolated from the broader student protest movement. Tragedies like the shooting at Kent State in 1970 would have a profound effect on the student body at TCC.



TCC-SDS Campus Rally (TCC Archive)

### **Four Dead in Ohio**

On Monday May 4, 1970, six days after the U.S. invasion of Cambodia, the Ohio National Guard, in response to an increasingly tense campus anti-war demonstration, opened fire into a crowd of unarmed students at Kent State University in Ohio. Four students were killed and nine others injured, in what would later be known as a pivotal moment in the shift in popular opinion against the war in Vietnam. Across the country college campuses reeled in the wake of this tragedy. Administrators were reassessing their security protocols, and student activist groups redoubled their efforts in dissent.

On Tuesday May 5, three hundred students congregated for an impromptu rally at “the rock”. It was the largest student gathering of the academic year.<sup>34</sup> The majority of the student crowd was reportedly in a state of quiet grief, attempting to process the terrible magnitude of what had happened at the public college on the other side of the country.

During this rally, *The Challenge* reported that a contingent of student activists and political agitators attempted to mobilize the gathering of mourning students and instigate a college shutdown.

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<sup>34</sup> Fjermedal, Grant “TCC ‘Revolution’ doesn’t ge off the ground” 8 May 1970.

Across the country student activists were organizing in response to the Cambodia invasion, and the tragedy at Kent State instantly galvanized demonstrators, triggering campus unrest throughout the country. “The blood of our brothers and sisters who died yesterday is only a prelude to what is to come,” shouted Dan Raphael from his stump atop the rock.<sup>35</sup>

“There is a general upsurge of student unrest around the country,” said Jeff Barwick (a local Vietnam veteran and anti-war organizer) to the crowd of TCC students. “The National Guard won’t be able to handle it. They’ll call the army, and they won’t come.”<sup>36</sup>

In spite of the urgency and indignation of the speakers, the young rhetoricians had difficulty persuading the crowd that the revolution was imminent. This wasn’t due to any tacit endorsement of the war by the student body. The general sentiment on Vietnam was similar to that on most college campuses; the students were overwhelmingly opposed to the war. However, their disdain for Nixon’s foreign policy and their horror in the wake of Kent State was not transforming into any great revolutionary enthusiasm.

*Challenge* reporter Grant Fjermedal covered this impromptu political rally for the college paper. Fjermedal was a standout student in Lloyd Berntsen’s writing class, who would go on to become a successful science and technology writer and reporter. His report on the rally’s inauspicious end was *The Challenge’s* cover story the following Friday:

After Six Speakers spoke from the rock, the leaders asked the people to recess to the cafeteria to tell the students about, ‘the shit that’s coming down all around them,’ and, ‘to get it together.’ In the cafeteria a public address system was implemented but not many students seemed interested as they continued to talk, eat and purchase food.

A TCC student, and a [Vietnam] veteran, approached the speaker, took the microphone and articulated, ‘I know what I’ll say. F—k you!’ This received the loudest applause of the day’s short lived events. The speaker shrugged his shoulders and walked to his friends. The cafeteria was quiet. ‘Darkness, Darkness’ by the Youngbloods came softly over the room.

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<sup>35</sup> Ibid.

<sup>36</sup> Ibid.

Behind me, the young revolutionaries decided there wasn't enough enthusiasm to interrupt classes. In a single file the last handful marched out of the cafeteria chanting '0-1-2-3, shut down TCC.'" A rally that had begun less than an hour ago, with students singing happy birthday to Karl Marx, ended with a veteran saying, 'F—k you.'" Thus goes the revolution at TCC.<sup>37</sup>

Failed revolutions notwithstanding, it would be imprudent to be dismissive of the antiwar movement that was very much part of TCC's early DNA. Students for a Democratic Society, during their rapid rise as the country's largest organized direct action antiwar movement, gained traction at TCC. ASTCC officially recognized the College's SDS chapter on April 4, 1968. Led by TCC student Jim French (no relation to the similarly-named Seattle radio personality), who vowed to "present the 'other side of the story' on domestic and foreign policies of the United States."

The TCC chapter of SDS distinguished itself by virtue of its unique composition. During a time when student activist groups were accused of harboring an idealism borne of youth and privilege, TCC students were a different animal entirely. Far from being ivory tower intellectuals or trust-fund activists, TCC student war protestors were of Tacoman stock, largely blue-collar, working class students of diverse age and background. Many of them were returned veterans of the war in Vietnam; others were one failed English class away from boot camp.

The student antiwar movement at TCC may have been smaller and less remarkable than in places like Berkley or Kent State, but it was also bloodless and unobstructed by college administration or police or the National Guard. Diminutive in number but not in passion, the antiwar movement at TCC was the first exercise of student autonomy as a force for social and political change on campus. Groups like the Obi Society, TCC's black student union and the Associated Women Students would adopt this model of direct action activism to effect systemic change on campus. Decades later LGBT rights groups and anti-globalization protestors would tap into their legacy to meet the social demands of a new generation of

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<sup>37</sup> Ibid.

students. It was an important participatory political process that left a lasting legacy on campus culture.

## 11 Demands

On Monday, May 5<sup>th</sup>, 1969, a group of 71 students and community members entered the office of President Ford. At the helm of this demonstration was Jim Walton –TCC’s Obi Society chairman and future Tacoma City Manager. Walton presented Ford with a four-page document, which contained a list of 11 demands “necessary to eliminate the racist conditions that exist on campus.”<sup>38</sup>

The demands of the Obi Society were as follows:

1. The use of Obi Society funds for financial aid for TCC students with demonstrable need
2. The recruitments of 200 non-white students for the 1969-70 school year, with Obi acting as chief recruiter
3. Financial Aid for the newly recruited students
4. The provision of \$25,000 in funds for counseling and tutoring
5. The addition of a black studies course in the TCC’s associate degree graduation requirements
6. The institution of a black literature class at TCC
7. The institution of a political science program focusing on contemporary Africa
8. The inclusion of black perspectives in sociology, psychology, history, English and economics
9. The establishment of a black studies department
10. The dismissal of all “incompetent and bigoted instructors”
11. The disarming of campus security officers<sup>39</sup>

The presentation of the 11 demands to President Ford was the culmination of a year’s worth of campus activism and engagement, from a passionate group of student activist who, through sheer determination and earnestness, brought to the forefront.

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<sup>38</sup> “Explanation of OBI Demands” *The Collegiate Challenge*. 12 May, 1969.

<sup>39</sup> *Ibid.*



Willie Hall reads Obi's "11 Demands" to TCC Students. (TCC Archive)

## **April 4, 1968**

On April 4, 1968 Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. was assassinated at the Lorraine Motel in Memphis, Tennessee. In the wake of this immense tragedy, a wave of anger, grief and civil unrest swept across the country. Despair and rage rocked a disillusioned public, triggering riots in Washington DC, Chicago, Baltimore, Kansas City, Oakland and dozens of other cities throughout the United States. President Lyndon Johnson addressed the American people, urging them “to reject the blind violence that has struck King, who lived by nonviolence.”

At Tacoma Community College the student body rallied to send an official telegram expressing condolences to King’s widow, Coretta Scott King. “Let us hope his supreme sacrifice will not be in vain,” read the telegram, which was drafted by ASTCC President Tim O’Grady, “that a better understanding between all people in this country can still be attained peaceably.” In Tacoma, there were no major reports of violence in the immediate aftermath of the King assassination, but tensions ran high as the community teetered on the precipice of racial unrest.

The weeks following King’s assassination were characterized by a lingering racial tension and general social malaise. Speaking on the TCC campus on May 1, 1968, pioneering African American television journalist Louis Lomax told students that there were “no

alternatives to a long, hot summer.”<sup>40</sup> Delivering a blistering, racially-charged indictment of the American socioeconomic and political system, Lomax, who was conducting his own investigation into King’s murder, had a grim message for TCC students. “The coming revolution will be bloody,” Lomax said. “All revolutions are bloody.”<sup>41</sup>

It was in the midst of this social maelstrom that TCC’s Obi Society was formed. Created by TCC students in May 1968 and organized during Louis Lomax’s “long, hot summer,” the Obi Society—Obi being the Igbo word for heart or soul—was the predecessor to the College’s Black Student Union. Officially recognized (in a 5-2 vote) in September 1968, it was an organization very similar to the numerous other black student activist groups that were rapidly organizing across the country.

### **Jim Walton**

“[We wanted] these public institutions to live up to their mission of inclusiveness,” said James Walton, who served as the first president of The Obi Society.<sup>42</sup> Jim Walton grew up in the segregated town of Mineola, Texas, about 80 miles east of Dallas. During his formative years he became familiar with the stark realities of desperate poverty and institutional racism. When recalling his childhood, however, his earliest memories were not of oppression and injustice; they were of community and mutual aid. “I was raised in a very supportive and encouraging environment,” said Walton. “Family, community, teachers and everybody took responsibility for everybody else.” His mother was domestic worker in the wealthy Dallas suburb of Highland Park, often living in “maids’ quarters” away from her children and extended family. Walton and his brothers and sisters lived with his grandmother, who raised them with the support of his mother and uncles. It was this strong nucleus of family support, along with his church community and some “wonderful teachers and principals” that impressed upon him a profound sense of purpose, civic responsibility and moral reasoning that sustained him throughout his life.

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<sup>40</sup> Jeffords, E. “No alternatives to a long, hot summer” *The News Tribune* 2 May 1968.

<sup>41</sup> Ibid.

<sup>42</sup> James Walton Oral History. TCC Archive. 2014.

Like many TCC students and community members, it was the military that brought Jim Walton to Tacoma. In 1965, Walton was stationed at Fort Lewis as part of the buildup for the escalating war in Vietnam. After serving his term at home (gratefully, Walton was never sent to fight abroad), he decided to lay down roots in the South Puget Sound.

Walton played semi-pro football for the now-defunct Tacoma Tyees. It was one of his teammates who helped him get a job at West Coast Grocery. “I thought it was the best job in the world,” remembered Walton, “it was a union-wage job with a profit sharing plan, and I could work swing shifts and continue schooling at TCC. I was on a roll.”<sup>43</sup>

### **The Obi Society**

Walton did not arrive at TCC with the intention of becoming a student activist. “I was 30-years-old. I had a good job... I had a full life,” he said. His focus was very much on his education. And it was in pursuit of his educational goals that he began to experience challenges and roadblocks, stemming from what he believed to be an institution that was “pretty much indifferent to the plight of African-American students.”

What became the Obi Society started out as a group of about 15-17 students, who were initially more social than political. “We just stuck together,” recalled Walton.<sup>44</sup> “We were feeling excluded and not very welcome.” In the beginning, it was as much a survival tool as it was a political instrument. As the tide of black student activism swelled throughout the nation, the Obi Society quickly defined itself as a direct action activist group.

Charles Canada, ASTCC’s sophomore class president was elected “vice-minister” of the organization. Canada was a popular student and a talented writer and fiery orator, who had made a name for himself in TCC’s debate club before forming Obi. Fred Lowe was another gifted young writer, who became Obi’s “minister of information”. Lowe wrote extensively for *The Challenge*, explaining both the ideological and practical positions of the organization, to an

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<sup>43</sup> Ibid.

<sup>44</sup> Mills, R. “Diversity on campus raises questions then and now” *The Challenge*. 9 June 2002.

audience that was by no means universally receptive. Jim Walton would serve as the “prime minister” of the Obi Society.

“It wasn’t something I ran for,” explains Walton, who was already balancing a full-time work schedule with school and a full social life outside of the College. “It wasn’t a natural fit for me. I decided to do it because no one else would.” Ultimately it was a belief in the justness of the cause, and his deeply-ingrained commitment to community, that compelled him to step forward into the leadership position –although to hear Walton tell it, he was simply “the last one standing.”<sup>45</sup>



Jim Walton (TCC Archive)

## The Fight

When the academic year started in September 1968, Obi quickly became a source of controversy.<sup>46</sup> Formed with the expressed purpose of “developing the Black Man culturally, with the aim of establishing Black awareness on campus and in the community”<sup>47</sup>, the Obi Society

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<sup>45</sup> James Walton Oral History TCC Archive. 2014.

<sup>46</sup> “Obi Officially Recognized” *The Collegiate Challenge*. 4 October, 1968.

<sup>47</sup> “Black Students organize Obi” *The Collegiate Challenge*. 27 September, 1968.

fought against what they felt was a deeply entrenched status quo of systemic racism and neglect of TCC's African American community. Emboldened by the ebullient sociopolitical zeitgeist of the late 1960s, Obi arrived at TCC with seriousness and sense of purpose that would set a new standard for student activist groups at the College. They were the real deal.

Their first "battle" revolved around the establishment of an ASTCC-approved operating budget. In spite of its heavy ideological impetus, the Obi Society was not merely a club for philosophers and social theorists. In order to accomplish their expressed goal of equal representation, they required funding from the student government, which controlled a large discretionary budget for student activities and organizations. For the members of the Obi society, this was not just a request for funding for a college club; it was their first act of systemic reform.

TCC's Student newspaper, *The Collegiate Challenge*, describes an ASTCC meeting that was "well attended, with blacks sitting and standing on the right and whites gathered on the left."<sup>48</sup> Obi requested a \$5800 budget in order to fund outreach events, recruit popular African American entertainers and speakers and assist with financial aid for underserved students.<sup>49</sup> A contingent of the student government felt that this amount was excessive. An ASTCC auditing committee suggested that a budget of \$4500 was more reasonable. Obi argued that the funds were critically important because they were undertaking an unprecedented, community-wide outreach and awareness campaign.<sup>50</sup> When some students expressed a semantic objection to the organization's style of making "demands" instead of "proposals," Jim Walton responded by saying, "You're saying we should beg like good house niggers. Well, we've been begging for 400 years and it hasn't gotten us anywhere."<sup>51</sup> Obi's budget was approved for \$5800. Their first fight ended with a victory, and Mr. Walton established himself and his organization as a serious voice for reform and advocacy at TCC.

Contentious and confrontational language was a hallmark of the Obi Society during much of its inaugural year. This was exemplary of

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<sup>48</sup> "Obi Gets Budget on Second Try" *The Collegiate Challenge*. 11 October, 1968.

<sup>49</sup> Ibid.

<sup>50</sup> Ibid.

<sup>51</sup> Ibid.

the larger Black Power ethos, birthed in the wake of the civil rights movement in the late-1960s. Though Obi professed to have no explicit political ties, and denied any association with the Black Panthers or other Black Nationalist movements, their rhetorical technique was often intentionally provocative and bellicose.<sup>52</sup> “Obi Won’t Bite (unless you bite Obi)” was the title of a controversial poem published in *The Collegiate Challenge* in October 1968.<sup>53</sup>

*The Challenge’s* editorial pages were rife with discussion and debate on race issues. Frequent remonstrance to the “racist administration” and their tyrannical subversion of student voices can be found in TCC’s paper of record.<sup>54</sup> Obi’s Minister of Information, Fred Lowe, penned scathing institutional critiques, which often appeared alongside countervailing editorial content. The paper also provided a sounding board for those who objected to the methods and/or viewpoint of the Obi Society. The most amusing was written by a student who had contacted the University of Washington and discovered that the word “Obi” was not in fact the Igbo word for heart, as claimed by the membership. He determined that “OBI” (often spelled in all capital letters) was, in fact, a clandestine and subversive acronym and called for an investigation to discover the true meaning of the word.<sup>55</sup>

It is important to note that the student dialog in *The Challenge* wasn’t limited to histrionics and veiled threats. Primarily, it was a robust and informed ongoing conversation regarding the contemporary racial and social climate, both on and beyond campus. During a time when students crammed into classrooms by the hundreds to attend public forums on race relations, the paper was very much a participatory medium, in which students could express their ideas, propose solutions, ask tough questions and encourage involvement and activism.

This dialog was not restricted to students. After the May 5<sup>th</sup> demonstration, President Ford used the paper to communicate progressive reforms as they were implemented, including advances in curriculum development, library holdings, faculty changes, budget

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<sup>52</sup> “Obi Sets Down Goals at Open Meeting” *The Collegiate Challenge*. 11 October, 1968.

<sup>53</sup> “Obi Won’t Bite (unless you bite Obi)” *The Collegiate Challenge*. 4 October, 1968.

<sup>54</sup> “Administration Racist?” *The Collegiate Challenge*. 12 May, 1969.

<sup>55</sup> “Letters to the Editor” *The Collegiate Challenge*. 18 October, 1968.

allotments and outreach efforts.<sup>56</sup> Walton remembers *The Challenge*'s coverage as accurate and fair-minded, on balance, with, perhaps, a bit of a sensationalist touch. "They've got to have a little Hollywood in 'em," Walton said in retrospect.

### **Changing the System**

"It was a difficult time but it was a time we needed to go through," said Frank Garratt, who was part of the English faculty during the height of the racial unrest on campus. "You basically have an all-white faculty, very earnest in its effort to be accepting, at the same time being asked to accept things that were just so foreign to them and to their experience." Garratt believes that the fact that Obi's demands for representation in the curriculum and faculty were such foreign ideas, is, in part, proof that they were justified in their cause.

"We knew from the start that Tacoma had a huge minority population, in comparison to other places," Morris Skagen said. "We felt guilty from the very start that they weren't well represented in our faculty and classified staff."

"I thought [The Obi Society] had just cause," said Ron Magden. "They were being shoved outside." Magden had sympathetic feelings for the minority students who were present in his history classes since the opening of the College. He witnessed students striving to better themselves in spite of serious social obstacles. "They were reaching for an education, and there was a lot of redneck stuff here."

TCC staff and faculty could justly be characterized as generally (although not universally) receptive, but sluggish, in responding to the mounting social pressure from minority students. The attitude in the broader community was more complex. While the bulk of progressive, young adults were in favor of some reform, there was disagreement on the extent and degree to which reforms should be enacted. "One segment of the community was very unhappy to see any concessions made to black students," recalls Dale Wirsing, who was responsible for advising administrators on public relations issues. The militant stance and absolutist language of groups like the Obi Society frightened some people, who responded by entrenching the status quo. Wirsing also points out that there was a part of the population that saw African American social activism as

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<sup>56</sup> "There Has Been Progress" *The Collegiate Challenge*. 12 May, 1969.

“unpatriotic,” and those who went even further to assert that groups like Obi were “part of the international communist conspiracy.”<sup>57</sup>

One instructor was happy to lend his assistance to the Obi Society. William “Bill” Muse was hired just a few weeks after the assassination of Martin Luther King. A hotshot biology instructor from Stadium High School, Bill Muse had worked as an industrial chemist and a medical technician. He was a Golden Gloves Boxer who served in the United States Navy during World War II. He was also the first African American faculty member at Tacoma Community College.

In addition to being a member of a dozen different scientific, civic and community service associations, Muse was also an executive board member and former branch president of Tacoma’s chapter of the NAACP. Although he never took a class of his, Jim Walton counts Bill Muse among the few faculty that offered support and mentorship during his time at the College.

Throughout his tenure, Muse used his considerable professional and social clout to assist the Obi Society, and TCC’s Black Student Union in bringing high-profile guest speakers to campus. Most notably, Muse used his connections in the boxing world to bring legendary boxer Muhammad Ali to campus, on behalf of the Obi Society. When Ali came to Tacoma on February 1, 1969, he was 27-years-old, in exile from professional boxing after famously refusing a military draft induction. Sitting next to Jim Walton in the Obi Society room, Ali admonished TCC students and a small crowd of reporters, reminding them that “education is valuable if accompanied by knowledge of oneself.”

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<sup>57</sup> Dale Wirsing Oral History. TCC Archive. 2013.



Muhammad Ali with Jim Walton (right) and the Obi Society (TCC Archive)

It is noteworthy to mention that the Obi Society was not universally embraced by TCC's African American student population. "Some of the [African American] students didn't want anything to do with a black student union,"<sup>58</sup> Walton said. He remembers a specific incident, where the Obi Society attempted to convince three of the College's star basketball players to threaten to strike, in protest of the school's lack of minority cheerleaders. Walton recalls the players were not at all receptive.

### **Riot at the Rocks**

Following the presentation of demands to President Ford, the Obi Society held rallies on the campus lawn for several days.<sup>59</sup> The atmosphere at these rallies was described as "tense, but nonviolent."<sup>60</sup> On Tuesday May 7<sup>th</sup>, however, controversy broke out over the painting of several large boulders on the west end of the campus lawn. Throughout the 1960s and 70s, these large stones, commonly referred to as "The Rocks," acted as soapbox podiums for student and guest speakers. "Rally at the Rocks" was a frequently heard call to assembly during those years of activism and outrage. The largest of the Rocks, which was regularly painted with political slogans and social messages, had been painted black as part of the Obi Society's

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<sup>58</sup> James Walton Oral History. TCC Archive. 2014.

<sup>59</sup>"'Little Progress,' Says Walton." *The Collegiate Challenge*. 1969.

<sup>60</sup> "Inefficient Police Force" *The Collegiate Challenge*. 16 May 1969.

ongoing demonstration. This sparked a back-and-forth, where students would return the next day to find that, overnight, the rock had been painted white.

"[The Rocks] became a symbol for us trying to get established at TCC," recalled Jim Walton. Throughout human history, racks have been used as symbols of enduring settlement and strength of resolve during times of trouble. The ongoing struggle for control of the rocks, while seemingly banal or sophomoric in retrospect, became a very real source of racial conflict on campus. On the afternoon of May 7, when a group of students, intent on provoking a confrontation, attempted to paint the black rock white, a series of fist fights broke out on the campus lawn.<sup>6162</sup>



Students relax at "The Rocks." (TCC Archive)

"It just seemed like every student on this campus was there," said Walton, who arrived at the scene shortly after a meeting with the Tacoma Urban League. "There were about five of us, and we stood between this big block of students and the rock." The crowd began challenging Walton and his companions, who were trapped between the rock, a classroom building and an advancing mob. "I remember I had my umbrella," Walton said, noting that campus security was present but would not intervene on behalf of the black students. "My

<sup>61</sup> *TCC Update* Volume I No. 16, 5 June 1969.

<sup>62</sup> "Students Tangle Over Rocks Color" *The Collegiate Challenge*. 16 May 1969.

defense was going to be trying to jab people with my umbrella, because we were trapped, our backs were against this building.”<sup>63</sup>

Then college records officer Joseph Kosai, along with Bill Muse, stepped between Walton’s group and the advancing crowd. They were able to defuse the situation and calm the angry crowd, much to the relief of Walton, who sincerely believes they protected him and his friends from bodily harm.

The situation quickly escalated again when Tacoma Police Officers arrived, dressed in full riot gear, wielding nightsticks and shotguns. The officers surrounded the students, which ratcheted up tension to dangerously high levels. As two officers were advancing into the crowd, Kosai intervened again, asking them to stand down.<sup>64</sup> Kosai successfully convinced the police officers to disengage from the crowd. He was applauded in *The Challenge* for potentially preventing what could have been a violent confrontation.<sup>65</sup>

The demonstrations and disturbances in early May prompted an “informal” meeting between the Obi Society and the TCC Board of Trustees on the following Friday. Speaking on behalf of the Obi society, Jim Walton expressed his dissatisfaction with the efforts of the College administration regarding the proposals laid out at the beginning of the academic year, during the club’s official approval. Ford and the administration reviewed the “11 demands” with Mr. Walton as an act of good faith. They assured him that steps were already in place to address many Obi’s concerns. Walton expressed frustration over the fact that, since the meeting was not a legally convened meeting of the Board of Directors, no concrete action could be taken with regard to the 11 demands. For Walton, this “informal dialog” was little more than bureaucratic gamesmanship, self-congratulatory lip-service.<sup>66</sup> At the conclusion of the meeting, Walton reportedly said, “There is going to be an educational change in America and at TCC –through burning, books or bullets. We favor books.”<sup>67</sup>

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<sup>63</sup> James Walton Oral History. TCC Archive. 2014.

<sup>64</sup> Ibid.

<sup>65</sup> “Editorial & Opinion Page” *The Collegiate Challenge*. 23 May 1969.

<sup>66</sup> “Trustees, Obi Meet; Demands Reviewed” *The Collegiate Challenge*. 12 May 1969.

<sup>67</sup> Ibid.

## **The Mother's Day Disturbance**

Just four days after the mass confrontation on the TCC campus, another, more violent, eruption of racial tension hit Tacoma's Hilltop neighborhood. As one of Tacoma's oldest working class neighborhoods, Hilltop was rocked by de facto residential segregation and the suburban exodus that took place during the mid-20<sup>th</sup> century. Hilltop's sizable African American community was growing increasingly dissatisfied by what historian Barbara Johns refers to as "a deteriorating inner city neighborhood, the lack of economic opportunity and political representation and the gulf between the promise of equal rights and the daily reality of black life."<sup>68</sup> Johns goes on to describe the ensuing events:

On Mother's Day, 1969, the fuse blew. An attempted arrest on the Hilltop led to a night of angry, youthful confrontation and property destruction, the shooting of a policeman, and charges of alleged police brutality. The riot started when Tacoma police officers, Herman Knaack and Arthur Jackson attempted to arrest a black felon. When he resisted, an African American woman from a nearby house began to scream "police brutality" and soon several other black residents gathered. Gunfire erupted and Officer Knaack was wounded trying to protect his partner. A riot ensued, lasting the rest of the night.<sup>69</sup>

The Tacoma Urban League, led by Executive Director Thomas Dixon, quickly set about calming tensions within the community. Two Urban League members would rise to prominence for their dedicated work in resolving the Mother's Day disturbance and alleviating racial tensions in the Hilltop neighborhood. One was Harold Moss, who would go on to gain distinction as Tacoma's first black mayor. The other was Jim Walton.<sup>70</sup>

### **Agreement**

On May 29<sup>th</sup>, 1969 the TCC Board of Trustees held a formal meeting. In attendance were Jim Walton, Charles Canada and the rest of the Obi Society. The first item on the agenda was the list of 11

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<sup>68</sup> Johns, Barbara. "Mother's Day Disturbance, 1969" n.d.

<sup>69</sup> Ibid.

<sup>70</sup> Ibid.

demands submitted to President Ford. As an act of good faith the Trustees agreed, in whole or in part to seven of the eleven demands. The major concessions were as follows:

1. Earmarking of funds for the recruitment of black students
2. New Black studies courses in literature and political science, to be implemented in the following Fall Quarter (a course on Black literature was already scheduled to begin in the fall).
3. A commitment of \$8000 for tutoring disadvantaged students
4. A prohibition on carrying firearms or chemical weapons by campus security policemen during daylight hours
5. to be considered: the addition of a Black studies requirement for an Associate Degree

According to the TCC Update newsletter, “the demand for an autonomous Black studies department was turned down as unwise and illegal.”<sup>71</sup> Additional demands were either left unaddressed or tabled as “under consideration.”

### **Carl Brown**

Carl Brown was hired on the same day that the Board of Trustees formalized their agreement with the Obi Society—in the same meeting, even. His new position, ambiguously entered into the record as “administration,” was Director of Minority Affairs. He would also teach the “Black Literature” course that was agreed to in that meeting. His hiring was the direct result of the Obi Society’s continued campaign of direct action activism for institutional reform.

“I was hired to help black students adjust,” Brown said in a 1985 interview. “[The Obi Society] raised hell because the school system didn’t respond to minority needs, and blacks in particular.”<sup>72</sup> Like Jim Walton, Brown was a Texas native. He began his teaching career at the Gatesville State School for Boys, a juvenile corrections facility in Central Texas. He relocated to Tacoma in 1965 where he taught English and current affairs in the Clover Park School District, before

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<sup>71</sup> *Tacoma CC Update* Volume I No. 16, 5 June 1969.

<sup>72</sup> Pazar, D. “Dean Brown named to action committee” *The Collegiate Challenge*. 1985.

joining the administration at TCC, where he would serve in a number of positions in the 20 years between 1969 and 1989.

As with all of the College's most effective leaders, Carl Brown was committed to civic engagement and community service. His career is marked by an impressive record of service. He was president of the Urban League Board of Directors. He served as commissioner for the Tacoma Human Rights Commission and the Tacoma Housing authority. He worked with the Port of Tacoma to create an Affirmative Action policy (as he did at TCC). He served on the Tacoma Civil Service Board and was president of the Tacoma chapter of the NAACP.<sup>7374</sup>

"He ran his own little loan fund out of his office for students who didn't have enough money for books or tuition," said Dan Small, recounting Carl Brown's commitment to TCC Students. Brown not only worked to diversify TCC's staff and faculty, but he took a great deal of interest in the success and achievement of a segment of TCC's student population who, prior to his arrival, did not feel particularly supported or welcome. Jim Walton and Dan Small both spoke of Brown's mentorship of African American males in particular, using a combination of persistent encouragement and "tough love" to keep students accountable.

"We in education have to do more than just teach," Carl Brown once told *The Challenge*. "We have to live, and we have to create a livable environment."<sup>75</sup> Brown, along with the growing support of staff and faculty, would hammer out that livable environment over the next 20 years. As the needs of the campus community changed, Brown's position would change as well. When he retired he was the Dean of Support Services.

When asked by Challenge reporter, David Pazar, if he felt that his work throughout the years had "affected any social change," Carl Brown was philosophical.

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<sup>73</sup> Small, Dan. "Memorial service Nov. 17 for Carl Brown" [internal email] 15 Nov 2012.

<sup>74</sup> Pazar, D. "Dean Brown named to action committee" *The Collegiate Challenge*. 1985.

<sup>75</sup> Ibid.



Carl Brown (TCC Archive)

“I am not so much concerned with the changes as the direction,” Brown said. “If I change something, a few years later it needs to be changed again, as I changed the changes that came before me.”<sup>76</sup> As a lifelong leader, administrator and advocate, he knew that society was always in a state of flux. In order for institutions to be enduring, they must be prepared to anticipate and address those changes. “The social challenge I see before me,” he said, “is not to make changes myself, as much as it is to get some motion started. If things get moving, the changes will make themselves.” Carl Brown, like Jim Walton and Bill Muse and Joe Kosai and a score of others, was the local catalyst for a broader social change that had already taken place. The Obi Society provided a quickening jolt in an institutional blind spot, the effects of which continue to shape the culture and mission of Tacoma Community College.

“I think the whole community suffers when there is a waste of talent and resource,” Jim Walton told Challenge reporter, Ron Mills,

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<sup>76</sup> Ibid.

in 2002, "especially when someone is denied a unique and more rewarding experience." By this time the Obi Society had evolved into the Black Student Union, and TCC's Center for Multi-Ethnic/Cultural Affairs (MECA) was at work spreading an awareness and appreciation of the richness of the College's cultural and ethnic diversity. The College's mission statement was changed to reflect a commitment to diversity and equity of access, and comprehensive policy regarding equal opportunity, affirmative action and non-discriminatory hiring practices were firmly in place.

## Chapter 5: Strike!

### An Increasingly Tense Situation

In early 1971, as TCC's Faculty Association (TCCFT) was forming its first collective bargaining unit, word of an impending financial squeeze among state community colleges began to circulate. TCC President Tom Ford warned the Board of Trustees that the College was facing a threefold threat of budget cuts, enrollment restrictions and increasing enrollment demand. The State Board for Community College Education's request for a \$165 million biennial budget was quashed by the governor, who recommended a more austere \$120 million. The looming threat of cuts tempered the air of enthusiasm surrounding the success of the College, which celebrated a record enrollment of 5,556 students during the winter quarter of 1971.<sup>77</sup>

The months before 1973 were characterized by capricious periods of optimism and dread. Increasing fear, uncertainty and doubt regarding the financial future of the institution came and went in waves. President Ford discussed "bleak alternatives" with the Board of Trustees, which included increasing class sizes and reductions in staff services, work-study funds, pay increases and equipment purchases.

These mounting woes were not unique to Tacoma or Washington State. Throughout the nation, over 200 community and junior colleges were in the midst, or on the brink, of faculty strikes.<sup>78</sup> Escalating financial concerns and institutional acrimony were beginning to pose a real threat to the "open door" that was the promise of the community college.

On December 7, 1972 the *Seattle Times* ran a story with the headline, "Community college part-time teachers exploited," in which local educators and labor leaders sounded off about the "growing trend of inadequately paid instructors with insecure hourly, part time positions."<sup>79</sup> They argued that the State Board of Community Colleges and local boards of trustees lacked any incentive to reverse

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<sup>77</sup> *Tacoma Community College Update*, 3:7, 1 Feb 1971.

<sup>78</sup> "TCC administrators voice views on current strike" *The Collegiate Challenge*. 5 October 1973.

<sup>79</sup> "Community college part time teachers exploited, labor agrees" *Seattle Times*. 7 December 1972.

this trend, which threatened to “undermine both the professors and ultimately the quality of education.”<sup>80</sup> *The Seattle Post-Intelligencer* published a Christmas Eve exposé about part-time professors who were taking on the same course load as full-time faculty, at half the pay.<sup>81</sup> Seattle Community College had recently experienced their second consecutive year of negotiation breakdowns, requiring the intervention of federal mediators.

When the TCCFT entered contract negotiations in the fall of 1973, they were prepared for a difficult fight. The previous year’s contract talks stalled when, according to TCCFT Secretary Frank Weihs, “the Board of Trustees attempted to bypass negotiations by unilaterally adopting items which were on the negotiating table.” It was only under threat of strike that the 1972 contract agreement was reached.<sup>82</sup> What lingered was an increasingly rancorous relationship between faculty and administration. Issues of salary, tenure and reduction-in-force continued to be immutable points of contention. When the same tumultuous issues arose in 1973, TCCFT called for a strike vote. On September 13, 1973, TCCFT members voted in favor of a labor strike, with work stoppage to commence on Thursday, October 4<sup>th</sup>, in the absence of an acceptable contract. The vote was 83-3.<sup>83</sup>

The prevalent view among faculty was that administration had grown out of touch and arrogant –disconnected from the teachers, who were busy in the trenches, attending to the realities of teaching. “We see the management, both the board and the administration, as wanting to turn TCC into a factory.” TCCFT leader George Huffman told *The Challenge*. “Those people in administration have been removed from the classroom... I think they have lost touch with what education is.” This emergent rift of disparate interests and problematic communication between faculty and administration would prove be a lingering point of contention throughout America’s institutions of higher education.

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<sup>80</sup> Ibid.

<sup>81</sup> “Part-time college teachers seek equal pay” *Seattle Post-Intelligencer* 24 December 1972

<sup>82</sup> Weihs, Frank. “TCC Faculty Strike Victory” *Washington State Teacher*, 3 November 1973

<sup>83</sup> “TCC administrators voice views on current strike” *The Collegiate Challenge*. 5 October 1973

TCC administration felt that the faculty, under the umbrella of the teachers' union, was being unreasonable and myopic. "There's no doubt the union has its place here," President Ford told News Tribune reporters, "but if we give them the deed to the College, we might as well go home." The College faced a large budget cut from the state. Administration wanted to implement a "16-step salary schedule with raises ranging from 3.2% to as high as 19% without increments."<sup>84</sup> Administration spokesperson Dr. Richard Falk repeatedly noted that TCC faculty was, on average, the highest paid community college faculty in the state.

What Falk (whose perceived duplicity among faculty earned him the timely nickname "Tricky Dick") neglected to report was that TCC's administrators were actually the highest paid community college employees in Washington State, by nearly twice the marginal average as of the faculty. Faculty representatives believed an increasingly unwieldy and unchecked administrative apparatus was at the heart of the College's financial woes. For TCCFT the answer was obvious: if cuts were needed, they should be made in administration, not faculty.

### **Strike!**

Negotiations floundered throughout September and into October. On Thursday, October 4<sup>th</sup>, the day after the contract negotiation deadline, Tacoma Community College's branch of the American Federation of Teachers (TCCFT-AFT) officially went on strike. College faculty and their supporters set up picket lines at each of the campus entrances. Students, local labor leaders, community members and sympathetic faculty from public education intuitions throughout the Puget Sound turned out in support of TCC teachers.

Gary Sigmen, who was among the bevy of recently hired young professors, recalls his commission as a picket line captain during the strike. "The union brought in individuals that went around, from one strike location to another, representing union interests. They were coaching us on how to conduct a strike and what to do next." A large contingent of TCC's faculty were young people, fresh out of graduate school, looking to start a career at one of the state's leading community colleges. As a fledgling business and economics

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<sup>84</sup> Weihs, Frank "TCC Faculty Strike Victory" *Washington State Teacher*, 3 November 1973

professor, Sigmen found himself at the central vantage point with a unique and compelling view of the inner workings of the strike. More than anything, however, he wanted to get back in the classroom and resume the business of teaching. “It wasn’t a very happy time,” Sigmen said. “It was very disruptive.”

Ivonna Anderson was a young science instructor –the first of many talented female professors in TCC’s science department— during the time of the strike. She remembered that a few of her colleagues placed bets on whether she would participate. “I guess I decided I was a faculty member, and that was a decision the faculty made. I’ve always been a team player, and that’s what the team did at the time.” Although there were a few instructors who crossed the picket line, the overwhelming majority acted in solidarity. Even those without a strong ideological investment participated out of a sense of camaraderie or duty. “We walked the picket line on Mildred Street. My picket partner was Murray Morgan,” Ivonna recalled. She looked forward to her time on the picket line with Mr. Morgan, who, in addition to being TCC history professor, was a celebrated and revered local historian, writer, journalist, political activist. “He was one of the most fascinating people I’ve known. And he would regale me with stories about Tacoma.”



Murray Morgan interviewed from the picket line (TCC Archive)

Organized labor from every local sector came out in full support of the TCC faculty. Staying true to its hard-earned reputation as a workers' city, Tacoma's "Family of Labor" enthusiastically joined the picket lines on South 19<sup>th</sup> and Mildred. "We feel that a blow against the teachers union is a blow against organized labor as a whole," said Bob Dilger, executive director of the Building and Construction Trades Council.<sup>85</sup> Volunteers from the Longshoreman's Union, No. 23, Pierce County Building Trades Unions, Brotherhood of Electrical Workers, Retail Clerks Union, Plasterers and Cement Masons and United Farm Workers, joined the picket line, cut checks for the TCCFT strike fund, rallied local support, courted local media and lobbied State executives. The *Tacoma Labor Advocate*, a heavily circulated local AFL-CIO publication in print since 1909, covered the strike in great detail. County and state labor executives L.H. Pederson, W.E. Henderson and Joe Davis petitioned the Governor directly.

### **Student Action**

Students –as is always the case with education strikes– were the party with the largest investment and the least agency. While the balance of student support seemed to fall in league with the faculty (some students even joined their professors on the picket line) the primary impetus of the student body was simply to resume their classes as soon as possible. For many students, TCC represented their only real chance at a post-secondary education. They were not interested in the nuances of budget allocations and reduction-in-force policies; they just wanted to receive the quality education that they were promised.

*Collegiate Challenge* editor Tom Pantly gave voice to student concerns in a markedly despondent opinion piece, published in the October 12<sup>th</sup> issue of the student paper.

As I look out on an empty campus, I wonder if there will be no one to read my paper this week, as was the case last Friday. I think of the five or so people who have worked so hard this week to put out a newspaper that will largely not be read.

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<sup>85</sup> "TCC-FT Delegates Praise Organized Labor's Help" *The Washington Teacher* November 1973

You see, the administration, who are to be our guides, and the faculty, who are to provide us knowledge, have not the time for us any longer. They are too busy calling each other names and making proposals that they already know the other will not accept. The ‘faculty’ – the ‘administration’; I have really gotten tired of typing those now meaningless words.

On October 9<sup>th</sup> (strike day five) ASTCC president Jody Gomez led a delegation of 150 students and concerned community members in a caravan to Olympia. Their goal was to petition the intervention of Governor Dan Evans in order to bring an end to the strike. Governor Evans was reportedly out of town, but the governor’s assistant, James Dolliver, assured the students that they were applying pressure to bring both parties back to the negotiating table.<sup>86</sup> That same day Governor Evans held a press conference, in which he reaffirmed his assertion that he would not directly intervene to end the strike. While the actions of the student delegation may not have had the intended direct effect on the strike’s outcome, it was an important statement of purpose –a reminder that there was much more at stake than the number of steps in the salary schedule.

### **The Fix**

On October 12 administration lawyers persuaded Pierce County Superior Court Judge William F. Brown Jr. to issue an injunction against the picketers. While the judge declared the faculty strike illegal, he stopped short of ordering teachers back to work.<sup>87</sup> While this tactic had successfully ended strikes in other towns, Tacoma was like no other town. The union backlash against a court order had the potential to spark a legal confrontation between local government and local labor that nobody was interested in fighting.

Meanwhile, state officials in Olympia scrambled to produce an effective response to the impasse. The five-year-old Board for Community College Education expeditiously approved a measure to expand the authority of their director, in order to more effectively mediate disputes between faculty and administration (both parties expressed frustration regarding the state board’s efficacy in responding to this crisis<sup>88</sup>). Director John Mundt was granted

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<sup>86</sup> “Siege, Truce, Resolution?” *The Collegiate Challenge* 12 Oct 1973

<sup>87</sup> “TCC Faculty Strike Victory” *The Washington Teacher* November 1973

<sup>88</sup> “Rieder’s Digest” *The Washington Teacher* November 1973

increased latitude for fact-finding, calling in special consultants and creating impasse committees that could effectively resolve disputes.

On October 13 the first attempt to resume negotiation under the oversight of Federal Mediator Frank Schoepel proved to be unsuccessful. The next day, administrators left copies of their contract proposal in a staff lounge for faculty to retrieve. Union leaders refused to distribute the latest revision of the contract, which included a stark ultimatum: sign and return by 8 a.m. Monday or risk termination. 87 of the 95 full-time faculty members were unpersuaded by this threat, leaving their contracts unsigned.<sup>89</sup>

On Tuesday October 16, after a fifteen-hour mediated negotiation session, TCCFT and college administration reached a serviceable agreement. The crux of the two-year agreement was a seven percent across-the-board pay increase for all full-time faculty members, followed by a five percent increase the following year. The twelve step pay schedule would be maintained, and part-time faculty pay was also raised to two-thirds parity with full-time pay. Tenure rights and due process emerged intact. Faculty capitulated on class size limits. In terms of net gain, this was an overwhelming victory for the TCC faculty.

### **A Pyrrhic Victory**

Perhaps the most injurious and lingering outcome of the 1973 strike was the damage done to the easy relationship between faculty, administration and the student body. Even after a serviceable agreement was reached, the scars of entrenchment remained. The happy hour socials at the Cloverleaf Tavern, where faculty and administrators would celebrate and commiserate alongside the older students, were lost to history. Rebuilding the trust between faculty and administration would take a great deal of time and effort.

“It never was rebuilt. It was gone,” Ron Magden said. “We grew too big. At 30 faculty, 11 staff and 900 students it was easy. It was easy as pie. We had wonderful relationships both in and out of school. There were lots of parties. Everybody was happy.” Magden, who is also counted among the region’s foremost labor historians, feels that the 1973 strike marked the end of a “golden age” at Tacoma Community College. The majority of the former faculty and staff who

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<sup>89</sup> “TCC Faculty Strike Victory” *The Washington Teacher* November 1973

recall the '73 strike seem to remember the events of that year as both a coming of age and a loss of innocence.

President Ford, who heretofore was seen as a something of a benevolent father figure, was forced to embody the role of the executive administrator –“the bad guy,” in the view of the faculty. “He was accused of taking anti-faculty positions that I know were not in his heart,” said Paul Jacobsen. Jacobsen, who succeeded John Terrey as Dean of Instruction, had an easy relationship with Ford. “Tom *was* like a father to the faculty. That was his dying ambition, to be the big papa.” It was important to Ford that his legacy reflect the overwhelmingly positive impact that TCC’s establishment had and would continue to have on the community, not the momentary growing pains that were a part of any major institution’s maturation.

### **10,000 Beautiful Memories**

On September 11, 1974 *The News Tribune* announced that Tom Ford had been offered a position as superintendent of schools for the Bremerton School District. The following day TCC’s first president submitted his formal resignation to the Board of Trustees, who reluctantly accepted. Ford told *The News Tribune* that he had decided, during the preceding year, that it was time for him to head in a new direction. “I need to maintain a freshness of view,” Ford said. “I have nothing but absolute warmth and affection for [TCC]. That will never change, but I don’t think anyone can stay in any place forever.”<sup>90</sup>

There was natural speculation that it was the faculty strike or the College’s financial woes that weighed heavily on Ford’s decision to leave the College. Ford was forthright in his dismissal of this conjecture. “I have 1,000 beautiful memories of TCC –maybe 10,000. And not one of them has anything to do with strikes or student uprisings or policy adoptions. They are made up of the things that make a college –of human interaction.”<sup>91</sup>

Since 1961, Tom Ford had worked as a dedicated steward of Tacoma Community College. His influence and leadership was instrumental in the College’s evolution from idea to institution. The building locations, the instructional program, even the campus landscaping bore his fingerprints. He helped define the vision, and he faithfully steered the course, through still and stormy waters.

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<sup>90</sup> “Ford resigns TCC half of career” *The News Tribune*. 18 September 1974

<sup>91</sup> “Goodbye TCC; Hello Bremerton” *The News Tribune*. 22 September 1974

In an exit interview with *The News Tribune* President Ford reflected on his presidential tenure. “What is a community college for?” Ford asked, sitting in his new Bremerton office, puffing from his signature pipe. “It is for people who would not go to school otherwise.” The College’s ability to adapt and evolve to better embody the ideal of the open door was a point of pride for TCC’s first president. “I don’t take credit for this, but I am proud that we created at TCC a greater degree of equal opportunity.” Throughout his presidency Ford remained cognizant of the fact that it was the multitude of individuals and groups that, through dedicated service and sacrifice, were able to lift the College up in a manner true to its mandate. “Human interaction –that’s what puts it together. It puts you up or down. It can exhaust you, or... well, that’s love. That is what 13 years are made up of.”

## Chapter 6: The Test of Time

### Interim

In the wake of the departure of Tom Ford, the TCC Board of Trustees announced the selection of Dr. Robert Rhule to serve as interim president. Rhule, who previously served as Director of Occupational Education and held the first chair in the humanities department, was well respected by students, staff and faculty alike. “My job should be to keep things moving without implementing severe changes,” Rhule told *The Challenge* in October 1974.

The College was in serviceable shape when Rhule accepted the interim presidency. The bitterness of the strike, though not completely forgotten, was largely dormant. In fact, the protracted budgetary crunch faced by the College banded staff, faculty and administration together in austere solidarity. “Money problems have stripped us to the point of all working together,” said a confessional Ford during his final interview with *Tacoma Review*.



Interim President Robert Rhule (TCC Archive)

## **The Colonel**

On June 3, 1975, in an open letter to the campus, the TCC Board of Trustees announced the appointment of “Dr. Larry P. Stevens of Scottsdale Arizona.” Accompanying the announcement was a thank-you to the students, faculty, staff, administrators and board members for their assistance during the College’s first ever presidential selection process. The board’s letter also issued a qualified felicitation to Stevens: “We extend congratulations and best wishes to Stevens as he assumes and accepts the challenges (and headaches) of a most demanding task.” The board pledged their confidence and support to Stevens during “a time of rededication and commitment by the whole campus community toward quality education and training.”

Larry Stevens was born and raised in Mount Vernon, Washington. After earning his undergraduate degree in biology from Oregon State University, Stevens worked as a science teacher in Oregon public schools. After earning his stripes as a teacher, Stevens went on to earn advanced degrees in education, facilitating his ambition to transition into administration. He was a former football coach and the commanding officer of a large U.S. Marine Reserve engineer unit. His resume lauded his service as “an educational consultant in eleven states in over 60 in-service programs for teachers.” His administrative expertise was in the assessment and design of effective educational programs. A deep believer in active civic engagement, Stevens supported a number of community and youth organizations throughout his career. Most importantly, perhaps, was his passion and belief in the community college system.

Stevens came to the College during a period of stark reflection. In the ten years since the founding of TCC in 1965, the country had weathered two major economic recessions, the war in Vietnam, the tumultuous apex of the civil rights and student protest movements, an oil embargo, a presidential impeachment and a mass of social, economic and political upheavals too numerous to list. The world of 1975 was radically different from that of 1965. In order to move confidently into its second decade, a lucid institutional reckoning would be required. Stevens’ penchant for effective institutional assessment and strategic planning undoubtedly weighed heavily in the board’s unanimous appointment. It would be these qualities that Stevens would employ to make an immediate impact as the president of TCC.



President Larry Stevens (TCC Archive)

The reorganization of TCC's administrative structure was Steven's first priority. His goal was to create a system that increased accountability and minimized waste. In his initial assessment of the campus administration, Stevens was troubled by what he saw as systemic inefficiencies. For example, the College's Food Service Operation had been running at a loss since 1968, in spite of state laws requiring FSOs to break even.<sup>92</sup> By shoring up operating losses such as this, the College would have more money to reallocate into maintenance and expansion of the campus facilities. Commenting on the physical condition of the campus, Stevens reportedly told *Challenge* writer Robert Long that "the College was in sad shape."<sup>93</sup>

It wasn't only administrative structures and campus facilities that Stevens was looking to shape up. Every administrator was to be assessed in terms of their contribution to the institution. In correspondence with college staffers, he announced that he would be "evaluating the efforts of all administrators, looking for those who are

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<sup>92</sup> McHugh, Mike "Food services program operating in the red" *The Collegiate Challenge*. 10 October 1975.

<sup>93</sup> Long, Roger, "Dr. Larry Stevens: Man on the Move" *The Collegiate Challenge*. 3 October 1975.

‘shakers and movers’ and those who are not.”<sup>94</sup> It was his resolute conviction that “the administrative organization reflects the College’s Chief Executive Officer’s philosophy for achieving the objectives of the College.”<sup>95</sup> If Tom Ford wanted to be seen as a father figure, Larry Stevens very much wanted to be known at the CEO.

### **“Planning for the Future”**

And like most good CEOs, Stevens had a clearly defined, unambiguous vision of the mission of his organization. Stevens’ five-fold vision of the community colleges’ mandate was as follows: 1) to adequately prepare students for transfer to four-year universities, 2) to provide contemporary job skills and vocational training, 3) to provide all students with a solid general education, 4) to provide guidance, counselling and remedial instruction commensurate with student needs, 5) to provide a healthy offering of social and cultural edification to the community, including athletics, arts and entertainment services.<sup>96</sup> It was this clarity of focus and self-assured sense of purpose that Stevens brought to bear in his new presidential role.

He would channel this rigorous attention to systems into a comprehensive assessment and analysis of the College and its surrounding district. Stevens’ background as both an administrative consultant and military officer granted him a keen interest in quantitative data and actionable intelligence. In order to move forward as an institution in a deliberate and effective manner, it was vital to survey the landscape and evaluate the currently implemented strategies and tactics. This attention to data and statistical analysis would be a hallmark of the Stevens Administration.

A self-assessment of the size and scope that Stevens had in mind was unprecedented in the history of the College. In fact, the most detailed data collection effort associated with the institution was done previous to the College’s founding, as the school district built their case to bring a community college to Tacoma. It is unclear whether this new attention to quantitative analysis was largely a product of Larry Stevens’ management style or just the natural trajectory of any

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<sup>94</sup> Stevens, Larry. Letter to Mr. J. Allen Clarke, 11 December 1975.

<sup>95</sup> Stevens, Larry. Letter to Dr. Robert J. Rhule, 11 December 1975.

<sup>96</sup> Hall, Len, “Chancellor reflects on state of college” *Saddleback Valley News*. 13 September 1985.

developing institution. It is fair to assume that it was a combination of both.

To accomplish this ambitious task, Stevens established the equally ambitious Long Range Planning Commission. This 99-member organization was divided into three sub-commissions, with representative members from each of the College's stakeholders: students, staff, faculty and the community. Community representatives, drawn from local business, media, government, philanthropic, social and economic interests, were by far the largest contingent of the commission.<sup>97</sup>

The goal of the Long Range Planning Commission was a top-to-bottom investigation and assessment of the College and community. Local demographics, economic and employment data, enrollment figures, student and community services, instructional programs, college funding and campus development were all topics of considerable interest, to be meticulously analyzed and evaluated. Unprecedented in its size and scope, this study would not only lay the groundwork for the College's short and long-term planning, it also set a new standard in terms of data collection and analysis for institutional advancement.

The findings of the Long Term Planning Commission were collected and released in a 1977 report entitled "Planning for the Future." This 180-page document is Larry Stevens' masterwork. It is an in-depth analysis of the College district, a comprehensive collection of institutional goals and objectives, a detailed strategic playbook and a full accounting of college finances. It was a blueprint and a roadmap and a way forward for the College, unprecedented in depth and clarity of purpose.

The commission's most significant findings concerned the shifting demographics of the College. "In 1966 two-thirds of the College's students were male and under the age of nineteen," read the study's demographics report. "95 percent of all its student body identified as Caucasian." By 1977, the average student was older (70 percent over 21); they were approximately evenly split between men and women; and ethnic minorities accounted for 19 percent of student body.<sup>98</sup> That number was expected to rise, as the region experienced

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<sup>97</sup> Tacoma Community College Long Range planning Commission, "Planning for the Future" 1977.

<sup>98</sup> Ibid.

net in-migration from East Asian countries like South Korea, Vietnam and Cambodia.<sup>99</sup> Additionally, an increasing number of students entered TCC without having a clear career path in mind, and the number of transfer students dropped precipitously.

The primary thesis of the report was that the dramatically changing student population at TCC required an equally dramatic institutional response in order to continue serving the needs of the community, in furtherance of the College's mission. This meant that everything was subject to "a prompt, critical and thorough review and evaluation." This included "the College's present organization, curriculum, student services and support services."<sup>100</sup> Everything would be weighed in the balance.

Early in his tenure Stevens began to earn a reputation as the hatchet man for the Board of Trustees. The College was entering an era of new growth, and, in order to mature as an institution, a full accounting, both literally and figuratively, would be required. In the second *Challenge* editorial of the 1975-76 academic year (the first was written by Stevens), editor Steve Kruse commented on the arrival of President Stevens.

With the purse tightening attitude comes the hiring of the new president for the College (Dr. Larry Stevens). Dr. Stevens seems to be just what the doctor ordered. In just the short time that he has been with us, he has reorganized the administration structure, eliminated paraprofessionals from government [student government was using their allocated funds to staff student services paraprofessionals] and has instituted several studies and committees on areas that need a new look at their policies and procedures.

Early gripes about Stevens were largely limited to questions of style. His self-described style of administration was "personal, open, with free exchange, yet decisive after the relevant facts are known and responsible decisions are needed."<sup>101</sup> In actual practice, many felt Stevens was heavy on the decisive action and light on the open, free exchange. Once a decision had been made, the time for questioning

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<sup>99</sup>"Pierce County Profile" Labor Market and Economic Analysis Branch. 2001.

<sup>100</sup>Tacoma Community College Long Range planning Commission, "Planning for the Future" 1977.

<sup>101</sup>Hildreth, Allen, "Stevens named to head post" *The Collegiate Challenge*. 6 June 1975.

was truly over. Stevens made it clear when feedback was welcome and when it was not. His military background granted him an affinity for a leadership style that favored efficiency, authority and the chain of command, often at the expense of finesse and common workplace niceties. Complaints began to surface regarding the rapid reorganization that was taking place at TCC. An impending financial crunch only served to exacerbate tensions, which, by 1979, threatened to boil over.

### **No Confidence**

“I believe that you have the experience and insights necessary to be the most successful Dean of Instruction in the State’s system,” Larry Stevens wrote in a memo to former interim president Robert Rhule, shortly after his arrival in 1975. “I know, too, that you command the respect of the faculty, students, and members of the community, as well as the administrative staff.” Which of these factors was Stevens’ primary motivation for promoting the former interim president is unclear, but Rhule gratefully accepted the offer to join Steven’s administrative staff.

What is also unclear is what led to the termination of Bob Rhule in January 1979. “It may be a matter of just a personality clash,” said Rhule, during an impromptu press conference in his office. “He just told me and I didn’t pursue it... I’m not happy about it.”<sup>102</sup> Surprised and frustrated by his unceremonious termination, Rhule, who remained popular among faculty and students alike, decided to air his grievances in the local press. President Stevens, true to his nature, refused to comment on the matter.

For faculty and classified staff, the termination of Bob Rhule was the culmination of a problem that, according to TCCFT President Jerry McCourt, “had been building for a long time.”<sup>103</sup> TCC faculty harbored a festering resentment of President Stevens, and they collectively decided that the current situation was no longer tolerable. In early February TCC faculty and classified staff both submitted formal votes of “no confidence” against TCC President Larry Stevens.<sup>104</sup> The formal charge was a “lack of leadership” and

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<sup>102</sup>Gordon, Kelly and Carter, Lorrie. “Dean of Instruction Bob Rhule terminated” *The Collegiate Challenge*. 2 Feb 1979.

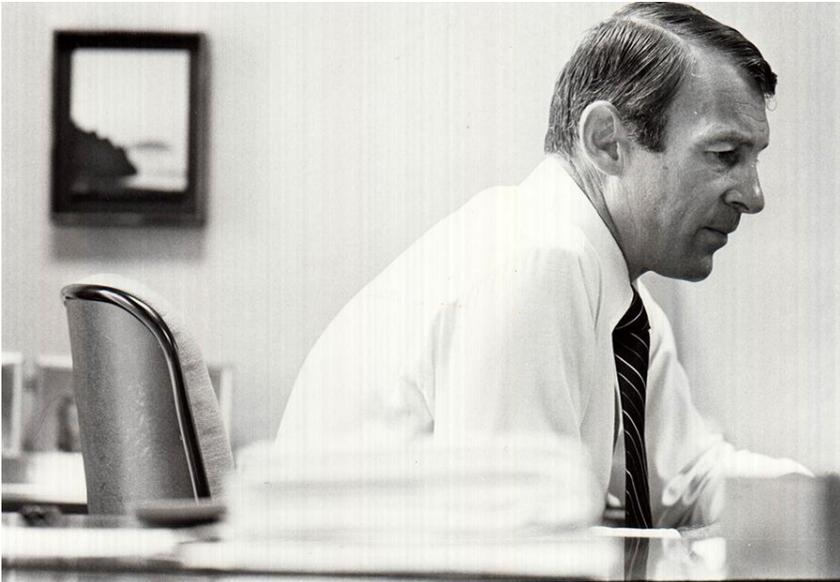
<sup>103</sup>Gordon, Kelly and Carter, Lorrie. “Faculty, classified vote dissatisfaction” *The Collegiate Challenge*. 9 Feb 1979.

<sup>104</sup> Ibid.

dissatisfaction with Stevens' penchant for unilateral decision making, especially in regard to implementing new programs and changing administrative structures.

This was unprecedented in the history of the College. Even during the faculty strike of 1973, the relationship between faculty and the College president, though contentious at times, never devolved into a total breakdown of confidence.

This placed the Board of Trustees in a tricky situation. The last thing they wanted was to get involved in personnel matters, but they could not ignore the growing mutiny at the College. "We have to be careful to protect everyone," Trustees Chair Ellen Pinto told *The News Tribune* "We have to weigh and be deliberate."<sup>105</sup>



An Embattled President Stevens (TCC Archive)

"The Board of Trustees supported him," recalled Dan Small, who was working as TCC's public information officer at the time. In spite of Stevens' contentious relationship with staff and faculty, he was faithfully carrying out the mission of the College. In executive acumen and analytical ability, Stevens was a master. By a mountain of collected data and sheer force of will, he navigated the College through unprecedented financial difficulty (the likes of which the

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<sup>105</sup> Erickson, Jim. "TCC Board head promises 'action'." *The News Tribune*. 15 March 1979.

College wouldn't see again until the 2007-13 budget crunch). Letting Stevens go was not an option. The only prudent course of action was to attempt to repair the relationship with faculty and staff.

"He was told that he needed to do a better job of communicating with people on campus," Small said. "So I worked with him to set up some forums for faculty and staff, in the student center, where he would go out and meet with groups of people and answer whatever questions they threw at him." As public information officer, Dan Small often acted as a public relations liaison between administrators and the public. At the behest of the board, Small and President Stevens organized a series of brown bag lunches, where Stevens attempted to repair the lines of communication.

Faculty and staff were largely receptive to this course of action. Internal strife aside, everyone was highly motivated to quickly correct course and get on with the business of teaching students. "One of the most important things is that the public didn't suffer because of TCC's problems," Jack Hyde told local reporters.<sup>106</sup> Discussions were frank and forthcoming, conveying a feeling of genuine progress. Stevens agreed to adopt a more communicative approach. While he would never be beloved among faculty and staff, a serviceable détente was reached. "It seemed to help some. It kind of all settled down by the next fall," Dan Small recalled with a laugh. "When people go away for the summer it seems to help."

### **Satellites**

During the 1979-80 academic year, Tacoma Community College embarked on an ambitious task. In order to better serve the "Tacoma-Pierce County areas of the Puget Sound" the College would launch a number of satellite education centers. After years of practicing community outreach in the form of service and distance learning, TCC would take their charge a step further, bringing the College itself into the various underserved neighborhoods of Tacoma-Pierce County.

From its founding TCC was ever conscious of its mandate to assess and serve the needs of the broader community. Community outreach was a foundational principle of the College, which built a robust community service program that thrived during the 1970s and 80s. Workshops and forums covered pressing community issues and

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<sup>106</sup> Erickson, Jim, "TCC's Larry Stevens" *The News Tribune*. 2 Sep. 1979.

current affairs. From the war in Vietnam to resume workshops, if it was significant interest or benefit to the community at large, it was covered at TCC.

The “Tacoma Community” has never been homogeneous. There is a tendency to refer to “the community” as if it were a monoculture, sharing similar, evenly prioritized needs and interests. In reality, Tacoma’s communities have always been diverse. Socioeconomic, religious and ethnic differences, along with a variety of other cultural distinctions, continue to make Tacoma one of the most culturally heterogeneous communities in the region. The educational needs in Tacoma’s urban centers were vastly different from those of the suburban neighborhoods of West Tacoma or the rural developments, across the Tacoma Narrows Bridge in Gig Harbor and the Key Peninsula.

In the College’s founding documents, the section regarding site selection notes the proximity of the campus location to State Route 16 (still under construction when the College was commissioned in 1963) and the Tacoma Narrows Bridge. The size and location of the campus grounds were chosen, it says, specifically to “keep pace with growth and development in future generations” and “offer convenient access from every point in the county.”<sup>107</sup> However, in the late 1970s, for a nation in the midst of an energy crisis, when an embattled President Carter beseeched Americans to conserve and sacrifice, TCC’s location was perhaps looking less convenient for people living in the outer neighborhoods of Pierce County.

This was the finding of TCC’s Long Range Planning Commission in 1977, which recommended that TCC “increase the number of off-campus extension centers” with “educational opportunities and college services” unique to their respective locations.<sup>108</sup> The commission envisioned the creation of a number of satellite centers, each with an educational plan, faculty, staff, resources and affiliations unique to their location. The specific locations mentioned by the commission were Downtown Tacoma, South Tacoma, Northeast Tacoma and Gig Harbor, with recommendations for continued research into additional locations that might present special needs or opportunities.

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<sup>107</sup> “Tacoma Community College: A Preliminary Report” Tacoma School District Board of Directors, January 23, 1964.

<sup>108</sup> “Planning for the Future” 1977.

There was also another, more pragmatic, reason behind the drive to expand the physical presence of Tacoma Community College in the late 1970s. Since TCC's founding in 1965, the competition for students had grown significantly. Bates Vocational Technical Institute and Fort Steilacoom Community College (renamed Pierce College in 1986) were experiencing growing enrollments, especially among Tacoma's increasing percentage of college-bound minorities.<sup>109</sup> Additionally, the maturation of the student financial aid system offered increased opportunity for students to finance an education at one of the region's many four-year institutions. In order to stay competitive in an increasingly crowded educational marketplace, it was critical that the College play to its strengths. Under the Stevens administration, the College's chief strength was the ability to plan, assess and rapidly adapt to the emerging needs of the College's multiple communities.

Understanding that funding was limited –TCC certainly couldn't afford to build a network of extension campuses throughout the city– the commission recommended that the College negotiate cooperative agreements with existing organizations that would be able to offer facilities and other resources for satellite locations. This strategy formed a virtuous circle in which the College offered increasingly convenient educational opportunities for residents, as well as directly beneficial academic and vocational training and instruction for local businesses while minimizing expense for all the involved parties.

### **The Big House**

This strategy was by no means new to the College. One of TCC's partnerships was a deal forged in 1967 with McNeil Island Federal Penitentiary. This South Sound island prison had been home to some of the West Coast's most notorious felons, including Charles Manson and Robert Stroud, the "Birdman of Alcatraz." From 1967, until its transition to a state corrections center in 1980, TCC ran a successful college education program on the island, granting 210 academic and technical degrees to both prisoners and corrections officers.<sup>110</sup>

"There was a race between inmates and guards on courses," remembers Ron Magden, who taught general studies at McNeil

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<sup>109</sup> Ibid.

<sup>110</sup> Small, Dan. News Release. 1 April 1980

throughout the duration of the program. He looks back on the program fondly, noting the demonstrable impact that the educational opportunity had on the inmates. “They were bank robbers, income tax evaders, and these guys were great students.” Watching the transformative effect that their instruction had in the lives of the inmates was a suitable reward for Magden and others, who remitted additional financial compensation for their teaching. “I didn’t want a salary or anything; I wanted the program to succeed. There were a whole bunch of us that did that.”

Magden became administrator of the McNeil Island Education Library program, and he worked diligently to improve the quality of education at the prison. “The goal of the project,” Magden told *The Challenge* in 1973, “is to provide an educational program equal to the one on campus.”<sup>111</sup> Lacking federal grant support, Magden and his associates collaborated with local college educators and inmate self-improvement groups to secure grant funding from organizations like the Weyerhaeuser Foundation, which quietly supported the program for eleven years.<sup>112</sup>

Richard Perkins was also among the faculty who helped launch the McNeil Island program. Lacking proper laboratory equipment and facilities, he taught a lecture course on contemporary biological studies. His enthusiasm for the program was similar to Magden’s. “I had a student, who was the brightest student I’ve ever had in class,” Perkins recalls. “He went from a GED there to a master’s degree in three years.” Perkins soon learned that his prize pupil was a former large volume narcotics trafficker.

“This individual was head of a very large drug operation,” said Perkins. “He had a fortress in Colorado; he had an army. He was brilliant, but he hadn’t been turned on to education. And once he was turned on to education there was no stopping him.” Perkins formed a friendship with the inmate and was able to help successfully lobby for his early release. “He went on to the University of Washington and got his doctoral degree in psychology.”

“It’s a culture, just like any other culture,” said Perkins, when asked about the challenges of teaching incarcerated students. In his experience, once a student was “turned on to education” it was quite easy to connect with them on a personal level. Many of the students

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<sup>111</sup> “McNeil Island to get Weyerhaeuser grant” *The Collegiate Challenge*. 6 April 1973.

<sup>112</sup> Ron Magden Oral History. TCC Archive. 2013.

were grateful to be treated as human beings with potential, as that was not a feeling that was normally cultivated inside a maximum security federal penitentiary. There were also distinct advantages to teaching inmates, according to Perkins, “most of the students there didn't have a lot more to do than study.”

### **We're Moving for You**

Acting on the advice of the Long-Range Planning Commission, TCC launched the first phase of its campus extension plan. Beginning in September 1978 the College ran a series of targeted advertisements bearing the headline “We're moving for you.” Residents throughout the county would be notified that several of their local junior high and high schools (Baker, Meeker, Lincoln, Peninsula) were offering courses for college credit, via TCC's new “extension centers.” In addition to their partnerships with local school districts, the College would roll out some larger, more ambitious collaborative projects.



TCC Downtown College Center (TCC Archive)

*The Peninsula Gateway* announced several credit courses being offered at the Purdy Women's Treatment Center (now the Washington Corrections Center for Women). Staying true to its mandate for personalized course offerings, Purdy offered women's studies classes, along with credit courses in math, English and pottery.

Course availability was not restricted to the residents of the treatment center; “all community members” were encouraged to register for classes. This was not the College’s first venture across the Tacoma Narrows. The Peninsula Adult Evening School was a joint venture between TCC and the Peninsula School District that offered courses on everything from advanced bookkeeping to woodworking and wig and hairpiece styling. This was, however, a significant redoubling of the College’s commitment to credit course offerings in service of the peninsula.

Three years after the launch of the Purdy program, TCC established its first dedicated learning center in Gig Harbor. On March 30, 1981, the TCC Peninsula College Center opened on Stanich Avenue, just off of State Route 16. Local paper *The Peninsula Gateway* boasted “Gig Harbor is now a college town.”<sup>113</sup> Housed inside a repurposed post office building, the Peninsula College Center offered an eclectic mix of credit courses from conversational French to bookkeeping to equestrian management.<sup>114</sup>

Over time, TCC’s Gig Harbor Campus would grow into the College’s most important extension campus, eventually offering a full range of academic and community service programs. It would outlast all of the College’s other expansion efforts. In 1995, the Gig Harbor Peninsula College Center would move a mile down the road into a custom-built, 13,000 square-foot facility. Even as future presidents refocused resources back into the main campus, the Gig Harbor Center would remain an important priority for the College.

*The McChord Airlifter* broke news of a robust set of courses offered in a partnership between TCC and the McChord Education Center in 1978, as well. As part of the agreement, priority would be granted to active duty military, their dependents and employees of the Department of Defense. Any remaining class space would be offered to the general public. In addition to the standard course offerings, students could take a course series on forestry. Correspondence courses could be taken via television, telephone or newspaper. They covered subjects ranging from comparative religion to U.S. foreign policy.<sup>115</sup>

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<sup>113</sup> “Gig Harbor now a ‘college town’” *The Peninsula Gateway*. 4 Feb 1981.

<sup>114</sup> “TCC’s local branch opens in harbor soon” *The Peninsula Gateway*. 11 March 1981.

<sup>115</sup> “Try TCC College Courses this Fall at McChord Air Force Base” *McChord Airlifter*. 1 September 1978.

TCC's Eastside experiment was the most targeted and community-centric of all the early extensions. On December 22, 1978, *The Tacoma Review* heralded TCC's partnership with the Eastside Boy's Club, bringing the College directly to the center of one of the city's most underserved, poverty-stricken neighborhoods. The College exported Richard Spangler's math lab to provide individualized instruction in arithmetic and algebra for college credit. A series of specialized courses were tailored to directly address the neighborhood's most pressing problems. Residents were offered affordable continuing education courses in home repair; writing; divorce, widowhood and single-parenting; self-defense; dance and physical fitness. Free one-day job search workshops were available to assist the local unemployed enter the work force.

The TCC Downtown Center opened in January 1981. Prior to gaining an exclusive, dedicated space, the College had spent two years offering courses out of the YWCA and the Old City Hall. Courses offered at the new Downtown Center focused on business and emerging technology. Some of the TCC's first computer programming and systems analysis courses were taught downtown.<sup>116</sup> The College would work closely with Tacoma's central business district to develop cooperative programs for employees and prospects. Over the next 24 years, the Center would play a part in the economic and cultural revival that transformed downtown Tacoma, beginning in the mid-1980s and flourishing in the '90s.

Stevens' plan to expand Tacoma Community College into the community experienced mixed success, largely due to forces outside of his control. An economic recession would halt the College's expansion efforts, and, once again, exacerbate tensions between TCC faculty and their beleaguered president.

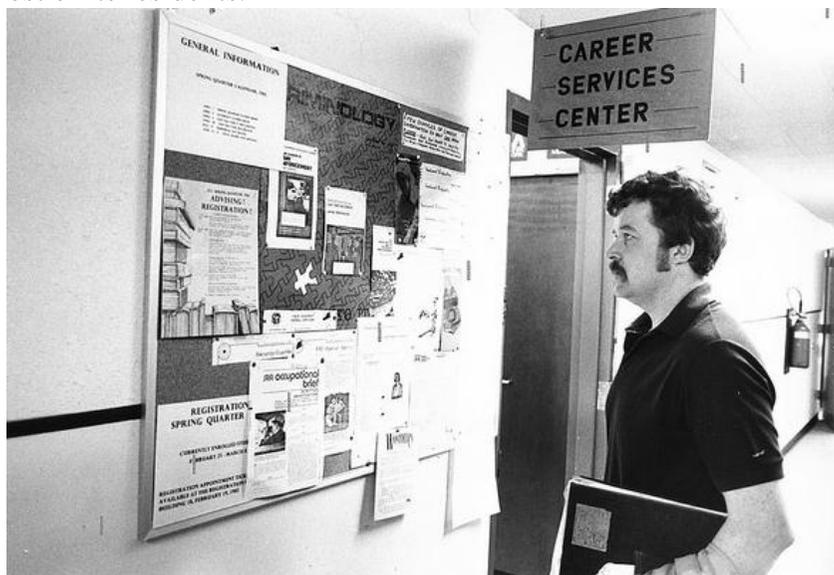
## **The Crunch**

In the early 1980s a global economic recession rocked most of the developed world. Low growth, high inflation and a series of economic crises resulted in a national budget crunch that left many state-funded institutions reeling. Washington State in particular, with an economy so heavily dependent on lumber, manufacturing and

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<sup>116</sup> Zweigler, Zach "Business and computers taught downtown" *The Collegiate Challenge*. 8 Feb 1985.

constriction, felt the brunt of the recession in a way that was palpable to most of its residents.<sup>117</sup>



Searching for opportunities at the Career Services Center (Photo: Christopher Stanich)

Impending budget deficits and plummeting tax revenues forced the state to implement desperate tax hikes and draconian cuts to state-funded programs and institutions. “Ultimately the state 1981-1983 biennial budget was revised downward by \$360.6 million as the result of the impact of high unemployment on the state’s tax base,” Dan Small reported to federal community college advocates in 1985.<sup>118</sup> This was a concussive blow to Tacoma community College, which would see an 18 percent budget reduction between 1981 and 1983.<sup>119</sup>

Notwithstanding that there is never an opportune time for budget cuts, the arrival of this crunch was particularly inconvenient. The College was in the midst of an expansion effort, with extension centers opening in Southeast Tacoma (September 1980), downtown Tacoma (January 1981) and Gig Harbor (March 1981). The number of students enrolled in these extension centers was not insignificant. “Before the budget cuts, 1000 students were enrolled in off campus programs,” President Larry Stevens told *News Tribune* reporters

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<sup>117</sup> Small, Dan, Mitchell, S. “Washington State’s Economic Crisis”

<sup>118</sup> Ibid.

<sup>119</sup> Dan Small Oral History. TCC Archive. 2013.

during his 1982 exit interview. “25 percent of those said they would not have come to the main campus to take classes.”

Staff and faculty, who were already nervous about job security in the face of looming cuts, were often less than enthusiastic about being reassigned to TCC’s satellite centers. In fact some faculty were philosophically opposed to the idea of campus extensions altogether. “I think a lot of people on the main campus saw the Downtown Center and the Gig Harbor Center as competing for resources, taking money that should be spent here on [the main] campus.” said Gary Sigmen, who moved his office to the Downtown Center after the original director resigned her position. “The College didn't have any money to hire anybody else. So I moved my office down there.”<sup>120</sup>

President Stevens, who was still working to gain buy-in from staff and faculty after a 1979 vote of no confidence (campus expansion was among the grievances mentioned during the vote), was determined to navigate the budget crisis without resorting to lay-offs. By early 1981, however, it became apparent that some reduction in force measures would be necessary, as part of the contingency planning process. This put Stevens, who was already not winning any popularity contests among faculty and staff, in an increasingly precarious situation.

On February 19, 1981 the Board of Trustees unanimously approved the tentative operating budget for 1981-82. In anticipation of the proposed state cutbacks, the budget featured a reduction of \$432,250.<sup>121</sup> The College faced the discontinuation and reduction of several programs, as well as reductions in staff, faculty and full-time students. Programs in drama, cooperative education and services for the developmentally disabled, among others, would be cut with an “add back” option in the event that funding became available. Several academic and vocational programs would see significant budget reductions. New and under-enrolled technical programs in optometry and dietetics were discontinued indefinitely. Administrative departments and positions were combined or eliminated. A 32% reduction in security services meant a few security guards would be let go. Outside of a handful of “essential curriculum” areas (English, Mathematics, foreign language and some social sciences) and the highly successful allied health programs (the radiologic technician

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<sup>120</sup> Gary Sigmen Oral History. TCC Archive. 2013.

<sup>121</sup> Board of Trustees Regular Meeting Minutes, 19 Feb 1981.

program was to be expanded under this budget) few areas would escape these cuts untouched.

Interestingly enough it was not the broad swath of these cuts that captured the public interest. Nor was it the fact that community colleges en masse were likely to be given short shrift by a legislature that was largely indifferent to its needs (this was a chief complaint of Stevens). Attention was instead focused on a single member of TCC's faculty: a 65 year-old history teacher named Murray Morgan.

### **TCC's Blunder**

Murray Morgan was a lot of things. He was a journalist and a teacher, a stalwart social and labor advocate, a celebrated writer and historian. He was, and still is, regarded by many as one of Washington State's finest historians. In 1997, when Tacoma's Eleventh Street Bridge was officially renamed the "Murray Morgan Bridge," Washington State's Joint House Memorial said that "Murray Morgan has brought the world to Tacoma, and Tacoma to the world."

Morgan was bringing both Tacoma and the world to TCC in his popular Northwest history class in 1981. It was his twelfth year teaching history for the College. His penchant for dramatic storytelling and encyclopedic knowledge of the historic particulars of the Puget Sound made Morgan's classes one of the most popular of the College's offerings in any discipline. The wait list for his courses often rivaled the allotted enrollment.

In early March 1981, Morgan was notified of the pending cuts in the College's history program. In spite of his 12 year tenure at TCC, Morgan had the lowest seniority in the history department. Therefore, in the event of a reduction in force (aside from budget approval, no official measure had been taken by the College), his contract would not be renewed at the end of the academic year.

News of Morgan's potential dismissal spread quickly throughout the community. On March 4 a *News Tribune* headline read "Murray Morgan epoch at TCC approaching end?" Reporter Jim Erickson interviewed a distraught Morgan, who reportedly said "I don't think they realize that they've got a good history class here. I love teaching Northwest history and I have letters from students who have enjoyed the class." Morgan took the news of his potential ouster as a personal

discourtesy. “I just feel that something I’ve done quite well is simply being insulted,” he said to Erickson.<sup>122</sup>

Throughout the month of March the Murray Morgan story floated about, generating a fair bit of bad publicity for the College. To the surprise of Stevens, the response was strong and overwhelmingly negative. Letters by current and former students expressing shock and disappointment were published in local newspapers throughout the Puget Sound region. On March 18, *TNT* editorial writer Richard Stansfield wrote the scathing opinion piece, “TCC’s Blunder: letting Murray Morgan go,” in which he lambasted Larry Stevens’ administration as short-sighted and disrespectful in their treatment of a “tremendous teacher” who “as an author, commentator and historian is without peer”.<sup>123</sup> “There are some things that go far beyond budgets,” Stansfield wrote. “Murray Morgan is one. Can you name anybody who has brought distinction to TCC besides him?”<sup>124</sup>

On Tuesday, March 31<sup>st</sup>, 1981 the Daughters of the American Revolution honored Murray Morgan as Washington State’s “History Teacher of the Year.” The next day, Morgan announced that he would resign his position as history faculty at Tacoma Community College.<sup>125</sup> “The man who has lured hundreds back to college,” read an article in *The Seattle Times*, “has been told his three history classes must go.”<sup>126</sup>

President Stevens did little to ameliorate tensions when he told *The Times*, “we made a list of essential and nonessential classes, and Morgan’s classes, unfortunately, fell into the latter category. We did say he could teach one history class, if he’d also teach journalism. He does have a master’s degree in journalism from Columbia University you know.”<sup>127</sup>

Morgan respectfully declined Stevens’ offer to teach journalism.<sup>128</sup> In spite of his distinguished career as a journalist, there was only one subject that Morgan was interested in teaching. “It’s just

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<sup>122</sup> Erickson, Jim. “Murray Morgan epoch at TCC approaching end?” *The News Tribune*. 4 March 1981.

<sup>123</sup> Stansfield, Richard. “TCC’s Blunder: letting Murray Morgan go” *The News Tribune*. 18 March 1981.

<sup>124</sup> Ibid.

<sup>125</sup> Duncan, Don. “Teacher finds self honored, then out” *The Seattle Times*. 1 April 1981.

<sup>126</sup> Ibid.

<sup>127</sup> Ibid.

<sup>128</sup> Ibid.

that I'm pretty good at teaching history," Morgan told *The Times*. "I had hoped to stay another five years until mandatory retirement," Morgan told Jim Erickson. "But this is the only way I know out of a frustrating situation."<sup>129</sup> He felt that the school was devaluing history as part of an intentional shift toward vocational-technical education.<sup>130</sup>

In a manner befitting both his wry wit and expertise on the peculiarities of his beloved native city, Murray Morgan left *Seattle Times* reporters with a characteristically irreverent rejoinder: "That's Tacoma, I guess."<sup>131</sup>

### **TCC Foundation**

By 1982 it was becoming increasingly clear that the College would need to employ creative solutions to solve its budget crisis. State funding was dropping precipitously with cuts and layoffs ever-looming on the horizon. Having already survived a no confidence vote in 1979 and a media shellacking over the departure of Murray Morgan in 1981, TCC President Larry Stevens was desperate to avoid any additional cutbacks or layoffs.

"The time has come for the College to seek additional funding sources," Stevens told *The Challenge* on March 5, 1982, "so more scholarships can be offered to deserving students, special programs can be implemented, worn-out equipment can be replaced and services to the community can be maintained at the highest level of quality." By this time, TCC extension centers had launched throughout the district. Maintaining them all, while keeping the home front secure during a time of financial uncertainty, required a great deal of both human and financial capital.

To assist with this effort President Stevens tapped former TCC student Lilly Warnick. After attending TCC during the 1965 inaugural year, Lilly went on to earn advanced degrees in education from the University of Puget Sound. From 1973-78 she worked as the assistant to the superintendent of Tacoma Public Schools, where she helped launch the district's program for gifted students. In 1978 she returned

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<sup>129</sup> Erickson, Jim. "Murray Morgan resigns TCC post as 'only way out' of testy situation" *The News Tribune*. 2 April 1981.

<sup>130</sup> Duncan, Don. "Teacher finds self honored, then out" *The Seattle Times*. 1 April 1981.

<sup>131</sup> *Ibid.*

to TCC as an administrator, directing the College's federally funded Cooperative Education program.<sup>132</sup>



Lilly Warnick (TCC Archive)

Her new position was Assistant to the President for College Development. This was a new full-time gig, in which she would be tasked with “securing new and alternate funding sources from business, industry and community residents.”<sup>133</sup> She was also appointed to serve as director of the TCC Foundation, a non-profit charitable organization that had grown moribund since its inception in 1967.

The Tacoma Community College Foundation was founded in June 1967, by a small group of local business and finance executives, college administrators, philanthropists and community leaders. Its broad mandate under the original charter was “to promote public education by assisting Tacoma Community College and its faculty and students in any and all of their educational and cultural

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<sup>132</sup> “Lilly Warnick appointed as new development officer” *The Collegiate Challenge*. 5 March 1982.

<sup>133</sup> Ibid.

endeavors.”<sup>134</sup> In practical terms, the TCC Foundation is a non-profit corporation that was created to be the private fundraising arm of the College.

The Foundation provided scholarships, gifts and endowments for students and college services. Large gifts and bequests could be received, held in trust and distributed to the College by the Foundation, without excessive bureaucracy and red tape. Non-financial bequests, like real estate holdings, could be managed and resold by the Foundation, providing multiple supplemental streams of financial support.

Reviving the foundation was Warnick’s first priority. It was slow-going initially, but she eventually assembled a board of directors that included twenty-five of the district’s most influential business and community leaders. This injected a renewed sense of excitement and purpose into the organization. “I didn’t know anything about fundraising, really,” Warnick confessed during a recent oral history interview. “I had to go to a few workshops and learn how to get deep pockets to come up with a few dollars.”<sup>135</sup> It wouldn’t be long before Warnick was courting the City’s deepest pockets.

### **Tacoma Wine Festival**

For their first major fundraising effort, the Foundation wanted to make a splash. Foundation chair Fran Garen was an avid wine connoisseur who had attended wine-tasting fundraisers in other parts of the country. She proposed that the College sponsor a wine festival in Tacoma, which would have the dual benefit of raising money for the College while “featuring Washington’s growing wine industry.”<sup>136</sup>

“It was a huge undertaking,” Warnick recalled of the event, which took place on November 11, 1983, at Tacoma’s Bicentennial Pavilion. “We had an auction, we had entertainment, and then we had wine tasting from all of these wineries.” The Foundation contacted 30 Pacific Northwest vintners, who featured over 100 different wines. The event was open to the entire community at \$15 per ticket. Reports of attendance range from 650-1500 people. The festival netted \$5,000 for the Foundation scholarship fund.

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<sup>134</sup> “Community Assistance” Tacoma Community College Catalog 1969-70

<sup>135</sup> Lilly Warnick Oral History. TCC Archive. 2013.

<sup>136</sup> Kelly, Debbie. “TCC to pull cork on wine festival.” *The Collegiate Challenge*. 8 November 1984.

Warnick remembers the inaugural event was not without surprises and complications. “One of the board members, on his own, hired a photographer to do this lovely poster thing of wine and cheese. It was just first class,” she said. “But they sent us a bill for 3000 dollars!” Lilly was shocked when she received the bill for a poster of cheese and wine, which she had framed and hung in her office as a reminder of the importance of financial oversight.

The Foundation would learn from their missteps and would double their profits the follow year. In time the Tacoma Wine Festival evolved into the Tacoma Wine Classic, which continues to be the TCC Foundation’s marquee fundraising event. It is now a high-end affair that courts big money donations from the district’s business and philanthropic elite. While the egalitarian ethos of a jam-packed festival has been replaced by a more refined and intimate night out, the basic premise of combining local businesses with generous donors (along with a liberal sprinkling of local wine) remains unchanged since 1983.



TCC Foundation Board Members at the first Tacoma Wine Classic (TCC Archive)

### **First Generation**

Lilly Warnick’s proudest accomplishment during her time with the TCC Foundation was the implementation of the First Generation

Scholarship Program. “That really made a hit with the community,” she said of the program that is still in operation at the time of this writing. “There were so many people—there are so many people—in our community who had been first-generation students,” said Lilly, who was herself a first generation student. “My parents were immigrants and came here with two boys from Lithuania. And I was born in Canada and came to the United States.”

“We really raised a lot of money,” she said. “It was one of those missions that just sort of took care of itself. It didn't need a lot of marketing. It just rang the bell, right away. We had 100 applications that first year and selected 20 students. It was a huge success.” As citizens of a working-class town, Tacomans seemed particularly responsive to the idea of allowing students a chance to achieve greater opportunity than their parents. It was consistent with the energy and enthusiasm surrounding the establishment of a community college in Tacoma. The idea that new ladders into the skilled workforce were being raised in this city of crumbling smokestacks and closing factories was widely embraced. It is an idea that retains its appeal today. And the TCC Foundation continues to inspire individuals and organizations who believe that the idea is an exceedingly worthy investment.

## Chapter 7: Management by Walking Around

### Mel Lindbloom

On July 30, 1982 Larry Stevens announced that he would be resigning his position as President of Tacoma Community College. After seven years of serving at the College's chief executive, Stevens notified the Board of Trustees that he was accepting the position of Chancellor of the Saddleback Community College District, in Orange County, CA. In spite of his rocky tenure as president of the College, Stevens insisted that his decision to leave was strictly a career decision. "The past seven years have been a most rewarding and gratifying chapter in my life," Stevens said in a press release. "Now, my wife, Pamela, and I are looking forward to this opportunity to serve an exciting and growing multi-campus college district in a different setting."<sup>137</sup>

It took the TCC Board of Trustees six weeks to select an interim successor after Stevens' announcement. Several board members felt that it was important to hire from within, choosing a caretaker leader who was already familiar with the College's culture and climate. Others felt that bringing in an outside perspective could provide critical objectivity as well as an understanding of the limited scope of the position. Still others felt that the Board should outsource the entire selection process to a third-party consultant. In the end a five-person screening committee was formed, including a single representative from each of TCC's invested parties: faculty, classified staff, the Board of Trustees, administration and, of course, the students.

The screening committee reviewed twelve applicants, interviewed five, and recommended three finalists to the Trustees. On September 10, 1982 it was announced that Dr. Melvin Lindbloom accepted a ten-month appointment as interim president of Tacoma Community College.<sup>138</sup>

In many ways Mel Lindbloom was the ideal candidate for such a position. From 1964 until his retirement in 1980, Lindbloom served as the first president of Green River Community College (GRCC was approved during the same 1963 legislative session as TCC).

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<sup>137</sup> Small, Dan. "Dr. Larry Stevens accepts position as Saddleback Community College District Chancellor" News Release. 30 July 1982.

<sup>138</sup> Bartley, Nancy "Lindbloom to head TCC" *Tacoma News Tribune*. 10 Sept 1982.

Lindbloom was a distinguished early proponent of the regional community college system. His long-held working relationships with college founders like Angelo Giaudrone, John Terrey and Tom Ford predated the founding of both schools. He had a comprehensive understanding of the Washington state community college system, and he was deeply familiar with the multitude of internal and external pressures facing these unique institutions.

Unlike the College's previous interim chief executive, Bob Rhule, Lindbloom was not interested in a long-term presidency at TCC (a prerequisite for the position, set by the Trustees). He was a recent retiree, having spent the previous 30 years in a distinguished career as an educator and academic administrator. In addition to the GRCC presidency, he was a former president of the Washington Association of Community Colleges. He was also the first community college representative to the Council for Higher Education, serving at the behest of Governor Dan Evans.<sup>139</sup> Having already achieved the bulk of his professional ambitions, Lindbloom was more akin to the grizzled vet in a cop movie, coming out of retirement to do one last job.

Lindbloom told the *News Tribune* that, within a week, he had to switch his primary focus from improving his golf swing to balancing the budget of a community college in the midst of unprecedented cuts. "I thought (the state-funding situation) was bad when I was president," Mel told reporters.<sup>140</sup> He was thankful that the College was already operating under austerity, with plans for contingency cuts, should the legislature tighten the screws. This was a testament to the extensive planning prowess of Larry Stevens. However, he was prepared to draw upon his considerable experience and expertise to faithfully keep the ship afloat until a suitable successor to Larry Stevens could be found.

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<sup>139</sup> Ibid.

<sup>140</sup> Ibid.



Interim President Mel Lindbloom (TCC Archive)

The budget situation at TCC in the early 1980s was dire. Public education institutions throughout the country were still reeling from the effects of a national recession. Two-year colleges in particular were viewed by some legislators as ancillary and nonessential, and they often bore the brunt of discretionary spending cuts. Between 1981 and 1983 the College lost 18 percent of its operating budget. Academic and vocational programs were being dropped to maintain funding of the most critical college operations. To his credit, Larry Stevens' administration managed to avoid widespread faculty and staff layoffs, but the specter of draconian cuts was ever-looming. In an exit interview with *The News Tribune*, Stevens tried to put a positive spin on the crunch, calling TCC "one of the most efficient colleges in the state." He emphasized the College's ability to survive on dwindling funds, while glossing over the internal havoc that the budget crunch caused. "We serve more students per dollar of state funds than any other community college," Stevens said.

While the chief commission of an interim president is to more or less maintain the status quo during transitional times, it would be inaccurate to suggest that the role is a passive one. Throughout his ten-month tenure, Lindbloom was quite active as the principle

steward of the College's mission. He was a tenacious legislative advocate, often using his considerable experience and influence to ensure that the College had a voice in Olympia. When the 1983 legislature released a budget proposal that included no new tax funding for higher education, Lindbloom testified before the Senate Ways and Means Committee, calling the proposal a "disaster". Throughout his brief service as interim president, Lindbloom demonstrated why he had been such a powerful asset in the fight to establish the community college system in the Puget Sound Region.

### **Carl Opgaard: Eight-Week Wonder**

During the summer of 1946, less than a year after the end of the Second World War, 17-year-old Carlton Opgaard took his newly minted teaching certificate to Fingal, North Dakota, and set up shop in the one-room country schoolhouse. In addition to teaching grades 1-8, Carl, as he was known among friends and colleagues alike, was also the school counselor, janitor and cook.<sup>141</sup>

"We were eight-week wonders," said Opgaard, during a 2013 oral history interview. This was the nickname given to the battalion of public educators trained to quickly fill an increasing demand for teachers in the postwar Midwest. After eight weeks of summer training at Valley City State Teacher's College, Carl found himself with a teaching certificate, a brand new career and a starting salary of \$150 per month. For a 17-year-old kid in rural North Dakota, this was not a bad hand.

The years between Opgaard's tenure in the Norma Township schoolhouse and his arrival at Tacoma Community College could fill an additional narrative volume. He was the editor of his college newspaper, an amateur actor, dishwasher, homecoming king, retail clerk and furnace attendant.<sup>142</sup> In 1952 he studied Norwegian literature as a Fulbright Scholar at the University of Oslo.<sup>143</sup> He served in the U.S. Army, where he "tested ejection seats in tanks."<sup>144</sup>

After leaving the Army he was hired "sight unseen" to teach grade six in Port Angeles, WA. From here he worked his way up the ladder of academic administration in Washington public schools as a

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<sup>141</sup> Small, Dan. "From Eight Week Wonder to College President ... the career story of Carleton M. Opgaard" 2014.

<sup>142</sup> Opgaard, Carl. "From There to Here" n.d.

<sup>143</sup> Ibid.

<sup>144</sup> Ibid.

teacher, counselor, vice-principal and then principal. In 1969 he relocated with his wife, Phyllis, to Nanaimo, British Columbia on Vancouver Island, where he served as the founding president of Malaspina College, a position he would hold for nine years, before returning to the Midwest to take the helm of Dakota State College in Madison, South Dakota.

It was his wealth of experience and demonstrated ability to grow college institutions that separated Carl Opgaard from the other presidential applicants. Alan Vandeventer was chair of the Board of Trustees that selected Opgaard from the candidate pool, on April 28, 1983. He said that Opgaard's "special talent for expanding occupational/vocational programs" was a deciding factor during the selection process.<sup>145</sup> During his five-year stint as president of Dakota State, enrollment grew by nearly 40 percent.<sup>146</sup>

Opgaard was excited to return to the Northwest and was looking forward to returning to work in a community college. "I am impressed with the potential of Tacoma Community College," Opgaard said in an announcement press release. Like all of TCC's presidents, he was deeply committed to the unique mission of the community college. "A community college is able to develop its programs to fit the needs of the community," Opgaard said in an early interview. "Four year institutions can't do that as easily."

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<sup>145</sup> Small, Dan. "Dr. Carlton Opgaard Named President of Tacoma Community College" News Release. 28 April 1983

<sup>146</sup> Opgaard, Carl. "From There to Here" n.d.



President Carl Opgaard (TCC Archive)

### **M.B.W.A.**

“I think it would be rather presumptuous of me to make any kind of change until I’ve [had a chance] to talk to people and see how things are being done,” Carl Opgaard said in his first interview by *Challenge* reporter Keri Siler.<sup>147</sup> In the coming weeks and months, the campus community would come to learn just how committed Opgaard was to the principle of talking to people before making changes. This was not simply a professional courtesy; it was a philosophical imperative that would come to define both the administration and legacy of TCC’s third president.

In terms of temperament and administrative style, President Opgaard was the near-perfect opposite of Larry Stevens. While Stevens was accused of being austere and aloof, Opgaard was empathic and approachable. Stevens was self-serious and authoritative; Opgaard was self-effacing and good-humored. (In a short biography written at the time of his retirement, he claimed he

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<sup>147</sup> Siler, K. “Opgaard named as TCC president by board” *The Collegiate Challenge*. 13 May 1983.

“graduated in the top ten of his class from a high school in Fort Ransom, with a class of nine.”) Stevens was a master of long-range planning and assessment, and Opgaard was a firm believer in flexibility and quickly meeting challenges as they arose.

“He used to practice management by walking around – M.B.W.A.” said Dan Small, recalling Opgaard’s presidential demeanor. Opgaard took the open door policy a step further, frequently walking the campus grounds, dropping in on faculty, staff and students for a casual chat. Through genuine interaction on the “ground level,” he was able to forge strong relationships among the staff and faculty, enabling him to make accurate, real-time assessments of the questions, concerns and needs of the campus community.

To emphasize Opgaard’s casual demeanor and knack for listening is not to suggest that he was a person who preferred discussion and deliberation over action. In fact, shortly after his arrival at TCC, he would have the opportunity to demonstrate his unique brand of thoughtful innovation and his capacity for decisive action.

## **SPRUCE**

As previously discussed, the economy of Washington State was significantly injured by the global recession of the early 1980s. Even as the United States began to rebound in early 1983, the Evergreen State lagged behind with a 13.3 percent unemployment rate.<sup>148</sup> And lagging behind the state average was Tacoma-Pierce County, which peaked at 13.8 percent.<sup>149</sup>

The effects of long-term unemployment on individuals and communities can be vast and debilitating. Aside from the obvious economic consequences of income loss, a community that lacks employment prospects can experience higher crime rates, deteriorating public health (both physical and mental), stunted educational progress and a decrease in earning potential.<sup>150</sup> Opgaard recognized the severity of this crisis immediately. Shortly after his arrival in July 1983, he set about the task of identifying the role that TCC could play in the local economic recovery.

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<sup>148</sup> Small, Dan, Mitchell, Susan. “Washington State’s Economic Crisis” 1985.

<sup>149</sup> Ibid.

<sup>150</sup> Nichols, A. Mitchell, J. & Linder, S. “Consequences of Long-Term Unemployment” *Urban Institute*. 2013.

On December 13, 1983, President Opgaard presented a simple and innovative strategy to the Board of Trustees. Each quarter, after registration, there inevitably remained a handful of vacant seats in a number of classes. Under the existing system, those empty seats would go unfilled as a matter of course. Opgaard's proposal was "to fill those empty seats with low-income, unemployed persons by waiving their tuition and fees."<sup>151</sup>

This proposed program would assist the community's long-term unemployed by providing them not only with job skills, but with a renewed sense of self-esteem and belief in their future prospects. Most importantly, it would do so in a way that would not only be completely free in terms of funding, but would actually provide a more efficient use of current college.<sup>152</sup> It was the ultimate win/win. Opgaard's proposal was met with enthusiasm by the Board.

Unfortunately, this simple proposal was complicated by legislative particulars. Upon inquiry to Robert Jenson, Washington's Assistant Attorney General, Opgaard and the Board were informed that the College lacked the legal authority to establish a waiver program for unemployed persons. In spite of its prima facie benefit and utter lack of downside, state law was (and still is) very specific regarding which groups and individuals were eligible for fee waivers for state supported educational programs. The long term unemployed were not among them.

Instead of accepting defeat, Opgaard decided to press forward. If state law didn't allow waivers for long-term unemployed, then the law needed to be changed.

Time was not on Carl Opgaard's side. It was already mid-December, and, to be considered during the upcoming session, legislation would need to be drafted, sponsored and introduced in January 1984.<sup>153</sup> Opgaard describes this rush to action in the following excerpt from a brief historic account of this effort, drafted by Dan Small and Susan Mitchell in 1985:

"I started by contacting many social service agency representatives in the Tacoma area," Opgaard relates. "I asked them 'is this a good idea, and would you be willing to help us by working on a task force to set up program criteria?' They

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<sup>151</sup> Small, Dan, Mitchell, Susan. "Innovative Program for the Unemployed" 1985.

<sup>152</sup> Ibid.

<sup>153</sup> Ibid.

were supportive and soon nearly a dozen agencies were working with us to form the program's foundation. We knew their expertise and support was vital to the program's success."

"I wrote all 21 state legislators in our county and talked with most of them on the phone. They overwhelmingly supported the idea. After all, it was an easy way to meet a serious social need at no additional cost to taxpayers."<sup>154</sup>

The proposed legislation quickly found sponsors in Rep. Carolyn Powers of Port Orchard and Senator Marc Gaspard of Sumner. "The idea caught on like wildfire," Opgaard said. Powers, Gaspard (who was Chairman of the Senate Education Committee) and Opgaard speedily drafted legislation. Alan Vandever testified alongside Opgaard in front of the Education Committee. "After that the bills moved swiftly through each legislative body and were almost unanimously endorsed. Clearly this simple idea had big appeal."<sup>155</sup>

The new legislation was signed by Governor John Spellman in March 1984. State community colleges were now legally permitted to offer tuition waivers to assist the long-term unemployed. By endeavoring to better serve the Tacoma community, Opgaard and his associates helped create a law that would benefit colleges throughout the state. TCC wasted no time implementing the new SPRUCE program (an unwieldy acronym that stands for "Space available to Respond to the Unemployed through College Education"), enrolling 14 students in the upcoming spring quarter.<sup>156</sup>

One of the program's first enrollees was a woman named Chris Walker. Walker had been unemployed and broke, with no career prospects, for a year, when she heard about the SPRUCE program. "When I first came (to TCC), my self-esteem was non-existent," Walker said during a 1985 interview. During her first quarter as a SPRUCE student, she earned a 4.0 GPA and got a work-study job as a peer counselor, assisting students who found themselves in a similar position.

Walker was living proof that the system worked. The SPRUCE program was proof that the system, with a bit of determination and a

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<sup>154</sup> Ibid.

<sup>155</sup> Ibid.

<sup>156</sup> Butterfield, Nancy. "Fresh start: College program gives unemployed a boost" *the News Tribune*. 13 August 1984.

lot of cooperation, could be improved to better fulfill its mandate to the community. President Opgaard saw an unmet need, rallied the community and led the charge to meet it. This would be a hallmark of his presidency.

## **TACID**

On October 16, 1980, Dr. Barbara Wesley, Chair of TCC's Board of Trustees, signed an historic lease agreement with the newly-formed Tacoma Area Coalition of Individuals with Disabilities, or TACID. As part of the deal, the College agreed to lease two acres of land to the City of Tacoma, "for construction of a service center for the handicapped" at the price of \$1.00 a year for 25 years.<sup>157</sup> This largely unheralded deal was the result of months of advocacy, investigation and organization by Tacoma's disabled community, under the leadership of Sue Batali, a tireless Mount Tahoma High School teacher.

Sue Batali was the first instructor for the hearing impaired in the Tacoma Public School District.<sup>158</sup> In her advocacy work for the local deaf community, Batali observed that factious local disability groups were all struggling for proper funding and recognition. Various organizations represented local blind and deaf, people with multiple sclerosis and the developmentally disabled. When Washington voters approved Referendum 37 in 1979, \$25 million in funds were made available for the construction of facilities for persons with disabilities. Instead of competing for Tacoma's \$1 million allotment, Batali led an effort to merge the disparate groups under one umbrella. Thus was born the Tacoma Area Coalition of Individuals with Disabilities.

This organization was unique in that it was much more than an advocacy group for persons with disabilities. It was certainly that, but it was (and still is) also organized and operated *by* persons with disabilities. The organization's original by-laws provided that two-thirds of TACID's 20-member board be persons with disabilities. Everything from programs and services, to the design of the facility would come directly from the community.

Early in the planning process, TACID received a great deal of support from the College. After evaluating the manifold benefits of better service to Tacoma's disabled community, the Trustees, at the

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<sup>157</sup> TCC Board of Trustees Resolution 80-20

<sup>158</sup> "Distinguished Alumni 2012" *Bell Today*. Fall 2012.

behest of President Larry Stevens quickly approved the request. Ron Magden along with Dean of Planning and Operations, Don Gangnes and business instructor, David Hendrickson were all given special mention, along with President Stevens, for their support in bringing a multi-use disability services facility to the City of Tacoma.<sup>159</sup>

The TACID building was dedicated on April 27, 1984. Attending the ceremony was the chair of TACID's board of directors, a 72-year-old Angelo Giaudrone. The former superintendent of Tacoma Public Schools, who had led the effort to bring a community college to Tacoma, was well-regarded as a longtime advocate of individuals with disabilities. His work toward normalizing disabled individuals in Tacoma schools in the 1950s and 60s put Tacoma "way out in front of every school district in the state," according to Ron Magden. Now Giaudrone, who was partially deaf, was helping to pioneer another lasting institution in service of Tacoma's underserved.

The facility itself was designed by TACID members working with architect Ilmar Reinvald. "It was frustrating at times, but you always came away with a smile," Reinvald told the *Seattle Post-Intelligencer*. He noted the challenges of seeking equal input from all the involved parties, where "the blind can't communicate with the deaf, and vice-versa."<sup>160</sup> (This was six years prior to the Americans with Disabilities Act, and the establishment of a refined set of communication practices between groups of people with multiple disabilities). The difficult planning sessions paid off with the establishment of a truly unique center, founded on the principles of peer-support, community service and accessibility advocacy.

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<sup>159</sup> Batali, Sue. [Letter to Larry Stevens] 23 October 1980

<sup>160</sup> Glover, Darrell. "Disabled expecting to help each other at new center in Tacoma." *Seattle Post-Intelligencer*. 26 April 1984.



TACID (TCC Archive)

For TCC, the indirect benefits of TACID were far-reaching. By providing proximal services for individuals with disabilities, the College could more effectively fulfill its mission of service to the entire Tacoma-Pierce County community. TACID assisted their patrons with enrollment and access to college services, and they helped the College provide better accessibility to disabled students. Nursing and human services students found new opportunities for training and internships, and TACID gained access to a large pool of enthusiastic college volunteers, on which their organization relied. These, along with a myriad of additional societal and economic benefits associated with the normalization and empowerment of individuals with disabilities would ensure that the relationship between TCC and TACID would only strengthen over time.

### **Transit**

Another collaborative project that would prove to be beneficial and enduring was the public transit center agreement between TCC and Pierce Transit. Shortly after their founding in 1979, the Pierce County Public Transportation Benefit Area Corporation approached TCC President Larry Stevens and the Board of Trustees with the request to lease three acres of land on the corner of South 19<sup>th</sup> and Mildred to launch an experimental transit center. President Stevens

advocated heavily in favor of this deal, immediately recognizing the prospective benefits of building a major public transit hub right at the doorstep of the College.

When it came time to renegotiate the lease agreement in October 1983, Pierce Transit expressed an interest in installing a more permanent, fully-developed transit center at the current location. Designs for an expanded 12-station center, to be constructed at no cost to the College, were presented to Carl Opgaard and the Board of Trustees. Don Gangnes worked closely with representatives from Pierce Transit to forge a deal that was very similar to the TACID agreement. When all was said and done, TCC offered Pierce Transit a 30-year lease agreement, at the cost of \$1 per year.<sup>161</sup>

In the decades since the signing of this agreement, the TCC Transit Center has become a critical node in the regional public transportation system. It serves more passengers per day than any other center in Pierce County. Not only does it transport countless students, staff and faculty to and from the College campus, it also provides critical transit links to Tacoma's central business district, Gig Harbor across the Tacoma Narrows Bridge and Tacoma's south adjacent city of Lakewood. During a time when the College district was on the precipice of a rapid population influx, the TCC Transit Center was critical. For prospective students who lacked reliable transportation or were unable to drive to campus for any number of reasons, this new center literally meant a shot at a college education.

### **Opgaard's Legacy**

When a sitting president retires, there is always an opportunity for candid reflection. This is true in both business and politics. The chief executive and lead administrator holds a particularly unique vantage point. Exit interviews often offer a chance to make a case for a legacy and provide a prescient and candid view of the institution's future. In 1974 Tom Ford took the opportunity to reflect on the maturation of TCC since its inception under the Tacoma School District and the significant progress made in serving minority and disadvantaged students. When Larry Stevens resigned in 1982, he praised TCC's community service program and satellite expansion efforts, increasing the College's ability to directly serve the needs of a

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<sup>161</sup> "Executive Summary: Pierce Transit Lease and Interlocal Agreement", *Minutes of the Board of Trustees*. 20 Oct 1983.

community struggling under the weight of recession. He also warned of the increasing legislative apathy with regard to community colleges.<sup>162</sup>

When Carl Opgaard retired as TCC President in January 1990, he reflected on the accomplishments of and challenges to the College within the community. He praised the improvements in assessment and advising, which allowed the College to focus more clearly on the individual needs and requirements of the students. In a post-graduation survey of TCC's Class of 1990-91, an impressive 88 percent of student said that their advisors were "an active source of guidance and information."<sup>163</sup>

He also felt that the College had faithfully heeded the exhortation of President Stevens, making significant inroads with state legislators. Opgaard's record as an advocate in Olympia was critical for college operations and advancement during the 1980s. His fight to establish the SPRUCE program was testament to both his administrative creativity and legislative acumen. He set a new standard for cooperative and bold leadership.

"He came at a time when the College needed him," said former TCC librarian Lorraine "Hildy" Hildebrand. "He pulled the College out of a slump. He was very humane. You immediately became friends with him."<sup>164</sup>

In 2002, when an ASTCC-funded addition was made to the student center, it was officially renamed the Opgaard Student Center, in honor of the man who made it his mission to connect with students and faculty on a human level. In a fitting tribute, the Opgaard Center became the new convergence point on campus, where the College's various student organizations could gather and practice the human-level interaction modelled by its namesake.

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<sup>162</sup> Bartley, Nancy. "Stormy TCC Tenure Ending" *The News Tribune*. 6 September 1982. B-14.

<sup>163</sup> Taylor, Kathe. "Final Report Tacoma Community College Survey of Students Graduating in 1990-91 from Degree Programs"

<sup>164</sup> "What's in a name: Opgaard Student Center" *Tacomacc.edu*

## Chapter 8: Focus on the Future

### Campus Tech

Long before the College had any proper computer labs, TCC mathematics instructor Ed Zimmerman had his students programming computers. “Zimmerman worked out a deal with WSU for access to their mainframe computer,” recalled Gary Sigmen, who was hired at the same time as Zimmerman, in the spring of 1968 during the post-Tacoma School District hiring spree. “He had a couple of little [terminals] that he would hook up to an acoustic coupler –a device that hooks to a phone line and another separate device that hooks into your computer.”

To hear Sigmen or Zimmerman talk about campus technology might sound like someone describing turn of the century surgical procedure, but it wasn’t that long ago. In less than 30 years the College –and the entire world– went from acoustic couplers to high speed Internet, and Zimmerman and Sigmen witnessed the entire progression.

TCC has always done well at keeping pace with emerging technologies. Even during times of financial hardship, the College kept a keen eye on the rapidly changing tech landscape. Much of this was due to necessity. To maintain mutually beneficial relationships with local business and industry, it was critical that the College operated on or near the vanguard of emerging business technology.

The first personal computer course at TCC was offered during autumn quarter in 1978. “Programming Personal Computers” was taught by James Harrison, a senior computer analyst at Weyerhaeuser.<sup>165</sup> Harrison’s non-credit, continuing education course taught students the basics of computer organization and operations. For \$23, students caught a first glimpse of the personal computer revolution.

In 1982, nestled somewhere between theater advertisements for *Blade Runner* and *Star Trek II*, *The Challenge* announced that TCC was making strides toward a techno-utopian future of its own. Student Activities was installing a “student equipment center” to be furnished with two IMB Selectric Series typewriters and one new Apple II personal computer. The machine was available upon request for

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<sup>165</sup> “Programming Personal Computers” News Release. 25 August, 1978.

students who were interested in typing a term paper or fiddling around with some BASIC programming.

As computer and information technology became increasingly ubiquitous in the workplace throughout the 1980s, it was incumbent upon the College to provide students, faculty and staff with the requisite tools and training necessary to meet these new demands.

### **Focus on the Future**

If the economic recession of early 1980s exposed the vulnerabilities of the Puget Sound's old economy, the home computer boom that followed in the wake of recovery revealed the promise and expectancy of vibrant new tech markets. Even as state unemployment was reaching unprecedented highs, between 1979 and 1983, the burgeoning "advanced technology" sector experienced a 28 percent employment increase.<sup>166</sup> As our lumber mills and copper smelters stumbled, transformative forces were quietly building a brand-new industry that, in short time, would grow to be equally critical to the local economy. Tacoma Community College, aware of this shift, was eager to meet emerging demand.

In 1981, Gary Sigmen, along with Executive Dean for Educational Services (and former IBM employee), David Habura, struck a deal with a California-based tech company called Alpha Microsystems. Alpha Micro co-founder and CEO, Robert Hitchcock, had relocated to the Tacoma area, and he was looking for a place to test the company's new computer systems. Through a joint venture with the TCC, Alpha Micro brought dozens of new computers to campus, along with dedicated service personnel, for free or reduced charge, in a partnership that would persist throughout the 1980s. According to Dan Small, "this put the College, very early, on the leading edge of computer technology."

The TCC Catalog for 1983-1985 offers a poignant illustration of this pivot toward technology. Even the cover, which in years past typically featured some combination of evergreen trees and Mt. Rainier, was an austere perspective grid reminiscent of the technolandsapes seen in the 1982 science fiction film *Tron*, in which a software engineer is transported into a computer world. Inside the catalog are pictures of students happily plugging away at early-model

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<sup>166</sup> Boswell, Sharon, McConaghy, Lorraine. "A silicon forest grows" *Seattle Times*. 1 December 1996.

microcomputers, and a new introduction encourages prospective students to prepare for the challenges of the future. While some of this language is clearly marketing-speak, it is useful for gauging the long-term vision and intention of the institution:

Prepare for the future. Tacoma Community College can help you meet the demands of a rapidly changing world! It's a world where jobs are constantly changing –adjusting to new technologies—a world where jobs that used to be secure don't exist anymore and tomorrow's jobs have yet to be defined.

Programs at Tacoma Community College offer students the latest technology from state-of-the-art computer equipment and programming to the most up-to-date science laboratories and health equipment. TCC also has newly modernized art and music facilities –some of the best in the northwest.<sup>167</sup>



Student and Instructor and Alpha Micro PC (TCC Archive)

On the weekend of February 25, 1983 TCC hosted “Compufair ’83.” “Computers have something for everyone,” declared *Challenge* reporter Gwendolyn McAdams. The trade fair showcased the latest in home computer technology. Representatives from IBM, Apple, Commodore, Atari Texas Instruments and many others crowded into

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<sup>167</sup> TCC Catalog 1983-85

Building 18, Room 8.<sup>168</sup> English instructor Frank Weihs attempted to convince skeptical students and faculty that “computer assisted instruction” was the way of the future.

By March 1989 the path ahead was clear. Computers were integrated into the College’s administrative services, and word processing skills were being taught to elementary school students throughout the district. Gary Sigmen, who had previously been working as head of computer services and off-campus sites, was promoted to Director of Information Systems. This was a new position and a new department, created to oversee all of the College’s administrative data processing and computer services.

The department of Information Systems would act as the brain trust for TCC’s emerging IT infrastructure. Such a department would prove to be a vital institution, as computer and information technology continued its exponential growth during the years that followed. And in January 1990 this critical new department moved into a new home.

While the complete history of TCC’s technological progression is perhaps best measured as a series of incremental improvements, stretching over years and decades, the opening of the TCC Computer Center can be seen as something of a watershed moment. Built with \$2.5 million in capital funding from the State Board for Community College Education, this 15,000 square-foot building marked the beginning of a new technological epoch for the College.

It was the first building on campus to eschew the Columbia River basalt facades and mansard-style roofs that served as the College’s unifying design aesthetic. This new building had a starkly utilitarian and futuristic concrete design, vaguely reminiscent of a military compound or sci-fi research facility. This was intentional on the part of Sigmen, who had a hand in the design and planning of the new facility. “The architects asked me if we wanted to clad the exterior in field stone to make it look like other buildings, and I said, ‘hell no! We’ve got enough of those, thank you!’”

In addition to housing the new department of Information Systems, the TCC Computer Center served as a hub for computer education and learning-support services. New labs facilitated the addition of 80 new computers for student use. Two new multimedia

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<sup>168</sup> McAdams, Gwendolyn. “‘Compufair’ to come to TCC” *The Collegiate Challenge*. 18 Feb 1983.

classrooms, each equipped with large screen audio-video systems, allowed for a more robust set of instructional options. And a “computer-equipped classroom” containing 32 PC workstations offered a prescient view of the computer-aided learning environments of the future. Local area network (LAN) technology tied everything together, thus beginning a project that would eventually see 70 miles of underground cable installed on campus. This new IT infrastructure would be essential during the commencement of the Internet boom looming just a few years over the horizon.



TCC Computer Center Grand Opening Brochure (TCC Archive)

### **Ray Needham**

In early 1990, Ray Needham was chosen by the Board of Trustees as the next President of Tacoma Community College. Needham was another veteran of the community college movement in Washington State. When Mel Lindbloom joined Green River Community College as its founding president in 1965, Needham was his dean of instruction. A Whatcom County farm boy to his core, he paid his way through Washington State University by working on a commercial fishing boat and selling livestock in the summer. He captained the WSU wrestling team while earning a degree in agricultural education. After obtaining advanced degrees in

educational administration and sociology, Needham made an enthusiastic transition into two-year college leadership. He went on to build a career of founding and transforming community colleges.

As the first dean of instruction at Auburn, Washington's first community college, Needham and Lindbloom worked closely with TCC founders Angelo Giardrone, Tom Ford and John Terrey. Cobelligerents in the fight to bring these much needed institutions to their respective towns (GRCC is about 25 miles northeast of TCC), these men developed a comradeship and spirit of cooperation that was vital during the early years.

In 1970 Needham became president of the fledgling Linn-Benton Community College in Albany, Oregon. In the ten years that followed, he led the effort to transform what was essentially a series of programs offered at various rental locations throughout the district, into an established institution with thriving academic programs. His talent for growing colleges, and his demonstrated commitment to civic engagement earned him notoriety at both the state and national levels.

Before returning to the Washington as the successor to Carl Opgaard at Tacoma Community College, Needham was president of Guilford Technical Community College in Jamestown, North Carolina. When he arrived at Guilford in 1980, the school was known as Guilford Technical Institute. Needham waged a long and perilous legislative campaign to incorporate the school into North Carolina's community college system. In 1982, when the North Carolina Board of Community Colleges rejected Needham's first application, he reportedly contacted over 1,000 local businesses and community organizations, in order to rally support in favor of the College.<sup>169</sup> "I've never taken 'no' for an answer," said Needham.<sup>170</sup> In 1983, the state board said "yes" to Ray Needham.

Needham's leadership philosophy was very similar to the personable, open and collaborative style of Carl Opgaard, which made for a smooth transition. He spent a great deal of time and effort fostering a "team-based" culture, empowering and presiding over a broad constellation of campus leaders. "I really believe in people; I really listen to people," Needham said, during an exit interview in 1997. "I believe in giving people the chance to move out and do

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<sup>169</sup> Barkley, Meredith. "10 Years of growth at GTCC" *News & Record*. 14 May 1990

<sup>170</sup>

things on their own.” Throughout his tenure, Needham would be recognized for his sincere engagement of staff and faculty.

To ensure an easy relationship between faculty and administration, Needham worked closely with longtime TCC faculty and administrator Bob Thaden. Thaden, who taught English as well as a popular course on critical thinking, was a member of the College’s old guard. He joined TCC as a financial aid officer in 1966, but the man who once described himself as “too much of a ham” to stay out of the classroom quickly made the transition to a faculty position.<sup>171</sup> Elected president of TCCFT Local 2196 in January 1989—a position he would hold for 15 years—Bob Thaden was held in high esteem by students, staff and faculty alike for his mentorship and creative, open approach to problem solving, both in and out of the classroom. He would find a kindred spirit in Needham, who shared his sympathetic ear and pleasant disposition.



President Ray Needham (TCC Archive)

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<sup>171</sup> “Faculty Profile: Bob Thaden” *TCC Class Schedule - Fall 1988*.1988.

## A New Mission

One of Needham's first major initiatives would be a collaborative redrafting of the College's mission statement. This was done as part of a broad reevaluation of college operations, in regard to strategic planning and assessment.<sup>172</sup> In the 25 years between 1965 and 1990, both the College and the community had changed dramatically. Needham felt strongly that a top-to-bottom evaluation of the College's purpose, goals and strategy was required, as TCC rounded the corner into the 21<sup>st</sup> century.

In a manner similar to Larry Stevens' Long Term Planning Commission, Needham assembled a representative group of invested parties to conduct a comprehensive data collection and assessment project. Faculty, staff, students and community members all contributed to this effort. Even retired TCC President Carl Opgaard was hired to leverage his considerable clout in Tacoma's political and business communities. Opgaard personally interviewed 51 of Tacoma's most influential business and opinion leaders. In meetings with business magnates, politicians, labor and health care leadership, media professionals and the heads of civil and minority advocacy groups, he applied his unique brand of genuine community building. He asked them how they felt about the College and how they would like the College to better serve their interests.

The first item produced by this commission was a redrafting of the College's mission statement, which had grown vague and nondescript over the years. The statement itself was nothing revolutionary, but the decision to put the mission of the College at the forefront of all planning, promotion and project management was a new initiative that would endure beyond the tenure of Ray Needham. The Needham-era mission statement was as follows:

Tacoma Community College shall provide quality educational programs in a dynamic learning environment. The College shall be accessible, comprehensive and flexible, and shall address the personal, professional and social needs of its diverse community.<sup>173</sup>

As far as mission statements go, perhaps it was fairly standard. What is noteworthy is the expressed commitment to dynamism and

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<sup>172</sup> "Planning for the Future." 1994.

<sup>173</sup> Ibid.

flexibility and the explicit recognition of the values of accessibility and diversity. Following the statement was a list of nine strategic imperatives, by which the College would accomplish their stated mission. These covered principles of affordability, academic excellence, community interdependence, cultural diversity and human dignity.

## The 90s

Needham took the helm at Tacoma Community College in July 1990. Economically speaking, this was a good year for Tacoma. After a lurching recovery from the early '80s recession, the city was experiencing rapid economic growth. Unemployment was at 4.1 percent, below both the state and national rates, and job growth continued, in spite of the national recession of 1990-91.<sup>174</sup> Downtown Tacoma, which had suffered a long decline in the wake of mid-20th century suburbanization, was experiencing a nascent revival. The University of Washington opened a Downtown Tacoma extension in the autumn of 1990, and a dedicated group of civic and business leaders were laying the groundwork for a series of construction and renovation projects that would inject new life into the city over the course of the decade.<sup>175</sup>

While the economic picture during the early 90s was relatively positive, persistent social and environmental issues continued to stigmatize Tacoma as a violent and dangerous place. Tacoma's Hilltop neighborhood gained national notoriety during the late 80s and early 90s as a hotbed of drug-related violence. The urban crack epidemic of the 1980s fueled a migration of violent, organized street gangs—many from as far as Southern California—into the City. Business investment in downtown policing “cleaned out” Tacoma's reviving central business district, shifting the escalating tide of drug violence to the Hilltop neighborhood.<sup>176</sup> The rash of gang murders, drive-by shootings, open-air drug dealing and general chaos overwhelmed police, who responded with heavy-handed tactics, fueling a vicious cycle of violence, fear, mistrust and civil unrest. Tensions boiled over on September 23, 1989, when an anti-drug block

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<sup>174</sup> Bureau of Labor Statistics

<sup>175</sup> Johnson, Blaine. “What Holds Back Tacoma's Economic Development?” *Exit133.com*

<sup>176</sup> Featherstone, Eric. “Hilltop lacks essential control.” *The Collegiate Challenge*. 6 November 1989.

party ended in a shootout between local Army Rangers and local drug dealers in what came to be known as the “Ash Street Shootout.” In a short time the problems on the Hilltop became inextricably linked with the regional reputation of the City.

Across town at Tacoma Community College, the scene was markedly different. Apart from the occasional street-corner drug bust on Twelfth and Mildred and a handful of car stereo thefts in the student lots, crime and gang violence were not a significant problem.<sup>177</sup> What the campus community struggled with was how to make a positive contribution to the very serious problems facing the larger community.

Conversations regarding gang violence, endemic drug addiction and racial tensions, as well as the underlying socioeconomic causes and contributing factors, were widespread during the early 90s. The Office of Multicultural Student Affairs and revitalized student activist groups brought speakers and films to campus to ensure an ongoing dialogue. Articles in *The Challenge* accused students of being disconnected and complacent regarding the violence across town. Students struggled with the limits of discourse. They wondered what, if anything, they could do to help alleviate the problem. After all, Hilltop was part of the College’s community. Ultimately, a combination of community activism, economic development and policy reform sparked a slow but persistent revival of the Hilltop neighborhood that continues today.

### **Commitment to Diversity**

An in-migration boom in the early 90s (over 40,000 new residents in to Pierce County between 1989 and 1993<sup>178</sup>) contributed to the rapid growth and continued diversification of the College’s student population. As reflected in the College’s redrafted mission statement, TCC made it a priority to embrace its changing population with enthusiasm. Multicultural student services and the International Student Organization not only redoubled support services for incoming students, they made it their mission to celebrate the College’s cultural heterogeneity as a valuable resource. International film festivals; ethnic food cook-outs; traditional music, dance and

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<sup>177</sup> Ibid.

<sup>178</sup> Employment Security Department. *Pierce County Profile*. March 2001.

theater performances; and public lectures became an enduring staple of campus culture.



TCC Students pose in front of the old campus bridge. (TCC Archive)

“One of the things I've grown to really cherish is the diversity on campus,” said Chris Young, who started her career at TCC as a switchboard operator in 1970. “The opportunity to meet so many different people and share so many different ideas; I wouldn't change it for anything.” Currently working as the executive assistant to the VP of Student Services, Young has held a number of administrative support positions, offering her a unique vantage point to observe the changes throughout the decades.

In 1973 she worked as an assistant to math professor Richard Spangler, who was tasked with launching the College's English as a Second Language (ESL) program. Originally created in cooperation with Tacoma Community House, a local immigration and refugee services nonprofit organization, TCC's ESL program provided critical English instruction to a new wave of international transplants. In the wake of the Vietnam War and Khmer Rouge regime in the middle and late 1970s, an influx of Vietnamese and Cambodian refugees landed in the Puget Sound region. “I remember trying to take the attendance

roster from the instructors and match it to the forms that we got from the government,” Young recalls, “just to show that these people were indeed attending classes.” Learning to speak English at TCC was often a vital first step toward overcoming the social and economic disadvantages that are tied to language proficiency in the United States. By the early 1990s, TCC was offering free summer quarter U.S. citizenship preparation courses to a new wave of Puget Sound residents.<sup>179</sup> Over time, the College became proud of its distinction as a preferred school for English language learners.



Japanese Students visit TCC in 1974. (TCC Archive)

Ray Needham was also a sincere proponent of campus equity and diversity, both in philosophy and practice. He recognized that, in order to thrive, institutions must remain vigilant about addressing the needs of a community that was in a constant state of change. In 1991 he established the President’s Council on Diversity, an advisory group focused on “encouraging and facilitating information sharing, mutual support, and co-sponsorship of diversity programs and events to maximize their attendance and effectiveness.”<sup>180</sup> This council played an instrumental role in officially establishing the College’s open and ongoing commitment to equitable access and cultural diversity. It

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<sup>179</sup> Small, Dan. “TCC to offer free citizenship class” *News Release* 10 May 1991.

<sup>180</sup> “TCC Self-Study” 1994.

continues to play an important role in institutional assessment and facilitating a broad campus conversation on a variety of important social topics.

Another group of students who would increase campus diversity in the early 90s came from area high schools, participating in TCC's Running Start program. In 1992, new state legislation authorized tuition waivers for high school juniors and seniors. Motivated students with "college-level skills" could earn concurrent credit toward high school completion and an associate degree. Consequently, they could transfer to a four-year university at the junior level, potentially graduating from college two years early.<sup>181</sup>

TCC's first Running Start graduate was 17-year-old Rachel Ruble.<sup>182</sup> In 1994 she graduated from both Peninsula High School and TCC. She entered the University of Washington as a junior. "The first year, I was the only one of my friends to do it," Ruble told *Peninsula Gateway* reporters, "then more and more people heard about it."<sup>183</sup> Once the word about the Running Start program spread, it became a popular option for students who were high-achievers and/or career minded, as well as those who were bored by or uninterested in, the traditional high school experience.

"It's not for every student," said Ray Needham, reflecting on the implementation of the program under his administration, "but for those students that have that built in—they don't want to play football or be in band or one thing and another—they want to concentrate on their studies... Running Start is a good program." Needham remembers a bit of initial tension with the school districts regarding student funding of concurrent enrollees, but the net benefits paved the way for a program that has grown to be mutually beneficial to colleges and high schools, and, most importantly, to students and parents. "I have two granddaughters going off to private universities this next year," Needham revealed in a recent oral history interview. "They're both about \$50,000 a year, so, to be able to go in as a junior is a really positive thing."

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<sup>181</sup> Simpson, Nicole. "PHS grad gets 'Running Start' on college." *The Peninsula Gateway*, 29 June 1994.

<sup>182</sup> Ibid.

<sup>183</sup> Ibid

## Chapter 9: A Reflection of Quality

### Pamela Transue

“Like many of our community college students, I am the first generation in my family to attend college,” Dr. Pamela Transue said in a public speech in 1997, shortly after her appointment as President of Tacoma Community College. “Also, like many of them, I very nearly didn’t make it.”

President Transue was aware of the transformative power of higher education. After leaving high school during her sophomore year because she was “bored, unhappy and lacked direction,” she worked a series of low-paying jobs before landing at the post office. On the encouragement of a co-worker, Pamela decided to take her post office savings and have another go at school, obtaining her GED and enrolling at the University of Washington.

“I was certain that I would flunk out the first quarter,” Transue said, voicing an uneasiness common among returning students. Her anxieties would quickly be put to rest, however, as she discovered within herself an untapped academic aptitude. “Imagine my surprise when I turned out to be a 4.0 student.”<sup>184</sup> After graduating from UW with a BA in English in 1973, she went on to earn her MA and Ph.D. from Ohio State University.

Her personal story is a compelling testament to the idea that the nontraditional path, when well-tended, can unlock a wealth of potential in students and their communities. As TCC’s longest-serving president, President Transue made it her mission to unlock the potential that she saw on the TCC campus. During her tenure of over 17 years, she would lead the transformation of the physical campus, increase retention rates, modernize the College’s marketing and external relations and increase the College’s visibility with its community to an unprecedented degree.

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<sup>184</sup> Transue, Pamela. “Why I Love Community Colleges” 23 September 1997.



President Pamela Transue (TCC Archive)

### **It Was Just Depressing**

In 1993 University of Washington President William P. Gerberding famously referred to Tacoma Community College as “the ugliest collection of buildings in Washington State.” In response, President Ray Needham found the most dilapidated, out-of-use building on campus, and, in a mock dedication ceremony, the College renamed it “Gerberding Hall”. Then, at a Rotary Club meeting in which Gerberding was speaking, Needham approached his fellow Rotarian with a gift.

“I presented him with this plaque [and asked him] to be in a picture of a building we named after him,” Needham recalled with a laugh.<sup>185</sup> In retrospect, it was probably bad form for the president of a major research university to disparage the campus of a midsize community college operating under a fraction of his budget, but Gerberding wasn’t entirely wrong. In spite of all the great things happening at TCC during that time, the campus itself had become something of an eyesore.

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<sup>185</sup> Ray Needham Oral History. TCC Archive. 2013.

By 1997, TCC's academic and professional technical programs were thriving, but the campus grounds were clearly showing their age. Several buildings were in disrepair, parking lots were overcrowded and rife with potholes, and the landscaping was woefully neglected. Budget cuts and layoffs severely impacted the College's facilities and grounds crew, forcing them to prioritize work with a truncated staff and funding.<sup>186</sup> Maintaining the 80 acres of TCC's main campus as well as the Gig Harbor extension was a difficult task for the Director of Facilities and his three full-time gardeners. Simply maintaining new flower beds and beauty bark required "a minor miracle," as Facilities Director Alex Edwards put it to *Challenge* reporters during that time.

In a recent oral history interview, President Pamela Transue recounted her impressions of the TCC campus when she first arrived as a presidential candidate in 1997. "First of all, it was hard to find because there were no signs, no sidewalk, no landscaping," she said. "And then when you did find it, you would drive on and it was just was depressing... It was in bad shape."

President Transue felt that the neglected campus grounds and outmoded buildings sent an inaccurate public message about the College. "It was a disservice, not just to the students and the community, but to our faculty, because we've always had strong instructional programs at TCC," Transue said. She would make it a priority of her tenure to transform the College's physical campus in a way that "more accurately reflected the quality of what was going on inside those buildings."<sup>187</sup>

## **A Capital Vision**

President Transue organized a comprehensive assessment and analysis of TCC's main campus. In the same way that Larry Stevens and Ray Needham rigorously examined the College's external communities during their respective tenures, Transue refocused the analytical eye inward. What were the functional and aesthetic deficiencies of the main campus? What message did the current state of the physical campus send to the community? What did it say to the students?

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<sup>186</sup> Denton, James. "Improvements to campus are a 'minor miracle'" *The Challenge*. 1997

<sup>187</sup> Pamela Transue Oral History

These were large, important, conceptual questions that, prior to this point, had seldom been asked. Before President Transue arrived in 1997, the facilities master plan had been updated exactly twice: once shortly before college construction began in 1964, and once, thirty years later, in 1994, when rapidly changing technology and program requirements combined with a physically deteriorating campus, forcing college officials to take another look at the big picture.<sup>188</sup> This led to vastly improved accessibility conditions for individuals with disabilities, but a lack of capital funding prevented any further significant campus transformation during the mid-90s.<sup>189</sup>

To accomplish the goal of establishing a long-term, contemporary vision for the TCC campus, President Transue established a Capital Visions Task Force. Chaired by the Vice President for College Services, Shane Conway, this task force was remarkably similar to Stevens' Long Term Planning Commission, in that it incorporated representatives from all of the College's student, faculty, staff and community stakeholders. An architectural consultancy firm, Tacoma's Tsang Partnership, was also brought in to lend their professional expertise to this vast undertaking.

In their assessment of campus conditions, the task force pulled no punches. One of their primary findings was that the main campus lacked any real sense of place. There was no natural center to the campus, no place where students were drawn to congregate. Locations for student services were disparate and confusing, leaving new and prospective students disoriented and lost. Classroom buildings were far-flung and isolated, which severely hamstrung the collaborative capacity of both faculty and student organizations. Campus entrances were difficult to identify, many of the buildings had long-since reached the end of their economic lifespan and were falling into disrepair, and the general feel of the campus was dated, bland and uninviting.

This was a sobering assessment of campus conditions. It was not, however, the endgame. The Capital Visions Task Force set out to do much more than simply audit failing roofs and deficient HVAC systems (although they would do all of that); their charge was much broader, even philosophic, in nature. The task force needed to "affirm

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<sup>188</sup> "Commitment to Innovation" Tacoma Community College Facilities Master Plan (2009).

<sup>189</sup> Ibid.

core values,” then create a coherent and actionable plan that reflected a commitment to those values. The goal was to position the College, both literally and figuratively, in such a way that it could optimally carry out its mission, while holding to a clearly defined set of principles. As Transue put it in the first “TCC Campus Vision” newsletter in September 1998:

Our next step was to dig deeper. We thought about how a community college could serve the whole community. Could we create new learning opportunities? Could we become the gateway for every person living in the community who wanted to discover something new? Could we assist people in discovering how learning can enrich every stage of our lives? Could we help people learn how to learn all over again?

We know there are compelling reasons why this is important. A knowledge-based economy means that new opportunities await those who can adapt quickly to new environments<sup>190</sup>

In addition to assessing the capital vision of the campus, President Transue assembled a “Future Focus Priorities” team to create broad institutional goals, focusing primarily on educational programs, learning outcomes and performance indicators.<sup>191</sup> Using the “Planning for the Future Model” created by Larry Stevens and revised by Ray Needham, this team created a comprehensive strategic plan for the College.

By cross-referencing the strategic plan with a coherent capital vision, the College was able to determine the amount of space required for present and future educational programs. This planning model allowed college planners to design and prioritize for future development. It also provided a mountain of empirical data with which to build a convincing case, when lobbying for capital funding from the state.

“We need to be consistent,” said Transue on the subject of external relations. “We need to be able to demonstrate the value of what we’re doing, and we need to be able to excite people with the potential of what we can do in the future. So that’s a big part of what I do.” Assisting in this effort was Dan Small, who transitioned from the

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<sup>190</sup> Transue, Pamela “Campus community plans for future” *TCC Campus Vision*. 1:1. 1998.

<sup>191</sup> TCC “Accreditation Self-Study 2004”

long-held position at the helm of information and publications to the newly created position of Director of External Relations. He was now responsible for assessing the legislative climate and advocating on behalf of the College at the local, state and national levels of government.

“During the other presidential eras, we were not having very good luck getting capital money from the legislature,” recalls Small, who was hired by Larry Stevens in 1978. “Other colleges, like South Puget Sound [Community College in Olympia], got a bunch of money, built new buildings. And during that time we just were struggling.” Small recalls having to scrape together student fees and bookstore revenues to implement desperately needed infrastructure improvements, under the tenure of previous presidents.

### **Campus Transformation**

On April 12, 2002, TCC opened the door to its brand new art gallery. A faculty showcase exhibition featured art from the College’s most talented instructors. Sculptures from Richard Rhea displayed beside the bold paintings of Marit Berg offered the community a glimpse into the College’s often underappreciated creative output. In the ensuing years, The Gallery, at TCC would feature students and faculty and a broad range of artists, both local and international. Not only did The Gallery provide a much needed showcase space for the wealth of creative talent being cultivated and refined in the College’s fine arts program, the visually striking 2,000-square-foot building signaled a commitment to adding value to the campus by beautifying its external spaces.

Through comprehensive planning, relentless advocacy and dedicated community involvement, the College was able to secure unprecedented levels of capital funding during the tenure of Pamela Transue. At the beginning of fall quarter in 2004, the Classroom and Administration Building opened, providing a new home for college administrators, including newly hired Vice President of Administrative Services, Kathryn Longfellow, and VP of Academic and Student Affairs, Tim Stokes. A far cry from the field stone and concrete that identified the old campus, this bold and contemporary \$2.4 million, 16,765 square foot facility set a new standard for the College in terms of aesthetics and functionality.

“Constructing a new state-of-the-art facility only happens once every 40 years at TCC,” reported Chris Beale in *The Challenge* on October 21, 2004. What Beale didn’t know was that this feat would be repeated four more times during Pamela Transue’s presidency.

On August 31, 2005, TCC cut the ribbon on the College’s recently completed Information Technology Building. Draped down the west face of this three story, 56,000 square-foot, building was a 30-foot blue and yellow banner that read “Celebrating 40 Years of Tacoma Community college 1965-2005”. The IT Building would house the College’s burgeoning information technology and business programs. New multimedia classrooms provided students with vastly improved computer, internet and new media learning technology, and a new information commons added 85 PC workstations and multimedia student services in a consolidated space for all students.<sup>192</sup>



TCC's Information Technology Building (TCC Archive)

As part of the 40<sup>th</sup> anniversary celebration, at the conclusion of the IT Building’s grand opening ceremony, the College broke ground on its next ambitious undertaking: the Tacoma Community College Science & Engineering Building. Designed by Seattle architecture firm Miller Hull, this \$18.5 million, 73,000 square-foot building

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<sup>192</sup> Hiser, Jonathan. “Major Construction marks TCC’s 40<sup>th</sup> year” *The Challenge*. 26 Sept 2005

continued the trend of raising taller and more-expensive buildings on campus.<sup>193</sup>

Buoyed by hard-won state funding, Foundation fundraising and student contributions via fees and ASTCC budgeting, the transformation of the TCC campus would continue over the next 10 years. In addition to taller, more contemporary buildings, the College invested extensively in exterior landscaping. A new, more intentional and natural aesthetic spread throughout a campus that was once distinguished only by its abundance of puddles and potholes. A new fire lane and remodeled central campus bridge made campus navigation easier for new and prospective students. In 2002, the President's Council on Cultural Diversity (founded by Ray Needham in 1991), started plans to create a Japanese friendship garden on campus, in celebration of the bond between Tacoma, Washington, and Kitakyushu, Japan, sister cities since 1959.<sup>194</sup> Landscape architect Toshiyuki Yano of the Kitakyushu Greenery Association designed and built a Japanese rock garden in collaboration with local landscaping firms.<sup>195</sup> Paid for with donations to the TCC Foundation, the "Babe and Herman Lehrer Japanese Friendship Garden" was unveiled on September 20, 2007. It spoke to TCC's commitment to creating a physical campus that students, faculty and staff could inhabit with pride. It was a testament to the importance of the TCC Foundation and its community of donors. And it was a living reminder of the College's connection to the city and the city's connection to the world.

### **Surviving the Great Recession**

Much of this physical transformation happened during a time of unprecedented financial hardship. The Global Financial Crisis of 2007-08 and ensuing economic recession ravaged state funding for public institutions. Higher education was hit particularly hard, hobbling both public and private funding of colleges.<sup>196</sup> "From about 2007 [to 2013] we lost 30 percent of our budget," recalled Dan Small.

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<sup>193</sup> "Tacoma Community College Science & Engineering Building" MillerHull.com 2010.

<sup>194</sup> "Babe and Herman Lehrer Japanese Friendship Garden" *Tacomacc.edu*. 2014.

<sup>196</sup> Wolinsky, Howard. "The crash reaches the universities. The global financial crisis threatens private and public university funding in the USA and Europe." *EMBO Report*. March 2009.

Small was working as Vice President for External Relations, as well as the Assistant Executive Director of the TCC Foundation (these positions were combined in 2009 as Vice President of Institutional Advancement). Not only was he responsible for the College's fundraising and legislative advocacy arms, he also oversaw TCC's entire communications operation, both internal and external.

"I enjoyed my role as it expanded. I felt good about the relationships I built with people," said Small, reflecting on his time as a vice president. "As I moved over to the executive side, I think those relationships helped. It gave me a different perspective and an ability to talk to people about what the tough issues were." Small's experience working for President Larry Stevens during the previous budget crisis of the early 1980s offered him a unique perspective from which to approach the 2008 crisis. He worked with President Transue to create an open, communicative process to keep faculty, staff, students and the broader community informed, as the situation developed.

"I would hear from other colleges, people working there would say, 'We know the administrative team is going to cut positions, but they're not telling us anything,'" Small recalled. "And they didn't know until [college administrators] came out of an executive staff meeting, and said 'we're laying-off 12 people and here is who they are.' And we just didn't want to do that sort of thing. We wanted to bring people along."<sup>197</sup>

The following example of the candid internal communication was published in the TCC Bulletin on May 28, 2009. It was written by Dale Stowell, who worked under Small as the Director of Marketing, Communication and Outreach.

College leadership and all employees deserve big kudos for the open, two-way communication during a grueling and often frightening budget process. Leadership chose a path of openness, holding regular forums, talking freely about ideas, providing written information in the form of blogs, and creating means for people to give feedback and ideas. And the College community engaged. Scores of people attended forums in person and scores of others watched the live streams in the Bulletin. Others posted suggestions on the Ideas blog.

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<sup>197</sup> Dan Small Oral History. TCC Archive 2013.

People at all levels conducted themselves with a true sense of community. That's what good communication fosters and it takes everyone to achieve it. Thanks to quick action in freezing hires in November, a conservative fiscal approach, strong enrollment and significant creativity, the College had a minimum of the most painful budget cuts... employee layoffs. But even when it looked as though it might be even more painful than it was, the community hung together.<sup>198</sup>

"That's a real credit to Pamela and her executive team," Small said, in regard to the transparency surrounding the unprecedented budget woes. "All the presidents I've worked for have been good. They're all different; I think they've all done a good job for the College." Having worked closely with four of TCC's five presidents, Small is keenly aware of the significant impact that personality and leadership style have on the institution. He has seen the College flourish when administrators were able to directly connect with their various communities, and he has seen what happens when those lines of communication break down. "It hasn't always been an easy road. Presidents have a tough job."

On June 2, 2010, in a formal ceremony, the TCC Board of Trustees officially renamed the Science and Engineering Building the "Pamela Transue Center for Science and Engineering." This honor came just weeks after President Transue received the 2010 President's Award for Leadership from the Washington's Trustees Association of Community and Technical Colleges (TACTC), for her handling of the College's budget crisis.<sup>199</sup>

"When the Board felt that, because of her outstanding leadership, she deserved the honor of having a building named after her, they polled faculty and staff," Trustees Chair Laurie Jinkins told the *Suburban Times*, noting an overwhelmingly positive response. President Transue was commended for her ability to navigate "difficult economic situations with kindness, clarity and concern for those who make up our teaching and learning community."<sup>200</sup>

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<sup>198</sup> Stowell, Dale. "Communication success stories we can all be proud of" *The Bulletin*. 28 May 2009.

<sup>199</sup> Sclair, Ben. "Strong Show of Support for TCC President Pamela Transue" *The Suburban Times*. 17 May 2010.

<sup>200</sup> Ibid.

It could be said that this is the broader mission of Tacoma Community College: to serve students by connecting with its ever-changing teaching and learning communities with clarity of purpose and concern for equitable opportunity and dignity, while maintaining a high standard of achievement and accountability. From its very inception the College is at its best when it is able to directly connect with its community. Through economic hardship, social upheaval, changing job markets and times of crisis both global and local, TCC continues to provide an open door to education in Tacoma. The last 50 years have been a testament to the strength and resilience of this simple idea.