

COMMUNITY COLLEGES

Thank you all for coming. I thank OLLI for having me here. Today I want to give you background and insight about our community college – Yavapai College - to talk to you about what it needs to do on our side, the east side, of our county.

I was elected to represent most but not all of the east side residents of the county but, in fact, I try and pay attention to all the eastsiders' needs.

I ask you all to hold your questions until I complete my remarks and then I will do my best to answer them.

I will start off by providing a little information about how community colleges got started in the United States.

The groundwork for starting community colleges was laid in 1862 when a law was passed by the United States Congress, entitled the Merrill Act. This Act permitted creation of public universities and colleges including 2-year community colleges. Universities and 4-year colleges were started first by state governments. The first public 2-year community college wasn't created until 40 years later in 1902. It was started in Joliet Illinois.

Today 31 of our fifty states have 2- year public community colleges. That of course means that 19 states do not. Arizona created its first community colleges in 1920 with what was then called the Phoenix Junior College. Today that college has been expanded to ten public 2-year community colleges in Maricopa County.

Originally most 2-year colleges were created to offer basic courses and other liberal arts education. But that evolved after the Great Depression because more and more people moved to cities to find work. Instead of just focusing on providing an education in the liberal arts many community colleges then became job-training centers teaching advanced factory skills such as welding plus skills in the healthcare field.

As more people moved from small farms to urban areas community colleges opened in more and more cities.

Community colleges were originally free to students and that attracted people of low income, including minorities. Beginning in the 1950's higher percentages of women enrolled both for liberal arts education and to prepare for jobs such as advanced secretarial and nursing skills.

The current trend nationally today is for community colleges to focus more on preparing people for jobs that will get and keep them out of poverty. Times have changed. In the 1950's through the early 1970's a liberal arts education would get you an entry management job in business. Not anymore. There just are not many entry management jobs available today and those that exist give preference to people with specific business administration education, for example bookkeeping or accounting.

Some time ago the State of Arizona began reducing the amount of money it provided community colleges. To make up this short fall in income student tuition was introduced. Nevertheless 2 year community college tuition is still much lower than 4 year college's tuition.

This brings us to Yavapai College, a full county college, which was created in 1965. Leaders in both Prescott and the Verde Valley hotly contested the location for the college's first buildings and its administration. The most generous proposal came from the Verde Valley. Gulf State Industries offered to donate 165 acres of prime land in Clarkdale and, in addition, to give the college \$1.6 million if it was located in the Verde Valley. Prescott did not come up with an offer remotely as generous. NAU was asked to study the competing proposals and concluded that the college first buildings and administration should be located in Clarkdale. The deciding body, which no longer exists, was the Arizona Junior College Board. It decided for Prescott.

A college governing board was then formed. To get the college started quickly the College Board in 1966 asked the public to approve a \$1.5 million bond issue, which would be paid back by their property taxes. The bond issue was not very popular, especially in the Verde Valley, but it was approved by a thin margin of 107 votes.

Construction in Prescott began soon after for college buildings of stone or steel reinforced construction. In September 1969 the college opened to its first students. While this helped Prescott residents educationally it was of little to no help to residents from the Verde Valley because of the long driving distance to the Prescott campus.

The Verde Valley wanted its own campus. Finally five years later, in 1974, some wooden college buildings, described as temporary, began construction in Clarkdale. In 1975 they opened to students from the Verde Valley. Over time more temporary wooden buildings were added in Clarkdale. . Meanwhile the Prescott campus expanded dramatically adding more buildings of quality construction.

The Clarkdale temporary buildings were not replaced with more permanent structures for more than 35 years.

In spite of these conditions the Verde campus did a decent job.

The Verde Valley Clarkdale campus had its own dean, eventually promoted to the title of executive dean. The executive dean was allowed considerable freedom to manage his own staff and facility. Its deans, staff and facility were determined to succeed and put in long hours. They went the extra mile. It showed.

In Sedona, in the late 90's a very popular Yavapai College film school was created. The administration in Prescott, while given support where needed, allowed the film school to be run locally with its own staff and facility and it prospered for many years with its graduates winning awards.

2008 brought an important change to the Verde Valley campus. That year, because of a lack of funding, the college eliminated the vast majority of staff on the east side. Prescott then took charge of almost all staffing save maintenance, including financial management of the east side.

Nevertheless as late as 2009, in spite of this change, the eastside still had control of its facility and classes and was still teaching over 26% of the students of the total college.

In 2010 the Prescott administration finally decided to replace the worn out temporary wooden buildings in Clarkdale. The Verde campus was closed for a time. In 2011 the college got a new President. Reopening shortly after with better-constructed buildings should have been a great improvement for the Verde Valley campus. But there was a catch – the Verde Valley campus classroom space was now substantially reduced, some say by half; the number of eastside classes were cut in more than half and the teaching staff was also cut in half. The eastside's total percentage of Yavapai College student population, upon reopening dropped from a high of 26% to 11% of the total college population.

A new dean was also appointed by the then President but that dean wasn't given authority over the eastside facility. He had a maintenance staff and an executive assistant. Prescott was now in charge of the eastside education. The new Verde Valley dean didn't live on the eastside of the mountain. He commuted. This made it more difficult to connect with the eastside leadership. Eventually, perhaps to make up for the fact that the Verde Valley dean had been given little responsibility for education on the eastside, he was given some college duties outside the Verde Valley.

Starting in about 2013 the film school had its finances cut and also got less assistance from the Prescott administration. In frustration its director quit and its staff was reduced. It became obvious to Sedonans that the new President no longer supported the film school. Eventually Mr. Gordon, its founder, who had put his own money into the school, took his family name off the door. The school limped along for about another year and was then closed. The then President announced she wanted to sell the building and use the money on the west side. Sedona went ballistic. The President backed down.

Some time later a committee, on which I served, was selected by the college to design the operations of a culinary institute in the building. Some of the best chefs and restaurant managers on the east side served on this committee. The committee some months later after serious study made unanimous recommendations on the design of the culinary institute but the President of the college rejected them. The then President replaced them with a scaled down version by at least half that was eventually created. Sedona went from having the possibility of a regional state of the art full culinary institute to a modest 2 kitchens culinary with one chef who would teach high school students and some line cooks basic culinary techniques.

During the next 6 years (2012 – 2018) mega millions of dollars of property tax money that came from our Verde Valley, including Sedona taxpayers were freed up. At this time mega millions of dollars were used to convert the then Prescott student performing arts hall to a state of the arts Prescott Performing Arts Center that would and does provide (in non covid year), a substantial amount of professional entertainment, along with dinner if desired, to Prescott and nearby community residents. It also provides the Prescott Film Festival the use of the College's Performing Arts Center with newly installed state of the art screen, speakers and sound equipment.

During this same time period the college poured millions of more dollars into the 106,000 sq. ft career technical facility recently acquired in Prescott while nothing of the kind was in the Verde Valley

As it that wasn't enough, close to a million dollars was spent in 2014 to redo 6 old tennis courts and add another grander one on the Prescott campus for the main use of Prescott none-student residents' tennis players. The College itself does not have a tennis team. The east side Governing Board representatives objected to this use of taxpayer money but were out voted on the Governing Board by the west side representatives.

What was done during this same period to improve education on the east side of the mountain?

2014 had a good start. That year the YC Governing Board created a committee entitled the Yavapai College Verde Valley Governing Board Advisory Committee. It had seven representatives chosen by the elected officials of City, Town and Village Councils and members of the County Board of Supervisors and the Yavapai Apache Nation. That committee was composed of community leaders from all over the eastside of our county. It functioned professionally.

For two years this committee worked hard, meeting twice monthly as a committee and, in addition, meeting with elected government councils and the county board of supervisors, and with superintendents of K through schools, and it conducted town halls in Sedona and Cottonwood to get public input.

During its tenure it presented 23 recommendations to the then Governing Board. Twenty-two of those recommendations were unanimous. One had 6 to 1 support (the dissenter wanted it to be stronger).

The Governing Board, when it was asked, refused to meet and talk with the committee and further refused to even discuss any of the committee's recommendations amongst themselves at their own board meetings. After two years the Governing Board wanted to hear no more from the committee. The majority closed it down at the end of a Board meeting without even having the subject listed on the agenda.

Let's move on and talk about what is happening today

Most of the college's funding for many years has come from county taxpayers property taxes. I believe eastsiders pay roughly 1/3 of these taxes.

The College Governing Board can raise our county's property taxes substantially on its own without taxpayers voting on it. It takes only 3 of 5 board members to do this. It waits for college recommendations. The Board has raised taxes over the years but not in the last three years. I would be surprised if the college administration asks the Board to raise taxes this year because 1. Our residents have been and still are exposed to very high inflation and because 2. The college currently has a strong balance sheet thanks to federal and state covid funds received. I personally would oppose any tax increase this year.

Yavapai College tuition remains far lower than Arizona's four-year state colleges or private colleges tuition. Moreover federal Pell grants are available to many applicants and that pays about 2/3rds of an eligible YC student's tuition.

In addition to lower tuition, 18 states offer what is called the 'promise' program, which either pays community college student tuition upfront or upon graduation repays the tuition paid by the student. Arizona, as a state, does not do this but Yavapai College, on its own, decided last year to offer a pay back of the actual out of pocket tuition paid by those students who complete their degree in two years.

Our college administration has also found a way to substantially reduce the cost of most students' books and course materials.

But still for some students tuition is not free. Not everyone that goes to the college is there for a degree.

There has been a welcome YC administration focus recently on recruiting Latin American students. It is still challenging convincing some potential students parents of the value of a community college education. Nevertheless our college is making good progress and continues to increase Latin American enrollment.

Our college provides great two-year nursing student courses on both sides of the mountain. It offers other health care training and that will likely be expanded. It provides Police and Aviation training in Prescott. The Prescott CTEC, in my opinion, is one of the best Career Technical Education Institute's in Arizona. Our college partners with several industries to train workers there for the skilled jobs they need.

Where should Yavapai College go from here?

I believe our college should continue to focus on two things; the changes in education needed to meet current and near future needs and on correcting inequities that exist in education on the east side of our mountain.

With regard to changes, adjusting to Covid has taught college staff and facility members much about how to improve on line teaching. Today the facility teaches most classes on line for health and safety reasons. Our facility has learned both new on line teaching techniques and new on line testing methods. Our college's technical on line communications skills have been improved as well. But the college administration must keep in mind it faces serious online teaching competition, not only from other educational institutions, but from big business as well.

More on change: Community Colleges in general have high dropout rates. Effective student counseling can alleviate some of this. Our student retention rate is very good compared to other community colleges and our college is working to make it better. Our college student advisors and teachers are keenly aware that many students who enter our community college have little idea what they want to work at for the foreseeable future or how education can help them achieve their goals

Our college is also seriously looking into starting a couple of 4-year degree programs, which the State of Arizona now allows it to do. The areas under consideration include nursing and business administration

My Conclusions

Yavapai College can provide a great expansive education if you live on the west side of the mountain. It serves Prescott and its nearby communities well. The college administration not only provides great education on the west side but yearly spends millions of dollars to provide its westside residents entertainment both in sports and theater.

On our side, the east side of the mountain, our college is behind where I believe it should be in both educational and job training and it spends little on community entertainment compared to that it spends on the westside.

In 2021, as I already stated, the college opened its first eastside Career Technical Education Center consisting of 10,000 sq.ft. on the Clarkdale campus. East side students have filled all openings. I believe the college should start construction on another 20,000 to 30,000 sq. ft. of career technical space this year.

In Prescott 550 people are taught 20 different kinds of Performing Arts by the college but just 12 or fewer people are taught just one single kind of performing arts, which is voice, on the eastside. This ratio is highly inequitable particularly as the eastside has a very high number of residents involved in various performing arts but no institution on the eastside exists to teach them beyond high school. Sedona, which provides near 50% of the east side taxes, has a Performing Arts Center at Red Rock High School that could very likely be used by the college to teach college level performing arts to eastside residents. I have been told for months that the college is looking into this possibility but nothing yet has been announced.

In Camp Verde, our fastest growing and poorest eastside community of 13,000 people, the college collects property taxes and but spends practically nothing there. Its elected town council, representing their residents, understandably is not happy about

that. Some people argue that Clarkdale isn't far away so Camp Verde residents could go there to school. And yet on the westside of the mountain much of Prescott Valley isn't far away from Prescott either but that hasn't stopped the college from spending millions of dollars on creating a large building with classrooms etc. in Prescott Valley. I believe the college is planning on spending more millions in Prescott Valley soon.

I have not put together a complete list of the equitable educational needs of the eastside here because time constrains me going further. There are more.

So why should the college fix these eastside inequities?

1. Let's start with the fact that eastsiders pay roughly 1/3 of the county taxes.
2. The average age of residents on each side of the mountain is about the same. The argument that eastsiders in general are older than westsiders isn't true.
3. For every 10 people that live on the westside of the mountain 4 live on the eastside. Clearly for every \$10 spent on the west side \$4 has not been spent on the east side by the college. Not even close.
4. The average person that lives on the eastside is considerable poorer than the average person that lives on the westside. This to me is a just another reason to pay attention to eastside potential students to help get them out of poverty.
5. Eastsiders are just as worthy of getting an education from Yavapai College as westsiders. There are so many people on the eastside who could benefit by attending Yavapai College but cannot afford the time or money to drive back and forth to Prescott for classes.

Inequities should be corrected as soon as possible. The Board should require the college to spend the money necessary to fix the eastside inequities as soon as possible. There is major resistance to doing this. The westside competes very effectively for dollars and wants their projects to be the top priority. It is the headquarters of the college. The administration is in Prescott. Four of the five Board members live on the westside.

But you can help get these inequities corrected.

Dr. Lisa Rhine, our College President is a positive sea change from our last President and she works hard on behalf of the college. She inherited a lot of problems that needed correction and, no doubt, feels the pressure. Input from eastside residents

could be helpful. Dr. Rhine is now asking for eastside community input. Please consider telling her what our community's residents want and need from the college going forward.

Dr. Rhine has set up a meeting to hear your views. Anyone, and that includes you, who wishes to speak about what kind of education we need here or on subjects like student/teacher housing on the east side, will have a chance to do so directly face to face with her and the Board on **March 22nd beginning at 4 P.M. at the Sedona College** building. I urge you to come and speak and to encourage others to do the same. You can help the eastside get more and better education. Frankly I need your help. I cannot do this alone.

I want you to know how much I appreciated having this opportunity to speak with you today. I thank OLLI for inviting me.

This is our college, we pay our property taxes for it and it should work for us. My job is to represent you and our fellow resident in this district and I take that job seriously.

I will now be happy to try and answer your questions.

Paul Chevalier