

Failing to win the political battle over location

INTRODUCTION

The struggle for dominant political control of the County community college began in 1965.¹ That year the idea of a junior college sprang up among Prescott residents. The Yavapai Community College *Timeline* reports that in November 1965 Mrs. Merle (Opal) Allen, Prescott P.T.A. President, received a list of reasons from Doctor R.A. Perry suggesting that the time was ripe to form a Junior College.² A meeting was held under the sponsorship of the Prescott P.T.A.³ Following the meeting a campaign to support a County Junior College District was launched. On November 8, 1966 County voters approved formation of a Junior College District.⁴ However, where to locate the College within the County was undetermined. Prescott residents no doubt assumed it would be in that city.⁵

1. The East side is commonly referred to as the “Verde Valley.”

2. See <https://www.yc.edu/v5content/library/archives/timeline.htm> (last visited November 2016).

3. *Ibid.*

4. *Ibid.*

5. It may be of interest that Prescott was Arizona’s Territorial capital from 1863-64 and 1877-89. Phoenix became its Territorial capital in 1889.

EAST SIDE PROPOSAL

However, leaders in the Verde Valley may have surprised the Prescott folks when they decided to launch a political campaign to persuade the Arizona Junior College Board to locate the community college on the East side of the County. Both sides obviously recognized the potential significant economic impact and educational value such an institution would bring to their area.⁶

EAST SIDE PROPOSAL

The East side politicians contacted the Gulf States and Industries Corporation asking for help with a proposal to locate the community college in the Verde Valley. In response to the request, the Corporation developed a strong proposal. It provided for \$1.5 million in financing for student dormitories and a student center. It also offered an outright gift of \$100,000 for building purposes. Finally, it offered 164 acres of what was described as “prime land in the Clarkdale area” of the Verde Valley on which to build the Campus.

Corporate Offer

\$1.5 to finance Student dorms
\$100,000 outright gift
164 acres of prime land

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6. The location decision would be made by the State of Arizona Junior College Board. The State Board would be dissolved in June 2002, when the Arizona Legislature reduced its powers and duties and transferred most oversight to individual community college districts. See https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Maricopa_County_Community_College_District#History

THE FIRST DECISION

The Prescott politicians argued that the college should be located on their side of the County. Their argument was based on the population of graduating seniors at that time and an offer of free land from the Fain Family, City of Prescott, and land for sale from the Bureau of Land Management.⁷

THE FIRST DECISION

The question of where to locate the community college came before the State Board on December 19, 1966. Much to the chagrin of the East side politicians, the State Board selected Prescott.⁸ On December 20, 1966 the Prescott City Council authorized the process for the sale of 46 acres next to Whipple Veterans Administration to be sold to the college.⁹

The Verde Valley politicians complained to the Yavapai County Supervisors who then asked the State Junior College

7. See <https://www.yc.edu/v5content/library/docs/archives/conflict-over-location-of-college.pdf>.
8. As noted earlier, the Prescott City Council had already approved purchasing the 46-acre Whipple site on December 19. It seems doubtful that the Verde Valley politicians would be successful given this action.
9. See <http://www.yc.edu/v5content/library/archives/timeline.htm> (last visited September 2016). The City of Prescott donated 46-acres to the College. The Bureau of Land Management had control at the time over the old Ft. Whipple property. The BLM offered 55 acres of that land to the new Jr. College District for the price of \$2.50 an acre. The Yavapai Tribe is believed to have been next in line for the BLM land before the College but they forfeited their position so that the College would have an opportunity to purchase it. See <https://www.yc.edu/v5content/library/docs/archives/acquisition-of-land-for-prescott-campus.pdf>.

A SECOND CHANCE

Board to review the location decision. The State Board honored the request and reopened the location issue.

A SECOND CHANCE

Given a second chance, Verde Valley politicians contacted Northern Arizona University (NAU) and asked for an independent review of the proposed Prescott and Verde Valley sites by University experts. NAU agreed. In a very short time NAU completed its review and recommended Clarkdale as the more desirable location for the first Yavapai Community College.

FINAL STATE BOARD DECISION

The State Junior College Board convened once again to discuss the question of the location of the Community College on February 20, 1967.¹⁰ Despite the generous corporate offer, and the NAU independent site recommendation, Prescott was again selected as the site for the first community college by the State Junior College Board.

AN APPEAL TO THE GOVERNOR

In a last ditch effort to change the State Junior College Board decision, the Verde Valley Jaycees appealed to Arizona's governor John "Jack" Williams. They asked him to consider the site selection process. The Governor rejected their request writing that he had "looked into the matter and find that the board has acted and there is no recourse for this office."

10. *See Verde Independent*, February 22, 1967.

THE 1967 BOND VOTE ALMOST FAILS

The *Verde Independent* reported that many individuals had written the Governor protesting the State Junior College Board's site selection decision. Most writers questioned why the Board had totally ignored "the offer of Gulf States and Industries of \$1.5 million financing for student dormitories and a student center, an outright gift of \$100,000 for building purposes, and 165 acres of prime land."

THE 1967 BOND VOTE ALMOST FAILS

Although Prescott was selected as the first site for the location for the County Community College, voters on the East side of the County were outraged.¹¹ On May 23, 1967 a County-wide election was held on the question of whether to approve a \$2.5 million bond issue. When the votes were tallied, the Bond received approval by a 107-vote margin (3,011 to 2,904). Most of the opposition to the Bond is said to have come from East side residents still angry about the State Board's location decision.

The Community College held its first classes in fall of 1969. In February 1970, the college district dedicated its first buildings on the Prescott Campus on a site that was once part of Fort Whipple. Fort Whipple was the military base constructed in 1864 to provide security and protection for Prescott, which at the time was the territorial capital.

11. As noted earlier, the land for the Prescott Campus came from two sources. The City of Prescott donated 46 acres to the College. The Bureau of Land Management had control at the time over the old Ft. Whipple property. Later, the Bureau of Land Management offered 55 acres of that land to the new Jr. College District for the price of \$2.50 an acre. See <http://www.yc.edu/v5content/library/docs/archives/acquisition-of-land-for-prescott-campus.pdf> (last visited September 2016).

CONCLUSION

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In the head-to-head clash over the location of the first community college in the District, the East side politicians failed to match the political skills of Prescott West side politicians. Given the result, one might surmise that the political contest over the Community College had ended. However, it was just the beginning.