

LaGrandeur Looks Back

Ramon F. LaGrandeur may be leaving the top post at College of the Canyons, but he has made it known that he is not "retiring" in the normal sense of the word.

After five years as president of the college, LaGrandeur left yesterday, turning over the office to incoming president Dianne Van Hook.

Late last year, LaGrandeur announced his retirement, which prompted a six-month presidential search culminating in the hiring of Van Hook (see adjoining story).

"I hope that I am retiring 'to' something rather than 'from' something," he said.

Continued on Page 18

COC's New President Takes Office

By John Green
Signal Staff Writer

Dianne Van Hook will be sizing up the president's suite at College of the Canyons today.

This first day of July marks the beginning of Van Hook's presidency at the college.

Ramon F. LaGrandeur, who served as president for the past five years, retired effective yesterday (see adjoining story).

Van Hook, chosen following a six-month search, comes to the college from Lake Tahoe Community College which she served for the past two years in the dual role of dean of instruction and students.

A graduate of a community college herself, Van Hook went on to receive her doctorate in educa-

tional administration.

The fourth president and first woman to head the college, Van Hook said she is looking forward to leading the college through a period of extreme growth.

"I think the college is very proud of itself, and the people who work here are very proud to work here," she said. "They believe that the college has a bright future."

The reason for her high hopes, she said, is the explosive growth in both the residential and business communities that are closing in on the once-barren hills that surround the college.

"It's exciting for a college to be located in an area that's growing and that has the potential for economic stability," she said. "I think that any time you have new people coming in and new

businesses opening up there are opportunities that are created for the college."

Integrating the college with the local community — especially business and industry that might benefit from special vocational training programs — is one of Van Hook's goals, she said.

"As the community grows there will be many opportunities to develop cooperative relationships that haven't even been thought of yet," she said.

"The community college exists to provide training that leads to employment and to provide the first two years of the four-year baccalaureate degree."

Van Hook said that she also would like to work with local business and industry to provide

Continued on Page 18

18 ★ Newhall Signal & Saugus Enterprise ★ Friday, July 1, 1988

New COC President Outlines Goals

Continued from Page 1

advanced training for existing employees.

On the state funding apparatus that finances community colleges, however, Van Hook commented, "It's not adequate. That's why a lot of effort has been put in during the last few years to develop a new model for funding."

The solution to the current system, she said, is a system known as "program-based funding," something that she vigorously supports.

Unlike the California State University system, community colleges are funded by a complex system of calculating average daily attendance figures and projections, and then decreasing the amount even further by including what is called the "absence factor" for the K-through-12 system.

The end result, said Van Hook, is one where "we end up receiving a significantly lesser amount of money than we should get. Our costs are basically the same as those of a California State University."

Program-based funding, she explained, will allow community colleges to be funded for what it costs to actually run their programs.

To make matters worse, the current funding system hurts a growing school like College of the Canyons more than a less successful college, she said.

"But I would much rather have growth as a problem rather than having a decline of growth," she said. "It's a demoralizing process when a college's enrollment is shrinking."

That, she added, is something that she witnessed several years ago when she worked at Feather River Community College in Nor-



Photo by Tony Mason

Ramon F. LaGrandeur retired yesterday as president of College of the Canyons; Dianne Van Hook takes office today.

thern California.

"If I had to describe the kind of place that I would like to work at, this (College of the Canyons) would be it," she said. "It would be a dynamic, changing, growing, already-healthy-to-begin-with kind of place."

"This college has a strong foundation and has a strong chance of flourishing. I don't think that I will want to leave here very soon."

On the college's recently reported lack of success in the hiring of minorities, she commented that the problem is not one of not

trying.

"We can't force people to apply for jobs and we can't make them work here," she said. "The best that we can do is to make sure that we get the word out on openings to areas where there are minority populations."

On being the college's first woman president, Van Hook said, "I've always felt that people should be hired because they are the most qualified for the job. I don't think that my style can be characterized as male or female."

"My style is one that I have

developed that works for me based on my own thoughts and way of thinking. I don't think that it is because I am a woman."

A native of rural Minnesota, Van Hook, with her husband, owns a home in Seal Beach. She plans to reside in the college community and has just purchased a home in Valencia.

Van Hook's first official day on the job, she said, will be spent beginning a process of becoming acquainted with the people that make up the college and the community.

Retiring President Recounts Satisfactions

Continued from Page 1

At a time of unprecedented growth for the college and the community, he explained, the college faces a time of inevitable expansion.

"Right now, we are very close to running out of room," he said. "At certain times of the day we actually run out of classrooms."

"I expect that one of the first efforts of the new president will be to look into the need for a new building."

With a promising outlook for the college's future, LaGrandeur turned to the past which, he said, has been filled with several achievements and personal triumphs that he is particularly proud of.

"When I first took this job," he said, "I realized that there was a heavy breakdown in the relationship between the administration and the faculty."

Accordingly, he said, his first priority was to restore the mutual trust and confidence that are needed between the two groups to effectively operate a college.

"I think that has been accomplished," said LaGrandeur. "And it has been accomplished by demonstrating... that the functions of both the administration and the faculty support the mission of this college."

Improving the image of the college in the community was another mission that LaGrandeur undertook, he said.

"As I began to meet people in the community I found that people either had not heard of the college or, if they had, they did not think very highly of it," he said. "A lot of people have attended this college and benefited from it, but you never seem to hear from them."

Some referred to the college, he said, as "not really a college but a high school with ash trays" or "last chance college."

Now, he said, people in the community are more aware of the college and its quality programs.

One of the most satisfying accomplishments, he said, was the resurrection of the College of the Canyons Foundation, a fundraising arm of the college.

"The Foundation was in debt, and going deeper and deeper in debt each month," he said. "The only thing keeping the Foundation alive five years ago was the need to pay off debts which were mounting monthly."

The revamped Foundation is probably the second or third best funded community college foundation in California, he boasted. For the past two years, the organization has contributed approximate-

ly \$40,000 a year for the support of the college's instructional programs.

"I take great pride in the fact that the Foundation was almost dead and that now it is extremely lively."

He also is proud, he said, of the fact that the college was able to overcome a traditionally male-dominated athletics department by hiring the college's first full-time woman physical education instructor and coach, Diana Stanich.

Lastly, he said, the development of a strategic planning process integrated with the budget development process is something that the college will benefit from for years to come.

"We know that we are faced with a population explosion in this valley," he said. "The planning process will deal with how we are going to serve that growing population."

For the most part, LaGrandeur said, he can look back on his years at the college with a sense of satisfaction and accomplishment.

But not all aspects of the college operation have been as smooth-running, he said.

"We have an external problem of inadequate funding and finding extra space," he said. "An inter-

nal problem, I think, is the relationship of the board (of trustees) with the administration, and the board within the board itself.

"I think that they will have to keep working to improve their own working relationships before they will be able to give the guidance and direction to the college that would be expected from a board."

In the past, board performance has been hampered because of conflicts and disagreements between individual members.

"I think that they (board members) all share success for the college," said LaGrandeur. "But the way in which they approach that success is different, which sometimes leads to tension."

LaGrandeur and his wife, Patricia, will leave the Santa Clarita Valley early next week for the Puget Sound area of Washington. He has talked about joining VISTA, a domestic sort of Peace Corps, and an organization that promotes reading skills among the country's youth.

"I have no intention of sitting out on the front porch in a rocking chair," he added. "Besides, it's too cold and wet in Washington to do that."

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