

Written Response by Emery Skinner, President TVCC

My best memory is from the start up of Treasure Valley Community college in 1962. I was Malheur County Superintendent at the time and assisted with the early organization efforts. Dr. John Easley, an Ontario optometrist, together with his Kiwanis Club and the Lions Club, circulated the necessary petitions. My investment at this time was to work with Bill Loomis of the State Department of Education in setting up the public vote after the boundaries of the District had been approved by the State Board.

I had further involvement in the early organization of the College Board and the selection of the first president in 1962. I became president in 1967 and served until 1983.

1. When and how did you first hear about the “community college movement?”

In the early 1950s when the terminology for two-year colleges was “junior”, but had begun a more comprehensive role that led to the term “community college.”

2. What were your first impressions?

I was pleased to learn that an institution (first for this country) was beginning to focus on providing comprehensive educational services to local communities with local direction and management.

3. When did you first decide to get involved with community colleges and why?

My first experience was in 1961 when as Malheur County School Superintendent I was involved in the development of Treasure Valley Community College and believed the prospect of a local comprehensive educational program was a great idea.

4. What was your first community college experience?

In 1961-62, helping with the start up of TVCC

5. What was your first position at a community college?

In 1962, as county superintendent, I served unofficially as the first TVCC board’s secretary until the first president, Gene Voris, was hired in the summer of 1962.

6. How did that lead to a presidency?

I was hired as president of TVCC in 1967 when Gene Voris resigned.

7. How well do you think you were prepared? What were the biggest challenges?

I had administrative experiences as a school superintendent, but was just learning the role of the community college and its comprehensive programs. The greatest challenge was getting voter support for a budget that would meet the goals of providing the comprehensive educational opportunity for the student body and local citizens.

8. What were the biggest rewards?

Seeing the successful educational experiences, in both young and old people, who otherwise may not have had the opportunity.

9. Describe the atmosphere on your first campus.

The atmosphere was expectant, hopeful among students and high hopes for their learning opportunities with most of the faculty.

10. Describe the types of students you saw.

There were young and old, men and women, a few African Americans, some Asians, but mostly Caucasians from rural farm homes.

11. What was the attitude of four-year universities when you were president? How has that changed today?

Four-year universities were helpful and supportive, especially the state universities and colleges. I don't know if that has changed today.

12. What was the relationship between the community college presidents and the State Board of Education when you were president? With the other presidents? With OCCA?

From my standpoint, the relationship was positive and helpful for the most part. The first OCA was bit cumbersome as one integrated group of faculty, students, support personnel and administrators, but successful changes were made under Roger Bassett.

13. How has the "movement" changed since you first became involved?

The "new" has worn off and perhaps lacks some of the same vigor and enthusiasm of an earlier time. Financing may be better in structures with less reliance of local property tax but districts are still under-funded as best I know.

14. What advice would you give to community college leaders today?

Maintain the faith in the community college concept of comprehensive programs, community centered, local control, and remember that serving student needs is the focal center, both on campus and in the community.