

## Opening Day Speech

Good afternoon! It's so great to see everyone, and have all of COC gathered in one place! I hope you had a fantastic summer break, and I trust you are geared up to start another year.

Summer seems to pass more quickly each year. But I still always look forward to Opening Day. Today is the 79th time I have started a Fall or Spring semester at a community college in my career. I refrained my pulling out my pencil box last night, and packing my No. 2 pencil, protractor, and ball point pen. But just as I headed off to a new academic year as a student, last night and this morning as I was getting organized and ready for today, I was excited for this day to come because it represents a new start, new hopes, new opportunities, and new chances to do what we do so well together. It is the one day when we gather together as an educational community. Classified Staff. Faculty. Administrators. Board of Trustees. Retirees. Even our Foundation Board is represented today. The energy and excitement that you bring to what you do is infectious, and creates energy and is in the spirit that fills the room. I look forward to the year ahead with great anticipation because of what you bring to the college each day, because of your plans and dreams and the impact your efforts have on what we can do for those we are here to serve.

As we get started, I want to take a moment and introduce our Board of Trustees:

- ✓ Michele Jenkins, President
- ✓ Mike Berger, Vice President
- ✓ Joan MacGregor, Clerk
- ✓ Bruce Fortine, Member
- ✓ Scott Wilk, Member
- ✓ Nick Onyshko, Student Trustee

This board sets the tone that lets lead with courage, context, purpose, and vision and do amazing things for our community, and I appreciate their leadership and dedicated service.

I also want to give some **special thanks** to those who worked behind the scenes to put together this outstanding event and ensure it is truly representative of who we are, and what we're about at COC. Please join me in showing appreciation to:

- Sandra Canas and everyone at ISSI for the delicious food.
- Jami Paige and Step Paglia for coordinating the menu;
- Graphics, Reprographics and HR for the programs, which showcase the employees whose anniversaries we are celebrating today;

- Nick Pavik for the T-shirt design, and Steph Paglia for coordinating the T-shirt distribution;
- Diane Fiero for the Presentation of New Employees, a visible example of how we are continuing to build our staff and our programs;
- Allison Korse-Devlin and Kari Soffa for their long hours in choreographing the stellar Opening Day dance routines;
- Shawn Irwin, Joe Lanthier, and Noel Lopez for the audiovisual set-up and always entertaining video, which provides a good deal of laughter for all of us;
- Pamela Dagon, for the wonderful table decorations;
- Our hard-working Facilities staff for setting up the tables and chairs, which gives us a place to sit and eat rather than stand around balancing our plates and utensils;
- Jim Temple and his staff in Computer Support for producing the CDs, which allow us to get a great deal of information in an easy-to-handle format;

And finally, I want to acknowledge someone else who is especially deserving of recognition for her involvement with not only today's event, but with every Opening Day since 1991. Lenore Marta from my office has worked tirelessly behind the scenes to select menus, coordinate decorations, recruit volunteers, print service award certificates, distribute invitations, and even bus tables. No matter what has needed doing, Lenore has tended to every detail to ensure our last 21 Opening Day luncheons have gone off without a hitch. This is her last Opening Day, since she will be retiring in December. In honor of her efforts over the last two decades to make this event a truly special day in the life of our college, I want to present her with a special gift. Lenore, would you please come forward? (WAIT FOR LENORE TO COME UP)

We created this memento that captures the spirit of our Opening Day festivities over the years and says: Thanks for lunch! In honor of 21 years of outstanding Opening Day Luncheons, your friends at College of the Canyons thank you for working so faithfully behind the scenes to make each event so special for your colleagues.

On behalf of the Cougar Family, please know how much we appreciate your efforts. And next year, we'll look forward to seeing you as a guest so you can relax and enjoy yourself!

As we begin a new year, it is clear that we find ourselves continuing to face unique and challenging circumstances. As I read the headlines, California, and the nation as a whole, are in a state of flux:

- ✓ The stock market is a yo-yo.
- ✓ California unemployment climbed higher this week.
- ✓ The U.S. credit rating has been down-graded.
- ✓ A quarter of our state's high school students drop out before graduating.
- ✓ New jobs are not being created in the US as they have in the past.
- ✓ And the state can't seem to pass a balanced budget.

In the midst of 360-degree turmoil, it can be incredibly difficult to know what to do.

- ✓ Play it safe, or take a chance?
- ✓ Hoard your resources in supposedly safe ways, take fewer risks, do what is safe rather than what is needed?
- ✓ Or invest in opportunities that may or may not work out?

Just contemplating the complexity of these decisions can cause even the boldest leaders to hesitate. But at COC, we don't hesitate. We move forward with focus and purpose.

It is during these crises when the bonds of partnerships, THE STRENGTH OF RELATIONSHIPS, and the importance of past planning helps to guide us through the chaos. Where we are today is a result of the effort of all those in the room. Our achievements are the sum total of our thoughts and actions of yesterday. Thomas Jefferson said, "Do you want to know who you are? Act. Action will delineate and define you." The actions of our leaders here at COC past and present, from the classroom to the Board of Trustees, have set the stage and paved the way for this place we enjoy today. From creating innovative curriculum to building first-class learning environments, to the ever-growing number of staff and initiatives, their actions have determined what we can do today, created the capacity for what's possible and inspired us to move forward.

As we weather these storms; when we push forward with new programs and new initiatives; when we as a district forge a new path that was previously unknown to us, it is during these times when we also serve as beacon for our neighbors, our community, our sister schools, and to the state as a whole. When the whole world is waiting to see what is coming next, people look to and support those who say, “Crisis be damned – we *will* find a way!”

As professional futurist Garry Golden shared with the faculty this morning, amazing new technologies looming on the horizon will be a major part of that transformation from today’s notions of education and business, to tomorrow’s. As a leader of change, a place known for its innovation and trail blazing, College of the Canyons will continue to evolve, without sacrificing any of the quality that has made us so respected and admired. That comes as no surprise to us, as, in fact, as our track record reflects; we are quite adept at dealing and leading change and development, of touching lives and of making a difference.

By any measure, and in the public's opinion, College of the Canyons is a leader in our field. People tell me that all the time:

- ✓ Roger Seaver and Kerry Carmody, the CEOs at Henry Mayo Newhall Memorial Hospital and Providence Holy Cross – Training our nurses.
- ✓ Don Fleming, owner of Valencia Acura – Preparing auto technicians.
- ✓ Parents – Providing quality education at a fraction of the cost.

As everyone knows, I love talking about the college and I am proud of our successes and grateful to the talented and committed people who make magic happen daily on our two campuses. We are successful by any measure.



Success often means that someone, or some department, has found a working solution to whatever change or problem was before them. It may not have been the first solution; it may have taken repeated tries; it may have been an issue that we saw coming for years, or one that sprang up on us overnight. Success means working the problem, crafting a plan, implementing that plan, and forging ahead. Success also requires the ability to get to the heart of just what the problem is. One of my favorite methods for doing so is asking one simple question that always dissolves complex issues down to the most fundamental level: “So what?”

My doctoral advisor at the University of La Verne always asked me that question. No matter how convoluted the topic, or how complex the information, he brought it back to this one key consideration. “So what?” It’s so simple, and yet so profound – and so easily forgotten. To remind myself of the question’s importance, and its clarity, I had it engraved on a sign and it hangs on the wall just behind my desk. Every day, I walk into my office and have to answer that question – “So what?”

- ✓ **So what** does all the change mean and what difference does it make, anyway?
- ✓ More to the point, **so what** does it all mean for COC?
- ✓ And, **so what** role do we play in all this?

These aren't new questions for you. I know you have grappled with them and given them considerable thought and study as you have completed your annual plans, identified student learning outcomes, charted out your department goals for the year, or identified personal professional plans for yourself.

At COC, we are quite adept at looking into the future with a telescope, projecting what's ahead, and planning accordingly, and not just looking only at what is in front of us with a microscope. Our ability to anticipate and plan is one of the key reasons we have been so successful in enhancing our own capacity, and in growing our college so we can meet the needs of our students and community in ever-increasing ways and with breadth and depth that matters.

At last year's Opening Day, I challenged us to ask ourselves, and then act on, four questions:

- ✓ What is one new thing I can attempt in the next 12 months to challenge myself and grow beyond my current boundaries?
- ✓ What can I do personally to create opportunities for our students?

- ✓ What bridge can I build to another department?
- ✓ What can I do personally to expand our community's connections with College of the Canyons?

It's clear you did that, as the answers are evident in our record of what we have accomplished **this past year**. We:

- Secured \$6,180,376 in **grant funding**.
- Provided **Financial Aid** services to 22 percent more students, and increased loans to students by 36 percent.
- Expanded the **Honors Program**.
- Connected with recent high school graduates through the **First Year Experience** program.
- Improved the academic performance of student athletes through **The Zone**.
- Saw the **1,604th** person graduate from the University Center with a bachelor's degree or master's degree.
- Secured **\$1.9 million** in economic development grants and training revenue for the Small Business Development Center, Center for Applied Competitive Technologies, Business Incubator, and Employee Training Institute so we could help area businesses retool, retrain, and build momentum in these challenging economic times.

- Provided training services to **3,063** local employees and served **547** employers through ETI, CACT and SBDC.
- Launched the week-long “**Celebrating the Humanities**” program, which featured a wide range of events enjoyed by faculty, staff and students.
- Hosted another successful installment of “**ArtStart**,” and provided the community with samplings from the artistic offerings at COC - music, dance, theatre, RTVF, animation, graphic design and studio arts.
- Received recognition as the top-performing SBDC in the Los Angeles region as measured by client results/service levels provided.
- Launched the **Medical Lab Technician** training program, becoming one of the first community colleges in the state to offer training in this high-demand field.
- Won numerous academic and athletic awards, including the first-ever national gold medal for our **Speech Team**.

- Reached out to 80 local organizations through the efforts of more than 45 faculty and staff and 400 students, which resulted in **Service Learning** being named to the President's Higher Education Community Service Honor Roll. We were one of only 16 colleges or universities in California to receive the distinction – and the only community college.
- Brought together the leaders of local community service organizations through our **Non-Profit Council** to promote partnerships and resource sharing so they can help provide needed services and support for those less fortunate.
- Shared the wonder of the arts with more than 17,000 elementary, middle and high school students thanks to the **K-12 Arts Partnership**.
- Moved the **Re-Entry/Veterans Center** into its own office so we could expand its services and help ensure our growing number of veterans and re-entry students are successful as they work toward completing their educational goals.
- Added new degree options in the **University Center**, including a BS in Engineering from Cal State LA, an Autism Certificate, and an MA in Early Childhood Education from Brandman University, and a Master of Social Work from CSUN.

- And we have 95 new \$1,000 scholarships available for our future students because we exceeded our fund-raising goals in the Osher Foundation Scholarship Challenge by 174 percent. Out of 110 community colleges statewide that took part in the Osher challenge, College of the Canyons finished fifth in total dollars raised, generating \$1,065,000. COC was one of only six campuses in the state that raised \$1 million or more for this important initiative. By comparison, more than 50 other colleges did not reach the \$100,000 mark – including 27 campuses that raised \$10,000 or less.

As we consider the opportunities ahead, the focus and reason we do it resides in how we answer three questions:

- ✓ So what does it mean on a personal level?
- ✓ So what does College of the Canyons mean to our students?
- ✓ So what difference do we make anyway?

To see and to hear people in this community speak to and about us, the answer is clear: COC is a constant.

- It is a source of stability for our community in an otherwise turbulent and uncertain world.
- It is a source of hope and inspiration and a place of possibilities and options.

- As they look at the changes happening around them, and to them, our students know they can count on College of the Canyons to provide them with a safe place to risk, and connect them to their future.
- They know they can count on COC; they know they can count on **you**.
- We inspire them!

And what can they count on you for? They can count on you to provide:

- ✓ Understanding
- ✓ Encouragement and hope
- ✓ Paths to opportunity
- ✓ Role models

In essence, they can count on **you** to inspire **them**. Johann Gottfried Von Herder said, “Without inspiration the best powers of the mind remain dormant. There is a fuel in us which needs to be ignited with sparks.” As you provide understanding, encouragement, and opportunity, you provide the sparks our students need to fuel their growth and development, and ultimately change their lives. You help them gain the confidence to believe that if you don’t settle for anything less than your best in life, you’ll be amazed at what you can accomplish. And that is a rare and priceless gift indeed!

So what difference does understanding make?

The reason our students are ultimately successful is because of the understanding and acceptance they receive from all of you. Our state Chancellor Jack Scott likes to say that California Community Colleges take the top 100 percent of students in the state. Unlike, the state’s other higher education systems, or private colleges and universities, we make no distinctions among those whom we serve. It is an honor and a privilege for us to educate each and every individual who finds their way to our campus.



- ✓ Men.
- ✓ Women.
- ✓ Teens.
- ✓ 20-somethings.
- ✓ 30-somethings.
- ✓ 40-somethings.
- ✓ Even 50 and 60-somethings.
- ✓ Veterans.
- ✓ Honors students.
- ✓ Basic Skills students.
- ✓ Transfer students.
- ✓ CTE students.
- ✓ Re-entry students.
- ✓ Disabled students.
- ✓ Black.
- ✓ White.
- ✓ Hispanic.
- ✓ Asian.
- ✓ Rich.
- ✓ Poor.

In other words, **it doesn't matter who you are**, or what your past record of achievement is, if you need a chance to achieve, you are welcome here at College of the Canyons. That sense of acceptance and understanding tells our students "Come as you are. We will meet you there and help you grow to fulfill your potential." For all of these students, it is all about their relationships with COC, it is about their relationships with people who help them move forward. It is all about the people. Real people whose lives have been changed by real people.

Our **Veterans/Re-Entry Center** is just one example of those places on our campus that specializes in connecting with students and reassuring them that we **do understand** where they're coming from, and we're ready, willing and able to help. Rene Munoz is both a student and an active member of the U.S. Army National Guard. When he enrolled for the first time last fall, knew that he wanted to use his VA benefits to study civil engineering, but he didn't know exactly how to get started. "It was one of those things where I knew I had my VA benefits, but I just didn't know the process to get them," he said.

After discovering the Center, Rene was quickly able to begin the process of applying for his benefits. He says, “If I hadn’t come to the Center, I wouldn’t have even known how to register for classes.” “But this office deals with veterans and re-entry students on a daily basis. They know what you need, and what you need to do to get there.”

“Coming here you’re around other veterans and re-entry students who know what you’re going through,” Rene said. “It’s welcoming, and you get a real sense that there is someone looking out for you.” **INTRODUCE RENE.**

### **Encouragement**

Along with understanding, you provide our students with **encouragement**. Henry Ford said, “There is no man living who isn’t capable of doing more than he thinks he can do.” It is our job to expand the horizons of our students and show them what they are capable of doing and becoming through gentle encouragement, and on occasion, a swift kick in the rear.

During these uncertain times, tuition continues to climb at Cal State and UC campuses and at community colleges. We will process 15,000 financial aid applications on campus, a new record. Many students come to us having lost their jobs, their careers, or their companies, their homes, and in some cases, their families. They're not sure what comes next. They know they need to be equipped with new skills, but they doubt their ability to learn. Others find themselves at College of the Canyons because they were shut out of a CSU or UC campus. The uncertainty, insecurity, and self-doubt can be overwhelming. But you are quick to show our students that they **can** do whatever it is they put their minds too through your words of encouragement... A "you **CAN** do it," a word of praise, a helpful hand from you, can change a life.

For those of you in the English and Math departments, you know writing and math are two things that strike terror in the hearts of students. But you are instrumental in showing them they **can indeed** solve an equation or write a term paper. Here's what a student who used the TLC had to say about the help they received:

- ✓ I was confused about the assignment and (the tutor) was able to help me complete an outline. He also walked me through different points that I can include in my essay. I am always very thankful for the help that I get when I come into the TLC!
- ✓ Instead of the tutor criticizing my paper, she talked to me about the subject and how to apply it to my essay. She helped me get a better knowledge of how to approach and broaden my thoughts on the essay topic.

And those who recently attended a **Building Math Confidence Workshop** came away with a whole new perspective. Here's what they said they learned:

- ✓ I have learned to change my thought to more positive thoughts. I also have learned that I can start taking math classes.
- ✓ Victim behavior does not promote actions!
- ✓ Thank you for helping me see that I am not alone in this endeavor and sharing skills/resources to assist me.

At every turn, in ever so many ways, **you** serve as mentors and role models, and possess the credibility that allows you to relate to our students and their unique situations. Your impact on them, and the power of your influence, are inspiring and create a lasting effect.

We see that in this room. Almost two-thirds of our employees have been students at COC.

You came here with the same questions and doubts that our current students face, and along the way, you found the **strength** and **courage** to conquer those fears and achieve your goals with the help of others here. Your accomplishments point the way forward for our students and show them they too can become whatever it is that they want to become as they invest the time, energy, and effort required to do so.

Someone once said, "Instead of giving myself reasons why I can't, I give myself reasons why I can." So many of you gave people reasons that they could.

**You** are the reason why our students **can**, because you've been in their position. This week I had the opportunity to host a New Employee Luncheon for the 12 newest members of the Cougar Family. I was so impressed by the poise, personality, and professionalism of each person, but what really stood out was how many had experienced College of the Canyons as a student.

- ✓ Griselda Antimo works as a Student Services Specialist II in Financial Aid.
- ✓ Jill Carleton also works as a Student Services Specialist II in the Financial Aid office.
- ✓ Kim Haglund is an instructional lab tech in the TLC. She is a familiar face in the TLC Lab and the ZONE, having first worked there as a College Assistant beginning in 2003, and as an Adult Hourly beginning in 2006.
- ✓ Faby Marton is the site supervisor for the Center for Early Childhood Education at the Canyon Country Campus. She holds an Associate's degree in Child Development from COC, and she plans to attend classes at the University Center, to pursue a Bachelor's, then Master's degree in Early Childhood Education/Child Development.

- ✓ Talya Salzarulo is a student services technician in Admissions and Records. She attended Academy of the Canyons, earned her Associate's degree here at College of the Canyons, and her Bachelor's degree from California State University, Bakersfield by attending classes at the University Center!

### **DVH TO ASK EMPLOYEES TO STAND UP**

Those of you here who have helped these former COC students who are now your colleagues should be immensely proud as you can see today the visible impact of what your encouragement, and understanding created and inspired.

And students will respond to you. They can see your hope for them in the eyes and hear it in the voice of COC employees who is here because they know deep down in the core of their very being that this college can – and does – change lives as you give them opportunity.



## Opportunity

Albert Einstein said, “All that is valuable in human society depends upon the opportunity for development accorded the individual.” More than anything, you inspire our students because you provide them with opportunities:

- ✓ An opportunity to learn.
- ✓ An opportunity to know the satisfaction of success.
- ✓ An opportunity to change directions.
- ✓ An opportunity to have hopes and dreams.
- ✓ An opportunity to work towards turning these into reality.

What students of all ages and backgrounds learn from you at College of the Canyons gives them the power to empower and reinvent themselves. It begins with a personal transformation. They master new skills, and accordingly, learn they have what it takes.

Their self-doubts give way and are replaced with self-confidence, like this student, who wrote to tell me – “I have had such an amazing experience at COC. The professors are remarkable, the counselors are always helpful, the staff members are friendly, and the opportunities are endless. I was honored to proudly represent this college as an ambassador, serve as President of Psi Beta, and be an active member in the Psychology Club, Future Educators Club, Alpha Gamma Sigma and Sociology Club. Without (this) support, many of the opportunities and experiences I had would not have been possible.”

Someone once said, “Confidence comes not from always being right, but from not fearing to be wrong.” You provide our students a safe place where they can overcome their fears, where they can **risk doing**. In the process, they are inspired as they overcome challenges and prove to themselves they can learn, grow, and be who they want to be.

It is those skills that ultimately take their lives in new directions – that create opportunity. From that point, their potential is limitless.

- ✓ They believe in themselves and their capabilities.
- ✓ The ability to succeed was there all along.
- ✓ They just needed **your** help to discover it.

- ✓ And they did, because you took the time to help them discover it. Once discovered, that enabled them to create their own opportunities in the future.

Just like three of our Culinary Arts students, who were hired at Velvet Cupcakes, a new bakery in Valencia Town Center. Amanda McNelis, Megan Hourany and Marissa Oye were still taking classes at our Institute for Culinary Education when McNelis responded to a help wanted ad looking for bakers to work in the pastry shop during the holiday season.

From a pool of 200 applicants, McNelis was selected for an interview. “Two of the people I interviewed with were Le Cordon Bleu graduates,” she said. “So for me, coming from nearby COC, I thought I probably had a fat chance.”

She got the job, and business boomed, so she had a chance to expand COC’s presence in the Velvet Cupcakes Kitchen. “My boss asked if I knew of anyone else from the COC culinary program,” said McNelis, who has since been promoted to shift supervisor, “so I called Marissa and Megan, and they’ve been working here ever since.”

The ability to inspire – what an amazing gift indeed – is unique, out of the ordinary, and it's not something that just anyone can do. But of course, the team of people who make up COC are far from just anyone ordinary. You are exceptional, and it's not surprising that you have the power to inspire our students.

Your dedication, passion, and involvement set the stage for our students' success. You continue to ask yourselves, "so what do I mean for our students?" You believe in you—and you continue to believe that we will always be better tomorrow than we were yesterday because we do it together. Someone in the community recently asked me, "What inspires you?" I answered without hesitation: "My colleagues at COC inspire me."

I'm proud of **who you are, of what you do** as a critical part of the team, and the success that you enable us to achieve. Because **you** come to work every day equipped with common sense, compassion, a sense of humor, confidence, a team orientation, an innovative, risk-taking spirit, tenacity, commitment, an aspiration to succeed, and creativity, **you** make a difference in the lives of the students we so proudly serve.

It has been said that “opportunities usually disguise themselves as hard work so most people don’t recognize them.” The same is true at College of the Canyons. Doing difficult things brings great rewards. If you do easy things all the time, you don’t feel a profound sense of accomplishment. If you get a difficult thing done, as I know many of you do, you feel better about yourself since you stretched your abilities further. We can do amazing things if we see it in our minds, set a great goal, and work on it with all our might. And in the process, our students and the greater Santa Clarita community are inspired as well.

It is an inspiration that energizes me like nothing else does – the courage to do something new, to take a risk, and to have the confidence to pursue our dreams with quality, integrity, focus and character.

At COC, we do not hesitate to leap into the dream – to try new things. Where would we be if we didn’t?

- ✓ Would we have a University Center?
- ✓ Would we be moving ahead with an on-campus Culinary Arts facility?
- ✓ Would we have the First Year Experience Program?
- ✓ Would we have a Volunteer Bureau?

- ✓ Would we have The Zone?
- ✓ Would we have the Writing Achievement Center, or the SIGMA Math Achievement Center?
- ✓ Would we have the Gardens of the Canyons?
- ✓ Would we have a national championship hockey team?
- ✓ Would we have a permanent Student Art Collection?
- ✓ Would we have a Canyon Country Campus, which for the first time will enroll over 5,000 students?

The dream will never come true if you only keep it in your mind and don't move into the driver's seat to move it forward. Here, we take all the experience we can and we look for new experiences. And, as we do, we grow! We learn new skills and figure out complex things, and we have fun! We live out our dreams by learning the skills we need to do amazing, fun things with our lives and our college for our students. And that adds a spirit and creates an attitude that is contagious, and inspirational to our students.

The attitude that people bring to what they do either sets the stage for innovation or stifles it. At College of the Canyons, attitude lights the way for dreamers, doers, and builders and energizes us all as we do what we do in our own COC way.

It is the fuel that drives this place! When posed with questions that could have been met elsewhere with a “no, it is not possible,” instead we answer “can do” and “we will” and we do it.

Regardless of what changes lie ahead in the future, I am confident that as we have through the last five recessions, we will meet the challenges, help our students to do the same, inspire thousands and put the wheels in motion to achieve great dreams as we have for more than four decades. Now at the beginning of this new semester, it is more important than ever that we strive to help our students and each other achieve the goals that we set for ourselves. It’s up to us to us in public education to dream bigger dreams and to make those dreams come true.

We do it differently here, and we can all be proud of that fact. The climate of innovation and exploration is what defines our district, and while others pull back, we will push forward. We are ready to risk, to dream, to do, to get it done, and to do the best we can do for those we serve – and in doing so, serve as an inspiration for a better tomorrow.

At the end of each day, we will be proud of how we conducted ourselves, how we made a difference in the lives of others, how we understood and encouraged, opened doors to opportunities, and helped people to change their lives. Remember it's all about the people and that includes you.

As you start a new academic year, while it may be your first semester, or your 85<sup>th</sup>, remember that to your students and colleagues you may be the one person that makes the difference. I thank you for all you do and I am excited to see what's next.