

ROBERT E. OLIPHANT--
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Struggle for Independence--1975-2013

INTRODUCTION

This essay begins in 1975 and continues up to 2013. It examines the political battles between the East and West sides of Yavapai County until 2013 over the nature and extent of post-secondary development. Clearly, 2013-2017 have seen the most aggressive efforts to challenge the perceived mistreatment by the West County politicians controlling the Governing Board, however, that is covered in another essay. The consistent theme has been to gain either partial or full independence for a Verde Valley Community College on the East side of the County.¹

Political independence is considered important by the Verde Valley. It is argued that only with the absence of Prescott control can the East Side of the County fully become involved and focus on the development of the Community College for those County residents living in the Verde Valley.²

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1. The District Governing Board consists of five elected officials from five separate County districts. A three-person majority tends to vote as a block in favor of West side projects and tends to ignore or block East side efforts.

1975 ADMINISTRATIVE COLLEGE

The first political effort following the 1966-67 location defeat to pull away from Prescott domination of the East side of the County came in 1975. It arose after the District Governing Board had decided to open a small community college satellite facility on the East side of the County. The satellite facility is known today as the Verde Campus, which is bordered by the town of Clarkdale and city of Cottonwood. During discussions by the East side politicians over a perceived construction delay, the idea of making the satellite Verde Campus an “Administrative College” arose.

An “Administrative College” is provided under Arizona law.³ If an administrative college were created, the East side of the County would gain only a semblance of independence from Prescott domination. The administrative college would remain within the Yavapai Community College District and continue to report to the existing District Governing Board.⁴ As discussed later in this book, there are many benefits that the East side of the County can derive once independent. However, total independence from Prescott control can only be achieved by legislative action creating a separate contigu-

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2. A detailed list of benefits to the Verde Valley that flow from independence can be found in a later essay.
 3. Arizona statute, A.R.S. § 15-1444, provides for the creation of an Administrative College.
 4. Under this scheme, there would be a president for the Prescott Campus and the Verde Campus. There most likely would be a chancellor selected that both presidents report to and the chancellor oversees the entire District’s operations for the Board. The scheme would significantly reduce the power of the current president, who vigorously opposes even looking at such an idea.

ous taxing and community college district in the Verde Valley.⁵

At the April 1975 District Governing Board meeting, Dr. L.B. Blanchard, president of the Arizona Community College Board, broached the idea of an “Administrative College.” He argued that the Verde Campus should not revolve around the Prescott Campus. “It should not be a satellite campus, but a separate college,” he said.⁶ He also said that in selecting a name, Yavapai College students attending future campuses around the County should not feel they are in the shadow of a main campus in Prescott. Blanchard surmised that a probable result of giving the new Verde Campus a separate identity would be to ease the bitter feelings that had developed in the Verde Valley in the late 1960s when Prescott was selected as the site for the College.

However, Dr. Blanchard’s arguments fell on deaf ears. The District Governing Board apparently never seriously considered his arguments. Prescott’s political dominance over Verde Valley Community College matters continued.⁷ Eventually, the Verde Campus became a reality as a satellite facility with construction of several “temporary” buildings with many of them remaining in place for almost 40 years.⁸

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5. Another alternative is to create a separate Verde Valley County, which requires state legislation.
 6. *The Daily Courier*; “New Identity Urged for Verde Campus,” April 11, 1975.
 7. It is not clear that a formal vote was ever taken by the Governing Board in 1975 on the issue of an Administrative College.

ADMINISTRATIVE COLLEGE (1995)

The issue of an Administrative College for the Verde Valley arose again in 1995. According to Former Verde Valley Campus Executive Dean, Tom Schumacher,⁹ “Dr. Eula Dean and Dean Schumacher were asked by the Community College President, Dr. Doreen Dailey, to consider the feasibility of becoming our own college and what steps we would need to take to make it happen.” However, the proposal never made it back to the president's desk because it was determined “the task was [considered] far too Herculean.”¹⁰ Schumacher said that “In my opinion, it was a rare missed opportunity and a sad moment for the Verde Valley.”¹¹

TRIAL BALLOON —A NEW COUNTY?

Controversy over political domination by the West side of the County over the East side erupted again in 2007-2008. During this period, a trial balloon was floated by a group of Verde Valley citizens to assess the potential for creating a separate Verde Valley County.

The idea of a separate county found some support. For example, in an article in the *Verde Independent* newspaper¹² Councilman Duane Kirby said his support for a new

8. Ground breaking ceremonies for the Verde Valley Campus was reportedly attended by 150 people on March 20, 1975. See <http://www.yc.edu/v5content/library/archives/timeline.htm> (last visited October 2016). The temporary buildings would be removed in 2014-15.

9. *Verde Independent*, February 18, 2016.

10. *Ibid.*

11. *Ibid.*

12. *Verde Independent*, February 19, 2009.

NOVEMBER 2012--A NEW REPRESENTATIVE

county had “nothing to do with money. My decision is based on a great deal of emotion. I am tired of being the sad sister on the other side of the mountain.” He said he had believed that the Verde Valley should be a separate government for a long time.

Professor and former Division Dean at Yavapai College, Terence Pratt,¹³ told the newspaper that “At the college, we don't get our fair share, either. If the time has not come yet, it is due to come.”

The citizens who floated the trial balloon for a separate county eventually concluded there was not sufficient political will among the citizens in the Verde Valley to seek legislation at the State Capital to achieve that end. The effort failed.

NOVEMBER 2012--A NEW REPRESENTATIVE

In November 2012 Robert Oliphant became the Verde Valley Representative to the five-member Governing Board.¹⁴ He had filed for election when the East County seat became vacant because of redistricting and no one opposed him. He began his term in January 2013.

Oliphant came to the Governing Board with a background as a volunteer committed to improving the Community College in the Verde Valley. He had spent several years working closely with many of the Verde Valley's recognized leaders including: Ruth Wicks, Julie Larson, Randy Garrison, Dr. J Fleishman, Bill Regner

13. *Ibid.*

14. Oliphant was a retired William Mitchell College of Law emeritus professor. He had extensive national administrative experience in operating law schools and developing large nonprofit organizations.

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and others. With little financial support from the College, they had cobbled together a successful fund-raising Chapter for the Yavapai Community College Foundation in the Verde Valley. The Foundation recognized him and Wicks for their outstanding leadership in developing the Chapter. Both were Chapter presidents. However, he had observed first-hand the historic unequal treatment of the East County by the West side. He hoped he could achieve a better balance between the East and West sides of the County.

Once on the Board, Oliphant was disappointed at his inability to move its members in the direction of the Verde Valley. Within a short time, it became apparent to him that there was little, if anything, he could do to alter the iron fisted control held by the West County majority on the Board and the favoritism for the West side of the County.

Oliphant was concerned that the information fed to the Governing Board by the College administration at the Board's monthly meeting was being filtered to show only one side of an issue. Or worse, possibly some information was completely left out. As a result, there existed the potential that the information reaching the Board via the President and her staff was either incomplete or slanted in such a way as to shine only a bright light on the administration.

Oliphant was also concerned that the monthly meeting was the only source of information provided to him about the operation of the College. He was repeatedly told that the Board was not to involve itself in any College operations.

Oliphant was cautioned by West County Board members and the College President against any effort to obtain information from staff or students other than that provided at the District Governing meeting. He was also cautioned against making statements to his

constituents that would conflict with a Governing Board final decision, regardless of the vote and his views about the vote.

Oliphant concluded as a matter of conscience that he could not adequately represent the residents of the Verde Valley while remaining a member of the Board. He perceived he was boxed in by a political majority in complete control of the West and East sides of the County. He also perceived that the majority on the Board were primarily interested in developing the Community College to benefit of the residents on the West side of the County.¹⁵ There would be no major development on the East side of the County.

Oliphant experienced efforts by President Will's and the Governing Board he perceived were intended to silence him whenever possible. For example, when the Southwest Wine Center was dedicated in his district, he was not invited to participate by speaking at the ceremony. In contrast, when the Sedona Center was dedicated in September 2017, the District representative, who was newly appointed to Oliphant's district and appeared to cozy up to Wills' during her first six months on the Board, was recognized and given speaking responsibilities.

Another example came directly from the Board Chair who sets the agenda for each meeting. When Oliphant became a member of the Board there was an agenda item where each Board member could share his or her relevant College activities he or she had been involved in during the past month. After three or four months, Oliphant had shared his extensive involvement during Board meetings each month while most other Board members remained silent. Without any discussion, the agenda item was removed by the Chair and not replaced while Oliphant was on the Board.

15. He was also cautioned about discussing or exploring anything "operational" related to the College.

CITIZENS' ADVOCACY COMMITTEE

The last straw for Oliphant came at the December 2013 Governing Board meeting. By a four-one vote, the Governing Board approved a 10-year \$103.5 million development plan for the entire College District. Oliphant was stunned when it was revealed that the development Master Plan allocated over 95% of funding to the West side of the County. In addition, the Board approved in concept the closing of the Sedona Center and shuttering the acclaimed Sedona film school.¹⁶ Oliphant also opposed closing the Chino Valley Center. He resigned in January 2014.

CITIZENS' ADVOCACY COMMITTEE

Following Oliphant's resignation from the Governing Board, he joined with local community organizer Ruth Wicks to form the Verde Valley Community College Citizens Advocacy Committee. The Committee is a loose association of citizens concerned with a perceived failure of the College to properly develop post-secondary educational opportunities in the Verde Valley. Its mission is to achieve "a quality, accessible, sustainable community college education [that meets] the needs of the population of the Verde Valley."¹⁷

The Committee focuses on four areas of concern: (1) College management including eliminating the Carver™ model of policy governance that is strictly applied by the Governing Board. (2) Encouraging community outreach and relationship building with persons concerned with post-secondary education in the Verde Valley. (3) Encouraging improved Community College academic

16. President Wills had announced in October 2013 that she was closing the nationally recognized film program at the Sedona Center. This was a decision consistent with the 10-year-plan that stated the Sedona Center would be closed and sold in the second phase of development.

17. See 2017 Draft of Committee's mission statement.

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programming and development. (4) Internal organizational development, for example, recruiting more community members.

The Committee holds public meetings, makes regular appearances on local radio and television talk shows, writes letters that are published in local newspapers, and meets with city, town, and state politicians to make them aware of Community College issues. Its members also regularly address the District Governing Board to advocate on behalf of the Verde Valley on issues affecting its residents. Oliphant writes a regular Blog intended to keep Verde Valley residents informed about College developments that may affect them.¹⁸

The Committee was particularly effective in saving the Sedona Center from being closed. Today, the College is investing over \$6 million in renovation in the Center and is beginning to return courses it removed in 2013-14.¹⁹ The Committee continues with meetings throughout the East side of the County with the goal of persuading the College to create an Administrative College or alternatively to persuade the Arizona legislature to create a separate community college district for the 70,000 or more residents now living on the East side of Yavapai County.

CONCLUSION

For five decades, the Verde Valley leaders politically fought to achieve independence from the control of the Prescott based Community College Administration and the West side representatives who made up a majority on the District Governing Board that controls both sides of the

18. <http://www.eyeyavapacollege.com/>.

19. The 10-year-development-plan approved in concept by the majority on the Board in December 2013 allocated no funds to the Sedona Center or funds to replace the Center should it be closed and a new location chosen.

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County. The record as of 2013 showed the Verde Valley has been badly politically out-manuevered. However, with Robert Oliphant's Verde Valley replacement on the Governing Board in 2014, a surprise election result, emergence of a Verde Valley Advocacy group, and creation of the Verde Valley Board Advisory group, the greatest threat to the power of the fifty-year control by the West County Governing Board voting bloc suddenly arose.