



Of all the things you make in life, remember you make a difference.

– Noah benShea

August 7, 2009

Dear Colleague:

Can you believe it's been 40 years since College of the Canyons first opened its doors to the community in the fall of 1969? The decades have flown by and things have changed dramatically in the Santa Clarita Valley and at College of the Canyons.

The Santa Clarita Valley had about 60,000 residents when we opened. The Old Orchard Shopping Center on Lyons Avenue was one of the community's newest retail destinations. Interstate 5 had just replaced the old two-lane Highway 99. The Valencia Industrial Center was springing to life. The single-screen Plaza Theater in Newhall and the Mustang Drive-In off Soledad Canyon Road were the only local cinematic venues.

And what did College of the Canyons look like in 1969? It was a field full of cows, onions, and the occasional herd of sheep that like to congregate where the library now stands. When the college opened, we didn't have a campus. We held classes at Hart High School in the late afternoons and evenings after the high school's regular school day. We started with 700 students, a handful of faculty and staff, and proceeded to grow with the community. The innovation, energy, creativity and spirit of opportunity the college has become known for have inspired us to become one of the best colleges anywhere. We have come a long way. Today, we have 506 full-time employees, 1540 class sections, an expected 24,000 students this semester, and a total budget of \$175 million.

But even with all the changes in our size and sophistication over the last four decades, I see some interesting similarities between 1969 and now. That year was marked by uncertainty that signaled changes in the years to come. As Bob Dylan sang, "The Times They Are A-Changin'."

The Vietnam War raged, sparking protests at college campuses across the country. Richard Nixon took office after being elected President. The Manson Family killings terrorized Los Angeles. The counter-culture was in full swing, with 400,000 people gathering at Woodstock. People worried about the economy as inflation continued to rise.

But 1969 also was a year of promise, potential and growth. Man stepped on the moon for the first time. The Boeing 747 took to the skies, ushering in a new era of jumbo jet travel. Wal-Mart incorporated as Wal-Mart Stores, Inc. The first ATM was installed in the United States. ARPANET, the predecessor of the Internet, was created.

College of the Canyons Opening Day 2009

Fulfilling Dreams for 40 Years

We have our own uncertainties today as we face a sputtering economy, historic levels of unemployment, and an unprecedented state budget deficit, and the challenges of access to higher education. But there are promising opportunities available to us as well, like economic stimulus funds, the opportunity to restructure public policy, and the President's recognition of the vital role community colleges play in boosting the American economy.

Closer to home, we are fortunate to be located in the Santa Clarita Valley. Though not immune to the current economic climate, the community we serve offers opportunities not found elsewhere. It is the safest city of its size in Los Angeles County and the United States, and boasts the lowest unemployment rate in Los Angeles County among cities with populations over 100,000.

New businesses continue to open their doors as the City of Santa Clarita saw a 56 percent year-over-year increase in the number of Certificates of Occupancy issued in April 2009. The area continues to be a magnet for film and television production. The economic impact from location filming during the first third of 2009 was 98 percent above the impact recorded during the same time period last year.

Unlike other cities across the country with populations greater than 100,000 where the high school dropout rate approaches 50 percent, it is less than 1 percent in Santa Clarita. Clearly, education is a high priority in Santa Clarita, and more and more people are choosing College of the Canyons as an affordable and high quality option for higher education.

Now, 40 years after we began serving the Santa Clarita Valley, we are taking the initiative and surging forward to create new opportunities and build on the momentum we see in our community. As an employee of College of the Canyons, you deserve credit for providing the energy and initiative that fuels our development and forward motion, for contributing to creating an environment where people can pursue opportunities, take the next steps, open doors and create futures. Whether you have worked at COC for a short time or for many years, you can be proud of the fact that this educational community is special indeed. In addition to working hard, I thank you for also taking time to have fun and celebrate personal milestones of those who are part of our team – birthdays, weddings, the arrival of new children and more. You bring your character, your integrity, your compassion, and your care to all you do here. And, it makes an incredible difference. Never doubt that, as your impact changes lives each and every day.

You and your colleagues offer an amazing array of talents to the things we accomplish at the College. The combined effects of those talents have made substantial, creative, innovative, important, and lasting contributions to the community.

- You have altered the quality of life of our neighborhoods, our businesses, and the students who chose us to help them achieve their goals.
- You have given of yourselves, shared your confidence and energy, and served as role models, confidants, and advisors to students and colleagues alike.
- And, working together as a community, you have contributed to the amazing daily impact the college has on those around us.

Never has that been more true in these last few months, when we have grappled with unprecedented funding challenges, yet maintained our commitment to a high level of service that our community has come to expect.

College of the Canyons Opening Day 2009

Fulfilling Dreams for 40 Years

As Noah benShea said, “Things don’t have to be good for us to be great.” And, in ever so many ways, we are indeed great!

The results of your character and the foundations you have helped to put in place through your actions, your leadership, your passion, your spirit and your commitment are visible across campus and in our community. This last year alone, the accomplishments have been amazing. Working together, we:

- Secured more than **\$7 million in grant revenue** to fund innovation and needed programs. That infusion of revenue enabled us to train more nurses, help Early College High School students believe they can succeed in college, and put people to work by equipping them with fabrication, nanotechnology, or multimedia skills.
 - Opened **“The Zone”** to provide tutoring and structured study time for student athletes.
 - Reached out to 5,000 **parents and prospective students** at SCV College Day and helped them realize how College of the Canyons can assist them in reaching their educational goals.
 - Expanded the **wireless network** across the Valencia campus, putting technology within easy reach of our students.
 - Obtained **National Institute for Automotive Service Excellence (ASE)** certification for the Automotive Technology Program -- ensuring that our program meets or exceeds industry-recognized, uniform standards of excellence.
 - Achieved the **full six-year accreditation** of the College and received 12 commendations and only three recommendations for improvement, which affirmed the excellent work undertaken by faculty, staff, and administrators in every part of our campus operation, and the structure and support provided by the Board of Trustees that gives us the freedom to innovate, to take risks, and to distinguish ourselves from others.
 - Improved our skills and upgraded our training by participating in **540 Professional Development workshops**.
 - Collaborated in a collegial and constructive manner to identify **\$4 million** in spending reductions in response to statewide mid-year budget cuts to community colleges.
 - Launched a first-ever **Field Studies** program where faculty representing diverse disciplines teamed up to offer students a hands-on, outdoor learning experience.
 - Joined with the city and local business leaders to help the Los Angeles Economic Development Corporation develop the **first-ever economic development strategic plan** for Los Angeles County.
 - Launched the **Personalized Accelerated Learning (PAL) Program**, which uses a series of back-to-back, short-term classes to help students master Math and English skills and help them move more quickly into the classes they need to complete a major or earn a certificate.
 - Enhanced the visibility of the college in the community by starting the **College Ambassadors** program.
 - Opened the **East P.E. Building and tennis courts** and hosted community college state championship soccer games, the Western States Conference Bowl, and the National Police and Fire Games.
 - Implemented **seven LEAP projects** and created six more solutions by the LEAP 2009 grads.
 - Received the **Service Excellence and Innovation Award** from the United States Small Business Administration.
 - Won the **Exemplary Program Award** from the Academic Senate for California Community Colleges for the Institute of Teaching and Learning.
 - Received the **National Innovative Program Award** from the North American Council for Staff, Program and Organizational Development for LEAP.
-

College of the Canyons Opening Day 2009

Fulfilling Dreams for 40 Years

- Reached out to 90 local organizations and contributed thousands of volunteer hours through the efforts of our faculty, staff and students, which resulted in our Service Learning Program being named to the **President's Higher Education Community Service Honor Roll**. (One of only 39 colleges or universities in California to receive the distinction.)
- Elevated the success of returning students to a top priority by creating the **GO! Program**, which uses short-term online classes to make learning flexible and enable students to achieve their educational goals and move more quickly into new career opportunities.
- Created the inaugural **ARTstART event**, which drew thousands of visitors to the campus in May for a daylong event that highlighted COC's fine and performing arts departments and partnership activities with local school districts.
- Opened the **Early Childhood Education Center at the Canyon Country Campus**, created new learning opportunities for students, and removed a barrier to education by making high quality childcare available for parents trying to balance school and family responsibilities.
- Completed plans for the **Applied Technology Building** at the Canyon Country Campus, which will offer hands-on training in high-wage and emerging fields like solar technology, automotive technology, electronics, construction management, building inspection and construction trades (plumbing and electrical technician) and will submit them for state approval on September 1.
- Served more students than ever by achieving a **95 percent fill rate** in our classes.
- Reduced our 2009-10 operating budget **without laying off** full-time staff, or eliminating programs and services for students and/or staff.
- Offered summer school, which secured **11% more students** than Summer of 2008.
- Launched (fall 2009) the **fast-track Paramedic-to-RN** option in the nursing program to help paramedics make the jump to becoming registered nurses.
- Received a two-year \$400,000 grant from the Chancellor's Office that will help fund the college's **Medical Lab Technician (MLT) program**.
- Were one of only three colleges to be named by the Hewlett Foundation as a "**Leader in Student Success**" for our excellent Basic Skills program.
- Received a \$350,000 grant to create a **welding automation certificate program** as part of the college's associate of science degree in welding technology.

I could fill page after page with the accomplishments you achieved in the last year. Instead, let me thank you for a job well done. When viewed in the overall challenging context in which we found ourselves, with shrinking state resources and constantly changing parameters, as a college community you did an amazing job, and as a result, we distinguished ourselves from the rest!

So what does the future hold? While we don't know exactly what the next 40 years – or even the next five or 10 – will hold, we know we will continue to set the pace for others to follow, blaze new trails, innovate, excel, and lead with quality and distinction.

Author Ernest Holmes stated: "Great things are done by people who think great thoughts and then go out in the world to make their dreams come true." As we look ahead, I am once again reminded of the parallels between now and 1969. As that year hinted at the promises of amazing things to come, so does this new year at College of the Canyons. Because of your energetic efforts and commitment, and those of the colleagues

College of the Canyons Opening Day 2009

Fulfilling Dreams for 40 Years

with whom you collaborate in such innovative ways, many amazing initiatives are in the works and will debut in the 2009-10 academic year.

- First, and foremost, the **University Center** will make its debut in the fall, expanding access to higher education beyond the associate degree level to our community. The center will be up and running with the beginning of the fall semester, and a special Opening Celebration is scheduled from 5:30 p.m. to 7 p.m. on Saturday, October 17. Mark your calendar and plan to join us as we celebrate the completion of this amazing dream and the opening of doors of opportunity for thousands of local residents.
- We will expand our **Medical Lab Technician Training Program**, thanks to a \$400,000 grant funded through the American Recovery and Reinvestment Act (economic stimulus program). College of the Canyons was one of 17 colleges to receive an economic stimulus grant in the state.
- The **Culinary Arts Program** will host classes in its new home at Westfield Valencia Town Center. Occupying prime former restaurant space on Town Center Drive, Culinary Arts students will perfect their skills in a professional-grade kitchen and receive the training that will give them a competitive advantage in a tough job market.
- The City of Santa Clarita's **Work Source Center** will be moved from a hard-to-find location in the community to our campus, enabling job seekers to take advantage of not only what the Work Source Center offers, but also our college's complementary services.
- The long-awaited and much-needed expansion of **Mentry Hall** will commence construction after a groundbreaking ceremony scheduled for 10:30 a.m. on September 10. Funded by local bond money, this project will move forward without any dependence on state resources, and will enable us to meet increasing student demand for media arts classes. When the project is complete, the building will feature a cutting-edge learning environment where students will gain the knowledge and skills needed to succeed in the digital workplace.
- Our 10-year partnership with Los Angeles County Fire Department will enter an exciting new phase when we commence construction on an ambitious expansion of the **Del Valle Fire Training Center** in Val Verde. Firefighters and emergency first-responders will hone their skills with amazingly realistic scenarios and learn new techniques to improve public safety.
- As one of three California Community Colleges recognized by the Hewlett Leaders in Student Success Program, we will conduct "**train the trainer**" sessions for other California Community Colleges in the area of basic skills.

The times are changing faster than we can imagine. As we move into our 40th year of service to the community, the opportunities that present themselves to us will increase, and many will likely be disguised as challenges. Vaclav Havel put it this way: "Vision is not enough; it must be combined with venture. It is not enough to stare up the steps. As today's leaders we must step up the stairs."

Consistent with the spirit and enthusiasm that has helped get us to where we are today, College of the Canyons is definitely stepping up as we move ahead. Few colleges will have the courage or the energy to do so. Fear of the unknown, a lack of confidence, a false sense of comfort in the status quo, and inertia will paralyze some and intimidate others. They will not leap ahead, gain a competitive advantage, or lead and clear the path for dreams and opportunities ahead. Unlike these institutions, College of the Canyons will do all of this and more! As Gifford Pinchot said, "The vast possibilities of our great future will become realities only if we make ourselves responsible for that future."

College of the Canyons Opening Day 2009

Fulfilling Dreams for 40 Years

The important thing is that we are prepared for the changes; we are confident we can succeed, and we have the courage to give up what we are and do for what we can become. Antoine de Saint-Exupery said, "As for the future, your task is not to foresee it, but to enable it." We have prepared ourselves to be successful and to thrive in all times. Whether it is adversity, or prosperity, we always make the most of what we have and make it work. I know our college is up for the challenge. We have the human talent, passion, and commitment to fuel our successes as we embrace the opportunities ahead. We have achieved a track record of which we are proud, and we have proven time and time again that we grow with the community. We will continue to commit, to dream, to get involved, to risk, to focus, to create, to adjust, to anticipate, to persist, to cooperate, and to achieve in ways that will benefit our students, amaze our community, and continue to make us all proud of the amazing initiatives we launch to meet our community's needs with quality, with vision, and with unparalleled passion for all we do.

All of us at College of the Canyons have worked tremendously hard to plan for what's ahead. It shows in what we have already accomplished, and it has laid a foundation for our future success. I thank each and every one for the role you have played in helping to make it so. I know this year will be amazing and one of our best yet. It will be a year of significant expansion, growth, change, and many new opportunities. I'm excited to get started on what will be a year of firsts to be celebrated and enjoyed by all.

A spirit and history of fun, celebration and building community has fueled our journey these last 40 years. It has been one of the ways we get to know each other, celebrate each other's successes, and move our ideas from thoughts into action. Every 24 hours as we usher in a new day, we have a choice to make about how we approach and perceive what greets us. We have the choice to make the most of it and make it count. Because of who we are as a college community, I know we will make the most of the opportunities and what is going on around us. I know we will embrace what we do as only we can. And I know this year will be amazing as we begin fulfilling dreams for our 41st year – an incredible feat indeed!

To get our future off to a great start, I invite you to continue the adventure and inaugurate the 2009-10 academic year with me on **Friday, August 21, at 11:30 a.m. in the Gym** for our Opening Day Luncheon, Service Award presentation, Retiree Celebration and groovy entertainment as, I'm sure, only COC can provide. I look forward to seeing you there!

Go Cougars!



Dr. Dianne Van Hook
Chancellor