

OPENING DAY SPEECH

Achieving Our Dreams for 45 Years

Good afternoon!

It's a pleasure to welcome everyone to this new academic year. Each September, I find myself transported back to a sense of newness and fresh beginnings, as well the infinite possibilities and excitement that I experienced during my very first days of school as a small child. Now that we have digital technology at the touch of our fingertips, it may no longer be about that spiral-bound notebook with the blank pages, but still – every fall, we continue to find ourselves considering what it means to begin again.

This August, we have the privilege of greeting new students and welcoming them into our myriad of degree programs, training initiatives, outstanding staff, and our reputation across the state of California and beyond. Some of these students look - as freshmen will look – irrepressibly eager and impossibly young. But we also have our returning students who are motivated to complete, to succeed, and launch out into the world.

Mathematician and philosopher Alfred North Whitehead said, “The art of progress is to preserve order amid change and to preserve change amid order.” That’s really what we’re here to do – to preserve what College of the Canyons has built and has stood for over the last 45 years and to evolve to meet the changing demands. It’s not a choice between tradition and change, between familiar and new. Instead, we face an opportunity and an imperative to embrace thoughtful change into our mission in ways that fulfill this extraordinary College’s promise to our students and this community. It is my great privilege to be joined with you in this work.

At this time of year, everything is new, bringing with it the promise of possibilities, and yet the unknown as well. Anticipating curiosity, reconnecting with colleagues and friends, solving problems, looking forward – its all part of the beginning of a new year.

And, while much is uncertain, there are some things we know for sure. This being COC, there is much to look forward to as we think about the year ahead:

Cutting the ceremonial ribbon to open the long-awaited Student Services/Administration Building.

Opening the Culinary Arts Institute marked by delicious treats from Chef Cindy and her students.

Launching a Weekend College program.

Funding new student equity initiatives and cross-department partnerships.

Hosting an Accreditation Visiting Team.

Launching more student success initiatives.

Hosting students and business leaders from Korea and China.

Marking the 10th anniversary season of our fabulous Performing Arts Center.

Spending the year honoring the past as we celebrate this college's 45 years of service to the Santa Clarita Valley and look ahead.

I am sure each of you can add to the list by thinking of something new **you** will do this year. Whether it is:

Deanna Davis, who is off to teach in the Semester Abroad program in London, **or**
The Math Department members, who after piloting an institute this summer to train teachers to teach statistics, just learned over the weekend that their National Science Foundation proposal, headed up by Monica Dabos in conjunction with Villanova University, was recommended to the tune of \$571,091 to train 75 community college faculty throughout the country over the next three years, **or**

The English Department faculty who are moving to another level of acceleration for our students, preparing curriculum that will condense classes for students who test into the lowest levels of English, **or**

The colleagues involved in the Honors, CWEE, Service Learning, Volunteer Bureau, Office of Civil Rights, Business Department, and more who will collaborate to discuss partnering on the development of the Center for Civic Engagement, **or**

The Athletic Department who will plan their sixth Athletic Hall of Fame Dinner and work to figure out how to surpass this 13-14 achievement of winning the Western States Conference Supremacy award for the first time in the college's history - - -

Most of you will be doing something new for the first time.

As you move forward, you will build on the foundation of the memories and activities of the past: We are what we are today because of the people who did great work.

1969. How many of you were here then?

Forty-five years ago, I was in full hippy mode – like a number of others of you here. In fact, the outfit Peter Hepburn has on today reminds me of the wedding dress I made in 1971! But don't worry, I won't name names - - Murray Wood.

Those of you old enough to remember know the biggest news that year was man's first trip to the moon. Neil Armstrong did what humanity had dreamed of for centuries – set foot on the moon. The landings were broadcast live to 600 million people watching around the world. How many of you remember seeing that event on black and white television? Yes, the one that was a big box in your living room?

Just 64 days later, College of the Canyons opened for its first day of classes. While you didn't see that event on television, the proximity of the moon landing and the college opening is a coincidence of history. But to me, they have more in common than simply occurring in the same year. Though different in scale, they are both monumental achievements brought about by groups of unique, talented individuals, and as such, the moon landing and our college opening are bound together by four shared principles that ensured they moved from imagination to reality:

A daring dream

Relentless planning

Focused teamwork, and

Unwavering commitment

At COC, we have had Daring Dreams!

Every bold accomplishment begins with a daring dream. A decade before Neal Armstrong stepped on the moon, the space race started and the United States found itself in last place. We were caught off guard when the Soviets launched Sputnik, successfully putting a satellite into space for the first time. Most people couldn't imagine technology moving fast enough to leap from a metal ball orbiting the earth to landing on the moon within 10 years.

It was then that President Kennedy dared to dream, saying "We choose to go to the moon in this decade ... because that goal will serve to organize and measure the best of our energies and skills, because that challenge is one that we are willing to accept, one we are unwilling to postpone, and one which we intend to win."

That same sense of audacious goal setting was alive and well right **here** in Santa Clarita. Forty-five years ago, nobody called "here" Awesometown. In fact, they didn't call it Santa Clarita. The city didn't exist until 1987 – 20 years **after** the college district was formed.

Local residents looked around at their growing community.

It had new neighborhoods, excellent K-12 schools, an interstate, and even a country club.

The first Kentucky Fried Chicken, Taco Bell, and Jack-in-the-Box opened on Lyons Avenue;

Planet of the Apes opened in the Plaza Theater on Lyons Avenue;

The Signal Offices, located on 6th and Railroad Avenue burned to the ground;

The new DMV Office opened in Newhall;

McBean Parkway opened for the first time;

And sheep were where we are sitting today!

But our area lacked access to higher education. So they dared to dream.

They had the courage to ask, “Why not?” and “Why not us?” They had the ability to look beyond what others could see and glimpse what wasn’t yet visible to others. But more importantly, they had the commitment to achieve what others believed was impossible.

So they elected a Board of Trustees in 1967. Bruce Fortine was one of five members voted into the new offices.

Two short years later, this college opened its doors at Hart High School with 735 students attending classes held in the late afternoons and evenings.

The first issue of the *College Sound*, the campus newspaper, was printed.

The first baseball game with Coach Lee Smelser was hosted at COC junior college.

Dean of Students Al Adelini had a full head of hair.

The opening of the college meant people living here now had options:

They could complete two years of lower division courses and then transfer, just as Board President Michele Jenkins (who was enrolled at COC that first year) and her husband Greg did.

Or, they could use sports to continue their educations, like our first quarterback, and current athletic director, Chuck Lyon. Or they could get the spark for a new idea and the self-confidence to see it through, like alumnus Steve Arklin, who launched Santa Clarita Disposal and later sold it to a national waste company, or Greg Kinkaid who owns Sage Staffing.

As the community grew in those early years, so did the college. Enrollment jumped from 700-plus students that first year to more than 2,500 within five years. Over the years while student numbers ebbed and flowed in rhythm with the economy, the trend line always pointed in one direction: **UP**.

Walt Disney said, “Do what you do so well that they will want to see it again and bring their friends.” And the founding staff of our college did just that!

In response to growing enrollment, and to the needs of the community, the curriculum expanded. Programs were added that the community wanted: The college passed, in those early years, two bond measures and the poster read “Complete our College”. At that time, that meant building it for 5,000 students!

Once the dream started to take shape, we engaged in Relentless Planning

Dreams do not become accomplishments without planning. What ensued in the decade between Sputnik and the moon landing was planning, planning, and more planning. That’s equally true for College of the Canyons during our 45-year history.

H. Thomas Johnson said, “How the world we perceive works depends on how we think. The world we perceive is a world we bring forth through our thinking.” And we did.

We would not be where we are today without our focus on strategic, integrated planning! We have annual program plans, a district Strategic Plan, Educational and Facilities Master Plans, Technology Plans, and more. I know some of you may tire of hearing about planning, and revising your plans, yet it is absolutely critical to our ongoing success and innovation.

Simply put, planning has achieved results. We look at the world around us, examine the needs that exist, we create solutions to meet them, we secure the necessary resources, and then we go do it. Instead of waiting for things to happen, planning enables us to **make things** happen.

Richard Bolles, if you don’t know him, is a career counselor and planner who said, “If you don’t know where you are going, you will end up somewhere else.”

So we planned. As we look ahead, the proof is clearly evident on both campuses. In less than 20 years, with the input, effort, and coordination of administrators, faculty, and staff, and with the support of the Board, we developed the plans, jumped through the

approval hoops and built 547,000 square feet of space that supports the ongoing learning of our students and community. Many of you work in the Early Childhood Education Center, the Library, TLC, Mentry Hall, Student Center, the PAC, Pico Hall, Aliso Hall and Lab, the Canyon Country Campus, East PE, the University Center, Applied Tech Center, and some others will move into the new Student Services/Administration building and the Culinary Institute this fall. .

While every building is an accomplishment in and of itself, given the regulatory and funding hurdles we must clear, that's not why we build places. Every new space we have opened has presented us with the chance to expand and better our students, help them succeed, launch new programs, upgrade existing ones, and provide the best learning opportunities possible as we have added 91 programs in the last nine years.

How did we do so? We did it as a team.

Our Dreams and Plans were fueled by our Focus on Teamwork

A third critical factor to the success of the moon landing was teamwork - the willingness of a group of individuals to commit singularly to a mission and focus all their energy towards achieving it.

While we remember the names of the astronauts, we must not forget that they **didn't get to the moon alone**. Beyond the building of the rocket, everything accomplished on the moon was made possible by Mission Control, which set the stage for the astronauts' historical achievement. The same is true here at COC, where you – the staff, faculty, administrators, volunteers, partners and Board members – come together to focus on student success and set the stage for what our students accomplish. **The team at COC IS mission control.**

It is pro-active, forward-thinking, focused on quality, and highly dependent on relationships. Success in places is due to the capacity generated by relationships.

While the world was transfixed on the grainy images of Neal Armstrong stepping from the lunar landing module to the surface of the moon, there was **SO** much going behind the scenes and out of sight. The rest of the world was largely unaware of the importance of Mission Control, and the amount of work they undertook to ensure the success of the moon landing.

That too applies to what we do here at College of the Canyons.

Our students and our community have no idea about the amount of work each of you do to make this college succeed. While they may interact with you in the classroom, or talk with you in Financial Aid or A&R, that contact is just the proverbial tip of the iceberg:

They're completely unaware of the grants that we apply for, which fund expanded access and support for them.

When they're registering, they likely give little thought to the men and women in MIS who keep our system up and running around the clock.

They don't see faculty members revising curriculum, honing, developing student learning outcomes or figuring out how to help them showcase their learnings.

They don't know that our Computer Support Services staff works tirelessly to ensure that our servers are available so they can log on to Blackboard and complete an assignment at midnight.

They don't stop to think about those of you who designed the Weekend College postcard that landed in their mail box – the one that prompted them to think - about returning to college.

Whether it's noticed or not, each and every function that you perform is critical to ensuring our students' success.

What was truly amazing about Mission Control was their ability to manage thousands of details and process that had to be perfectly synced and coordinated to guarantee a successful moon landing and the astronaut's safe return to earth. The level of detail is mind-boggling.

The spacecraft contained thousands of moving parts, miles of wire, and a highly volatile mix of fuel. The danger was acute, and the possibility of something going wrong was ever-present. But the group was instead focused on ensuring everything was going right. Each member of the Mission Control team had a specific role to play, was highly educated, highly skilled, and committed to fulfilling their part of the mission. And so are you.

There is an African proverb that states, “If you want to go fast, go alone. If you want to go far, go together.” We do it TOGETHER.

It’s no small feat to do what we do each year: serve more than 15,000 full-time equivalent students and commit ourselves to doing our best to ensure their success. It takes the involvement of everyone on campus in every department to do that, and to do so in a manner that holds to the standards for which we are known at COC.

Think about all the effort it takes to fine-tune:

Our deans and department chairs fine-tuning course offerings, adding new classes to accommodate students on waitlists.

Admissions and Records processing 38,000 admissions applications, serving the 15,000 customers who appear at the counter, and fielding nearly 100,000 phone calls annually.

Financial Aid, where the team patiently answers 30,000 phone calls, processing 17,000 applications and 9,000 fee waivers, ensure that \$27 million in awards are distributed to students.

Meanwhile, our friends in Facilities ensure the lights are on, the doors are open, the bathrooms are clean and everything runs like a well-oiled machine from 7 a.m. to 10 p.m. day in and day out.

Mission Control couldn’t do what it did then without computers, and neither can we. What sits on your desk probably is more powerful than the roomful of

hardware they had in Houston, so we're lost without our technology. Ext. **3953** is a lifeline.

We call Computer Support Services, they answer, we yell "help," and they magically fix it. On average they respond to nearly 10,000 calls for help each year when something goes wrong.

The same is true for MIS, which tackles 1,300 work orders, maintains 3,000 customizations we've made to Datatel, and installs 150 patches to keep the system up-to-date.

Together – we are better.

To move what we imagine to reality takes Unwavering Commitment

When commitment is added to dreaming, planning, and teamwork, things begin to really take off. Abraham Lincoln said it best: "Commitment is what transforms a promise into reality."

When pursuing something audacious, there will always be challenges, unexpected difficulties, and obstacles that stand in the way.

They usually come as a surprise;

They are things that you've never faced before;

The solutions aren't always obvious;

You face setbacks because your original plan isn't feasible;

Things take longer than expected;

OR THE REALLY unexpected happens, like a natural disaster.

It's at those points that you're faced with choices:

Give up, or keep going.

Help or Leave.

Say "I Can" or "I can't".

That's where commitment kicks in.

Commitment. It pushes you past the difficulties, doubts and delays. It motivates you to keep moving forward; to keep looking for a solution. It inspires you to focus on your dream, instead of giving up. If you're committed, you'll find a way.

The enduring example of commitment from our space program is found in the movie "Apollo 13." When a mechanical malfunction scuttles the mission, leaving the lives of three astronauts hanging in the balance, the team at Mission Control commits themselves to bringing their friends and colleagues home safely. In the face of complex challenges, they simply wouldn't take no for an answer. When one idea didn't work, they came up with a new one and kept pushing until they had created a workable solution.

The same is true at our college.

We committed ourselves to opening a Performing Arts Center. It was included in the college's first master plan. For years, the answer from the state was "No." But we never gave up. Finally, we saw a window. Over the course of a weekend, we re-conceptualized one building into two, sent in the revised plans, and after nearly 30 years of waiting, we got the "Yes" we needed! As soon as the PAC was opened, we used Measure C funds to build Pico Hall and funded it ourselves.

It was Commitment that powered us through the aftermath Northridge Earthquake. We were determined to hold classes that semester, and we overcame every obstacle to doing so – even if it meant holding classes in tents during the winter. Many of you remember that. That was the best example of teamwork and commitment I have ever seen in action!

College of the Canyons is a place where it's impossible to remain stagnant. This is a community that is devoted to a love for learning, to developing a habit of doing what is the next thing – not the next logical thing – the next meaningful thing to do.

There is power in commitment. Kenneth Blanchard said, "When you're committed to something, you accept no excuses - only results."

And we get Results!

When dreaming, planning, teamwork, and commitment come together, the results naturally follow. Over the past four-and-a-half-decades, we haven't simply been a resource for the community. Our impact has been far greater. We have shaped Santa Clarita's growth and future, helping it become what it is today.

Whether it is infusing \$174 million annually into the economy as our students earn more because of their education and training received at COC, or Meeting the needs of local business and industry by establishing an Economic Development Division which has, in the last two decades, infused \$21 million in funding that has benefitted 22,000 employees at more than 3,000 local companies; or

Providing access to more than 40 Bachelor and Master degree programs in the University Center, which has provided over 3,000 BA/MA grads; or

Using the PAC to host 133 professional performance and 67,000 attendees, providing a venue where 4,200 of our students have performed on stage; enabling 360 community shows and events a place to occur, and hosting 70,000 local students served by our K-12 Arts Education Outreach Program.

TA-DAH!!!

We have accomplished all of this **because of the people at COC**. The people make the place. You have dreamt, planned and worked together to achieve results most could only imagine.

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. It's what separates COC from the rest.

At COC, we do not hesitate to leap an to try new things to help our students. How different would the outcomes be if we did hesitate?

Would we have a University Center?

Would we be completing 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 Gardens of the Canyons?

Would we have a Civil Rights Clinic?

Would we have a permanent Student Art Collection?

Or an Honors Program?

Or, would we have exceeded our goal of establishing 13 transfer degrees?

I am so proud that as people, we grow, we learn, just like our students! We master new skills and figure out complex things and develop relationships that matter. That creates a spirit that inspires our students and is the fuel that drives this place!

It is because of the people who work here that I am so excited about what the future holds for College of the Canyons. The coming year gives us a chance to build on our legacy of achievement and add to our record of milestones.

Will these accomplishments be on par with sending someone to the moon? It depends. If you ask each student, they may say that for them, "Yes – it changed their world."

What we will accomplish on behalf of our students begins much the same way:

We give them – many of whom think their odds of success are equal to walking on the moon – the opportunity to achieve.

We give them permission to dream.

With help, we instill in them the courage to do so.

We commit to planning how they can do it, and we pull together as a team to ensure they can.

When they cross the stage on graduation day, it's more than just a few short steps. It represents a giant leap forward in what's possible for their futures. But remember, they like the astronauts, owe a debt of gratitude to those who helped make it possible.

On July 23, 1969, the three astronauts aboard Apollo 11 made a television broadcast as they traveled back from the moon to earth. Pilot Michael Collins said, "... All this is possible only through the blood, sweat, and tears of a number of a people ... All you see is the three of us, but beneath the surface are thousands and thousands of others, and to all of those, I would like to say, 'Thank you very much.'"

On behalf of our former students, I thank **you** for making their dreams possible. And on behalf of our current students, I challenge you to help them fulfill their dreams. It's that promise of possibility that lends the start of the fall semester such excitement and anticipation. To know that for each student we meet, we have the ability to touch a life and change its course. And I know, from listening to you, that is inspires you as well.

Each day, I look forward to working with you at this college--you are a truly amazing group of talented and compassionate individuals. As we celebrate today, honor our past and look to the future, remember the special moments you've had at COC, the colleagues who have and do make a difference in your life and make that commitment to live all you can, to do what you do with passion and enthusiasm, to enjoy your moments and to make great memories in the future.

Know that when you go home at the end of a day, you can be proud that you can say to yourself, "I saw someone grow again today and I helped." That is really what it is all about. Seeing people grow is the only experience which brings your heart up into your throat. Which is where mine is right now.

As Elizabeth Dole said, “When we are in our 90/s and we are looking back ... it’s really about - Did we make a positive difference for people?”

I thank you for daring to dream, for committing to planning, and for focusing on teamwork. That has made the difference in our 45-year history, and it will launch us forward to even greater accomplishments in the year to come.

I’m proud to say – I know we will. Let’s give one more hand to our retirees!

Thank you!