

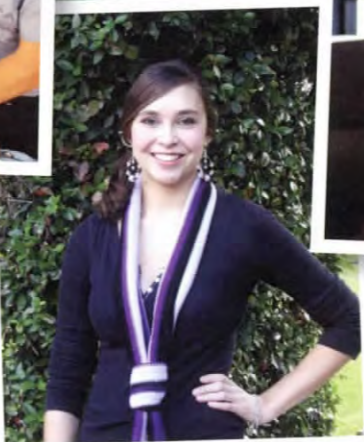
BRICKS AND MORTARBOARDS



*A 50th-Year Retrospective
on McLennan Community College*

By Kim Patterson

MCLENNAN COMMUNITY COLLEGE



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AND
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Our Leaders

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The three presidents who have served McLennan Community College are Dr. Dennis Michaelis, 1988–2009, Dr. Johnette McKown, 2009–present, and Dr. Wilbur Ball, 1966–1988.

Dedication

Dedication

This book is dedicated to the faculty, staff, advisors, coaches, and trustees who for the past 50 years have guided McLennan students to become their personal best. You are all teachers of the highest order. Former President Wilbur Ball once said the term “professor” is just a title, but to be a teacher, that’s something really special. I agree. –KP





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Lex Cavanah, *General Manager*
Nathan Stufflebean, *Production Supervisor*
Heather L. Floyd and Pamela Koch, *Editors*
Terry Epps, *Graphic Designer*
Monika Ebertz, *Imaging Artist*
Kathy Snowden Railey, *Project Research Coordinator*
Katie Gardner, *Marketing Assistant*

Jim Railey, *Project Director*

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Foreword

Foreword

When the founding fathers of McLennan Community College pursued the establishment of a community college in Waco, Texas, in 1965, they were determined to change the opportunity landscape for area citizens. Today, thanks to their efforts, MCC graduates enjoy rewarding employment in nursing, law enforcement, teaching, social work, accounting, and many other careers that shape the heart of our community. McLennan County residents attend college locally, thus remaining in our community while supporting their families and bolstering the economy. McLennan provides a quality education, and students can achieve a debt-free degree with assistance from numerous scholarship programs and affordable tuition. Students in area secondary schools gain college credit while still in high school, enabling them to complete a four-year education much earlier. While here, McLennan students enjoy rich experiences provided by incredible professors and research-based learning experiences, and our success initiatives ensure that they reach their goals. With the addition of Texas Tech University, Tarleton State University, and other partners to the University Center on the MCC campus, local residents complete bachelor and graduate degrees without having to leave Waco. After graduation, McLennan alumni staff health profession roles in area hospitals, perform service roles in social agencies, work in area banks, teach in our schools, and protect us as first responders. Local employers partner with our Corporate Training department to enhance training or to add new jobs into the workforce, both of which contribute to the vitality of our community.

Clearly, the opportunity landscape in our community today is limitless, thanks to the determination of our founders and the efforts of the faculty, staff, and trustees who have carried out this dream. This book, “Bricks and Mortarboards,” provides a fond look back at our celebrated 50-year history, with a particular focus on the exciting events of the last decade. The success of McLennan can truly be considered the success story of our community. We are eternally grateful for the visionaries of yesterday who recognized the need for a community college in McLennan County in 1965 and for the enduring support of our community since.

With gratitude,
Johnette McKown, Ed.D.
President
McLennan Community College



From the Author

From the Author

My thanks go out to the legions of people who have helped me along the journey of writing this book. First, thank you to my inspirational leader and friend, Dr. Johnette McKown, who entrusted me with telling this important story. Thank you to my supervisor, Annette Scott, who, only weeks after hiring me, was informed that she would have to share me and my attention with this project for the next year or more. She took the news with her usual good humor and has been unconditionally kind and supportive since. Thank you to my admired colleagues Karen Rudolph and Leslie Garrison, who contributed editorial input and a welcomed critical eye toward this work, and Clif-Ann Paris, who provided vital graphics support and advice. To those people near and far who so willingly participated in interviews, research, and project coordination, I thank you. To my children, who were just babies when I started working at McLennan 20 years ago — thank you for sharing your mom with her career. It has been a delight to watch you launch in life with such grace. And, most of all, to my wonderfully kind, talented, and supportive husband, Frank, who I first met in the hallway at MCC years ago. If I said I wanted to fly to the moon, you would build me a spaceship, pack a lunch, and say, “Let’s go.” You are, quite simply, my gift.

Kim Patterson, 2016



Board of Trustees

McLennan Board of Trustees



The 2016 Board of Trustees includes, from left: Earl Stinnett Jr., Pauline Chavez, Bob Sheehy Jr., Geneva Watley, K. Paul Holt, Doug McDurham, and Ricky Turman.



District 2

Earl Stinnett Jr. is among the newest members of the Board of Trustees, having joined in the fall of 2014 to replace Don Hay. Stinnett is program coordinator for the City of Waco's parks and recreation department. He is active in the community as president of the Waco Basketball Officials chapter, a member of the Texas Recreation and Parks Society, a board member for the Texas Association of Sports Officials, and a member of the Waco Disproportionality Committee. He is a proud MCC alumnus and father and sibling to MCC graduates.

District 3

Pauline Chavez is the longest-serving member of the MCC Board of Trustees, having joined the board in 1986. She served as secretary from 1991 to 2010. Chavez is a retired registered nurse who worked at the Veterans Administration Hospital for 34 years. She joined the MCC Board upon the encouragement of a friend who told her that she was a household name in her South Waco community. All three of Chavez's children attended MCC.

District 4

Ricky Turman is the newest member of the Board of Trustees, having been appointed in February 2016 to fill the unexpired term of Randy Cox. Turman is the executive vice president and chief financial officer of the Brazos Education Foundation. He served on the Robinson ISD School Board for 18 years, seven of those as president. He also is a member and past-president of United Way of Waco-McLennan County and served as a councilmember on the Robinson City Council for four years.

District 1

Doug McDurham was named District 1 Trustee in August 2015 to fill the unexpired term of Dr. James Lewis. McDurham is director of programs for the Texas Hunger Initiative at Baylor University and is an adjunct instructor for the Baylor Department of Social Work. Previously, he was chief executive officer for Communities in Schools for the Heart of Texas, Inc. and has served on the MCC Adult Education Advisory Board and the Mental Health Advisory Board.

District 5

Bob Sheehy Jr. is the board member with the deepest roots at MCC, having visited the campus as a child every Sunday while it was being built. His father, Bob Sheehy Sr., was a charter board member. "I want the chance to have an impact on the community and continue MCC's legacy of providing educational services to the city and county," he says of why he got involved on the board in 1994. Sheehy is a teacher at LaVega High School and served as chairman of the Board of Trustees from 2001 to 2008.

District 6

K. Paul Holt joined the board in 1999 and assumed the chairmanship in 2015. This chapter manager for Associated General Contractors says he became an MCC Trustee because he had been on the receiving side of so many MCC services that he felt it was time to give back. "MCC is a high-quality educational bargain in Central Texas," Holt says. "Through credit classes, continuing education classes, and the University Center, it helps serve the educational needs for the county."

District 7

Geneva Watley joined the college's governing body in 2008. Watley became the first new board member in eight years when she was named to fill the unexpired term of Trustee Linda Hilliard. Watley retired from the McGregor Independent School District, where she served as reading coordinator, trainer, assistant superintendent, principal, and teacher. Since 2010, she has served as secretary for the MCC Board of Trustees.

Former Trustees, 2005-2016

Randy Cox, manager for QTI Promotions, is a proud graduate of MCC who served on the board from 1990 to 2015, including seven years as chairman. He left the board because he moved out of District 4. Cox says he enjoyed working on behalf of MCC because the college is able to reach students who might not otherwise continue their education.

Don Hay served as District 2 Trustee from 1990 until shortly before his death in October 2014; he served as board chairman from 1991 to 2001. Prior to serving at MCC, he also served nine years on the Connally Independent School District Board of Trustees. Hay spent most of his professional career in human resources at Plantation Foods. He once said that he saw McLennan Community College as a place of hope. He is deeply missed by all who knew him.

Linda Hilliard served as the District 7 Trustee from 1995 to 2008, giving up her position only because she and her husband moved out of the district. Hilliard was a member of the second class to graduate from the MCC Associate Degree Nursing program in 1970 and has worked as a certified registered nurse anesthetist for 43 years. She recalls the immense joy she felt upon attending every MCC graduation ceremony and seeing students reach their goals.

Dr. James Lewis, former educator and businessman, joined the McLennan board in 1998 and stepped down in 2015 from his District 1 Trustee position for health reasons. Lewis said his role as a Trustee was to make a difference in the lives of each of the students the college serves, particularly through its affordability.



Randy Cox

Don Hay

Linda Hilliard

Dr. James Lewis





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1965-2000

PROLOGUE

Pathways Through the Grass

The story goes that when doors opened on the new McLennan Community College campus in 1969, President Wilbur Ball and campus planners waited several weeks before deciding on the final design for the sidewalks. After four whirlwind years of formation, startup, and construction of the college, taking such a break in forward progress was a remarkable thing, quite out of the ordinary for these highly productive leaders. The pause was also remarkable in its genius: Rather than forcing traffic patterns, they let the students beat the most efficient paths to the doors

of the new buildings. Following the lead of the students turned out to be an inspired tactic, resulting in languid, curving pathways through the trees that, to this day, contribute to the park-like charm of the campus.

The sidewalk venture was a simple act of faith on the part of the college leaders, but it was rich in significance. The gesture spoke volumes about this new place where every voice could be heard, every person could have a path to a successful future, and students would always come first. With such an abiding commitment to students, there was no way this fledgling college could fail.



Early students enjoy a lawnmower race on the college's new 200-acre North Waco campus.

Not that failure was ever an option for MCC. From the moment Waco Chamber of Commerce General Manager Paul Marable first voiced the idea of forming a community college in the early 1960s, up until its first semester on the new North Waco campus, success and good luck figured large in the early McLennan playbook. Enrollment numbers, which surprised organizers from the start with 855 students arriving on day one, continued to grow at a staggering pace. On Jan. 23, 1969, the first day of class on the new campus, 1,638 students arrived to learn, almost double the census from three years prior.



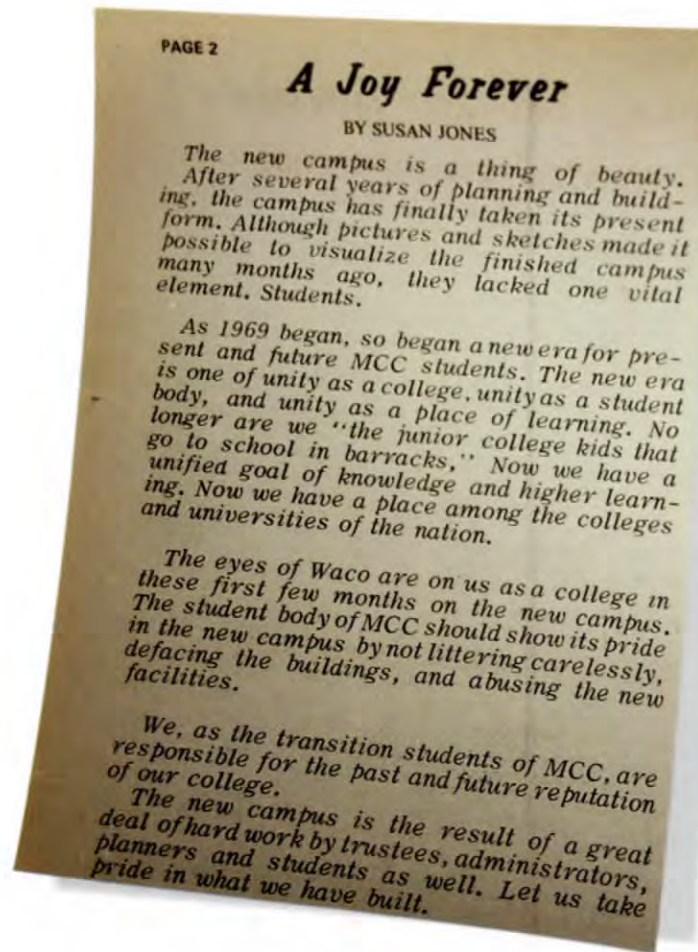
Waco Chamber of Commerce General Manager Paul Marable was among the first to voice the idea of forming a community college in Waco in the early 1960s.

The eyes of potential students were clearly on MCC, as well. A hugely successful start for the college, a beautiful new campus, and aggressive pursuit of additional courses and vocational degree programs spurred a fall 1969 enrollment increase of more than 40 percent over the previous year. Adding to MCC's supremely attractive product was an incredibly affordable cost: \$65 for 12 credit hours, \$150 per semester including fees and books.

“Let us take pride in what we have built.”

—Susan Jones, 1969 Highland Herald editor

Merely a year later, enrollment topped 2,300 students hungry for a high-quality, affordable college education. As unbelievable as it seemed, it appeared that the space on the new, 11-building campus might not be large enough to meet burgeoning student demand. But the students still came. That fall, the MCC Board of Trustees asked voters



for another \$4 million to fund projects that were not included in the initial campus plan: an administration/classroom building, a larger student center, a physical education building, a health sciences building, maintenance buildings, and parking and street improvements, including the familiar three-rail wooden fence around the campus perimeter. With that influx of capital, the physical campus would be prepared to meet the needs of the popular college for years to come.

And so, the faithful again hit the streets vying for taxpayer support, just as they had in 1965. Chairing the finance committee for the bond campaign was young Waco accountant James Hawkins, who had been president of the Waco Jaycees at the time of the 1965 bond election.

“Jim was involved as president of the Jaycees when the idea of a community college was conceived,” says Hawkins’ wife, Nell. “He and several of those Jaycees, like Rony Gray and Tom Salome, they were the young guys at the time. They



Waco accountant and Jaycee Jim Hawkins helped support the 1970 bond election.

were fully behind it ... They saw the need for a community college because there wasn't affordable education for the young people of Waco. Jim helped with that 1970 bond election so they could finish out the campus.”

Thanks to the broad efforts of young community leaders like Hawkins, the bond election passed by a wide margin, allowing President Ball and his team to fully realize their dream. Having a finished, permanent home also allowed the college to realize the young president's vision of an institution that fully served the community, and not just academically.



Dr. Wilbur Ball was a hands-on president in building the campus.

“A community college serves all the needs of the community — academic and career education, adult education of all kinds, continuing education, and even other kinds of services that don’t involve classroom instruction, like use of the facilities by the community,” Ball said. “All of these things are part of a concept ... It’s a beautiful concept.”

After the successful election, Ball told the board, “The work of this institution can now be continued and expanded with the blessings of the people.”

In conservative MCC fashion, it would be almost 30 years before McLennan again sought the blessings of the people for capital projects funded by a bond.

A 21st-Century Vision

When the MCC Board of Trustees began seeking the college’s second president in 1987, they knew it would be a tall order to replace Ball, the visionary leader who had built the college from the ground up. As they imagined Ball’s successor, they visualized an



Dr. Dennis Michaelis brought an aggressive vision for the college when he was hired to succeed Dr. Ball in 1988.

“ideas person” who could skillfully guide the college into the 21st century. They wanted someone with knowledge of fundraising, as they aspired to create a development branch for the college. And they wanted someone who could navigate the unfamiliar waters of the technical revolution that was transforming society at an astonishing pace. They found all these qualities in Kansas-born Dennis F. Michaelis, who took the helm of the college in 1988.

During the late ’70s and ’80s, the college had grown to serve more than 5,000 students each semester with no additional bond issues needed to fund capital expansion. The addition of the Highlands Gym in 1976, the construction of the Ball Performing Arts Center in 1985, and the purchase of the former Waco High campus in 1987 had been paid for with existing college resources.

By the mid-1990s, the McLennan campus, so thoughtfully built on a conservative budget of \$12 million funded by the 1965 and 1970 bond issues and various federal grants and loans, had begun to show the wear and tear of almost 30 years of service. As Trustee Bob Sheehy Jr. describes it, the buildings were solidly built, but after three decades of heavy use were beginning to show their age both inside and out. Facilities Manager Sid Ross, who had years of experience managing the physical plant for the World War II-era Hercules facility in McGregor, recognized not only cosmetic needs, but also the frailty of the subterranean pipes and wiring that were nearing the end of their useful life.



Sid Ross

“After 30 years, understandably, we were ready for some major system upgrades,” Ross says.

By 1999, infrastructure issues had begun to mount, and the energetic ideas man Michaelis was tired of hearing that MCC was “the best-kept secret” in McLennan County. He had been on the job for more than 10 years and had carried the college into a new age with investments in campus technology. But despite several strategic maneuvers, including adding new vocational degrees, opening satellite centers, and offering classes by video, enrollment had stubbornly hovered around 5,500 students for most of his tenure. As the turn of the century neared, it appeared that the college truly had become a best-kept secret. In Michaelis’ mind, the time had come for a bold move in reshaping the campus and, with it, the image of the college.

In the spring of 1999, trustees called an election to approve a \$17.95 million bond issue to fund several persistent and necessary capital projects: first, repurposing the old Waco High School on North 19th Street into a finished Community Services Center; second, transforming an outdated library that was struggling to serve the technological needs of an ever-more wired campus into an expanded and upgraded Learning Technology Center (LTC). The third, least glamorous piece of the bond package was a \$7 million upgrade to campus infrastructure.



Bearing the title of “MCC’s Vision for the 21st Century,” the bond package was hardly a futuristic exercise, but rather was a sensible investment in lingering issues from the 20th century: dated buildings, leaking pipes, and tired HVAC and central utilities.

It was only the third bond package proposed by the college in more than 30 years, and organizers felt good going into the election on June 22, 1999. The levy passed by a resounding 2-to-1 margin, thrilling MCC supporters and the faculty, staff, and students who had rallied around the election cause. The excitement on campus was palpable, even if the pending upgrades meant some inconvenience. In a letter to students in the fall of 1999, Michaelis wrote: “The upcoming year will be filled with changes for all of us as we begin one of the most ambitious capital improvement campaigns in our college’s history. It will take a lot of teamwork and patience over the next two years to realize this vision for MCC’s future.”





Eight-foot trenches crisscrossed the campus during the major infrastructure upgrades funded by the 1999 bond issue.

The legendary beauty of the campus was then ravaged by wide trenches as the infrastructure work carried on for more than two years.

“Each of those infrastructure projects were things you didn’t see,” Ross recalls. “When we finished, you didn’t have a nice new building to show for it — you had grass. We had students come here for two years who never saw our campus the way it was meant to be — it was like a tornado had hit the interior. That was not a fun thing but it was something that had to be done. We literally rebuilt the core of the campus from the ground up.”

Soothing the inconvenience of the infrastructure work was the prospect of the gleaming new Learning Technology Center, the most visible evidence of the college’s transformation from a no-frills junior college of the 1960s into an inspiring learning center for the next century. The architecturally stunning transformation doubled the size of the existing library and immediately created a gathering place for the campus community.



The opening of the modern Learning Technology Center in 2002 symbolized a new era of learning at the college, along with a nod to proud Highlander traditions.

“I’ve never seen a building change the personality of a campus as that one did,” Michaelis says.

Trustee Bob Sheehy Jr., whose father, Bob Sheehy Sr., was on the original McLennan Board of Trustees in 1965, relished the moment when the new LTC dedication plaque was unveiled alongside the original building plaque that bore his father’s name.

“That was a neat melding of the two generations. He had seen to it that the original library building was built well; then, the renovation of the LTC started to symbolically change the concept to more of a modern college campus feel,” Sheehy says.

What few realized at the time was that, while the infrastructure upgrades lacked the glitz of the gleaming building renovations, just a few years later that piece of the bond package would turn out to be the key

to the most dramatic transformation in the college’s history.

“In the back of his mind, Dr. Michaelis probably had the vision of the expansion we needed to do at the college, and he knew we needed that kind of infrastructure upgrade,” Ross recalls. “We never could have added the science building or the classroom building in 2009 if we hadn’t made the changes we needed to make back in 1999. That was the key to the transformation.”



Bob Sheehy Sr., who had served on the original MCC Board of Trustees, with son Bob Sheehy Jr., current Trustee, at the grand opening of the LTC in January 2002.

"My Time at MCC Set the Stage for My Life"

Luis Jauregui. Immigrant. Award-Winning Architect. Austin Developer.

It was 5:30 a.m. on a sultry summer morning in 1971. Seventeen-year-old Luis Jauregui stepped off a Trailways bus at the dimly lit station on the corner of 7th Street and Columbus Avenue in downtown Waco, a guitar in one hand and a suitcase in the other. It was his first visit to the United States, and as the wary teenager walked out of the bus station on that dark morning, he knew no one, spoke no English, and literally had nowhere to go.

It's not that Luis was destitute; far from it. He was the eldest of nine children of an educated family from the interior of Mexico. A month before, he had been bound for the School of Architecture at the National University in Mexico City, but an untimely

strike at the university changed his plans. According to Luis, he had no "Plan B" and was totally unprepared for that roadblock in his life.

"So, I figured I would go to Waco and learn some English," he says today. "I wasn't coming to America to go to school, or to escape Mexico, or anything like that. I just wanted to do something and learn English while I waited for my university to open."

That morning in Waco, Luis came across a Puerto Rican man

who helped him get his bearings, including taking an impromptu drive around the still-sleeping town and visiting a breakfast shack in East Waco. Luis found a job at Taco Torch and a room at the YMCA, where he began learning English from the returning Vietnam veterans who resided there. Eventually, he made contact with a missionary friend he had met in his hometown of Guadalajara.

One Sunday, Luis and his newfound friends took a drive out to the new McLennan Community College campus on North 19th Street. Outside the Student Services Center, a rack held a stack of paper applications. Luis filled out the application, dropped it into the box and didn't give it much further thought.

"I have no idea what moved me to grab that application and fill it out right there on the spot. There was a door that said 'Drop It Here,' and I dropped it there. Did I ever plan to do that? No. Did the other kids I was with do that? No. Here I was, a Mexican kid who was already enrolled in another college, and I put it into that slot and didn't realize what would happen."

Christmas came and went, and eventually Luis returned to his family in Mexico, still without a plan for his education. During those Christmas holidays, a letter arrived offering Luis admission to MCC. Thus began his remarkable journey of success in America.



"Opening that package literally changed my life. I was proud and happy and very excited," he says. Luis enrolled at MCC in the spring of 1972, taking calculus, art, and American history classes. Meanwhile, his parents visited Waco, determined to bring their eldest child home to follow a "proper" path.

"They were heartbroken by my decision," he says. "But I took them and showed them my classrooms and the beautiful campus. My father had attended the University in Mexico City, and to him, there was no other university in the world. But he was impressed by MCC, and he said 'OK, but you're going to do it on your own.'" With his parents' reluctant go-ahead, Luis stayed at MCC, where he found kindred spirits among the art students. As his English improved and he was successful in his studies, Luis' confidence soared. The following semester, he transferred to Pan American University in Edinburg and later to Texas A&M for his bachelor and graduate degrees in architecture.

"Without question, my time at MCC set the stage for my life," he says.

Today, that frightened young man who arrived in Waco with little to his name is president of

Austin-based Jauregui Architects LLC, a premier residential architectural firm with offices and design-build work progressing in Austin, Houston, and Dallas-Fort Worth. At any given time, Jauregui has several multimillion-dollar projects underway, with an average price of \$4 million each. He and his wife, Susan, are marketing their first major residential development in West Austin. Despite his abundant success, never far from his mind is the experience he had as a young man at McLennan and the transformative role MCC played in his life.

"I owe much of my good fortune to the new two-year college in Waco," Luis says.





CHAPTER 1

Good Times, Tough Times

The early years of the 2000s were exhilarating times at McLennan. Beautiful new facilities, combined with election-fueled awareness of the college and a renewed focus on community relations, plus a more aggressive plan for managing course enrollment, created a perfect storm of positives that altered the college in ways no one could have predicted. Almost as if someone flipped a switch, after 15 years of flat enrollment, demand for a high-quality, affordable MCC education surged. During the fall of 2000, enrollment hit a new all-time high of 5,767, followed by a record-breaking 6,028 students in the spring of 2001 — all despite the enormous physical obstacles presented by a campus under construction.

It would be the beginning of a decade of unprecedented growth for the college.

The year 2001 also brought a radical transformation to the college's mission with the establishment of the University Center, a partnership with four-year universities that committed to bring full bachelor's degree programs to the community college campus. Dr. Paul Illich, former vice president of research, planning, and effectiveness, had noted a concerning trend in the 2000 Census figures: Among McLennan County adults ages 25 and older, only 11.8 percent had earned a bachelor's degree, compared to a statewide average of 15.6 percent. And this attainment gap had widened since the 1990 count.



MCC enrollment began its dramatic ascent in the fall of 2000.

This glaring lack of educational accomplishment was cause for alarm among college and city leaders who aspired to produce a more skilled and educated workforce. But, because the region lacked a public four-year university, those who sought a bachelor's degree really had few options, short of taking on a long commute, relocation, or paying for a private education at Baylor University.

Harkening back to the college's mission of providing educational access, Michaelis reached out to eight state-supported universities to gauge interest in offering complete bachelor's degree programs on the MCC campus. Dr. Robert Witt, president of the University of Texas at Arlington, shared the vision. In the fall of 2000, a historic meeting at UTA sealed the deal. The following spring, students in Waco could, for the first time, begin working on junior- and senior-level courses toward an affordable bachelor's degree conferred by a state university.



Growing Pains

From that point forward, interest in the bachelor's degree programs through the University Center was thought to contribute to the uptick in demand for first- and second-year classes offered by MCC, resulting in what Michaelis termed "astonishing" enrollment growth. In the spring of 2005, MCC enrollment surged 12 percent to set an all-time record of 8,543 students, not including the University Center headcount of more than 500 on-site students pursuing upper-level courses through UTA and Tarleton State University.

The campus, built for an enrollment of about 3,500 students almost four decades before, was bursting at the seams. Each morning saw a nightmarish parking struggle as drivers circled lot after lot seeking any available space, sometimes opting for a parking ticket rather than be late to class. College officials attempted to ease congestion by offering students half off

Nearing capacity



Students crowd a science lecture class Friday in MCC's science building. School officials want to build a new structure to replace the current one built in 1968. Staff photo — Duane A. Lavery

MCC board set to consider bond package for additions

By MIKE ANDERSON
Tribune Herald staff writer
The McLennan Community College board of trustees will discuss a possible bond package tonight to pay for new classrooms to keep up with record enrollment.
The board is to consider the construction cost for two new buildings and a variety of other construction projects, said MCC President Dennis Michaelis.
Preliminary enrollment numbers released last week show a record 8,577 students started up for classes in the spring semester, nearly 1,000 more than a year ago and about 3,000 more than the spring of 2000.
Michaelis says the campus was built to accommodate 3,500 students, a number that would be exceeded well before he became president 17 years ago.
"So you finally get to a point where you say, 'We just don't have any more room to put people and it is not going to continue to grow. If we

LEAPS and BOUNDS



limitation are still going to be provided for the students, then we are going to have to have some new facilities," Michaelis said.
In 1980, McLennan County voters approved a \$11.55 million bond package that paid for renovations including that of the building now known as the Learning Technology Center. A dollar figure for the bond package to be considered tonight was not available.
See MCC, Page 6A

tuition for taking courses in the less-popular afternoons, a radical initiative that met with some success before being scrapped for lack of interest. Students in science classes sat three to a desk built for two, and labs were staggered to accommodate overwhelming numbers of students, many of them with their sights set on a health professions degree. The popular MCC Fire and Police Academies lacked space and training resources; students were driving to Tarrant County for hands-on exercises.

In an effort to reduce crowding and serve the booming western part of the county, in July 2003 MCC opened a

were in good shape, hopefully, for another few decades. Clearly, they thought wrong. Thanks to the attractiveness of the newly upgraded campus and new degree options, including the popular University Center, the college's enrollment growth projections showed no signs of stopping.

"We thought we were in pretty good shape, and I remember the president telling me we would probably not do another bond issue for 25 years," says Sid Ross. "And lo and behold, about five years later, we did a tremendous bond, because our enrollment was growing so much."

MCC was a secret no more.

The launch of the University Center in 2001 brought bachelor's degrees from state universities to Waco and was thought to contribute to the college's growth.



Access and Opportunity

In January 2005, MCC Trustees voted to hold an ambitious bond election, asking voters for \$73.4 million for campus upgrades to handle the growth. This fourth bond referendum in MCC's 40-year history would be the largest ever put before McLennan County voters. However, a community survey conducted in 2005 by the college's research team showed 70 percent of

McLennan County residents would support an increase in the college's tax rate. Officials felt strongly that the need was legitimate and community support was in place to finance construction of a new classroom building, science building, and emergency services center for first responder training.

Touting the advantages of "Access, Opportunity, Economic Development, and Community Advancement" that a successful bond election would generate, the campaign encouraged a targeted segment of presumably supportive voters to show up at the polls on a Saturday in late March. Following the game plan of the successful 1999 bond referendum that had been held as a single-issue election, the hope was that the issue would draw limited attention from those opposed to a tax increase.

If the third time is the charm, it stands to reason that the fourth time might be the curse. The March 29 bond election, quietly promoted for only six weeks by a modestly sized Friends of MCC committee with a budget of less than \$20,000, failed by a narrow 260-vote margin. The campus and community supporters were stunned.

"It was like a dagger," remembers former Trustee Randy Cox. "I think losing that election was the worst I have ever felt. It wasn't because of the money — it was because I felt like the college was so loved ... How could they do this to us?"



Randy Cox

In retrospect, a perfect storm of factors combined to take down the referendum. Despite a plan to run a short, low-key campaign, the historic size of the bond drew considerable interest in the media. Numerous articles about the college's crowding and need for more capacity appeared

in the weeks leading up to the election, each article drawing more amplified input from letter writers on both sides of the conversation. McLennan County voters had been offered numerous other bond proposals in the years since the 1999 MCC bond issue, and dramatic property reappraisals in the months leading up to the election heightened awareness of the tax load on the average homeowner.

Post-election analysis revealed that the average age of voters in the special election was 62 years, much older and presumably more fiscally conservative than the average 49-year-old voter. Ultimately, though, what doomed the effort was that many supporters just stayed home, assuming the bond proposal for the highly favored community college would pass without incident.

Trustee K. Paul Holt, who with wife Donna was traveling back to Waco on the night of the election (and who had gone to great lengths to vote early before the trip), was staying in touch by cell phone as returns rolled in. As the early lead narrowed, he engaged in his own unscientific survey of his fellow DFW airport travelers heading to Waco. Without fail, they said they had skipped early voting because they felt sure it would pass.

"It was at that point that I realized we had made a strategic error," Holt says today. "I agreed we should take the low-key approach and try not to awaken the negative folks. But three or four of them woke up enough to call three or four more, and we lost by just a few votes. I was frustrated."

Despite the private disappointment he felt, Michaelis was publicly stoic. "We don't see the bond issue failing as a lack of support for what we do here at MCC. We recognize that the current climate among taxpayers is not conducive to a bond issue of this size. We will just have to reassess how we will be able to provide educational opportunity to the many students who are seeking it," Michaelis told staff the following day. Soon after, leaders quietly went back to the drawing board.

Student, Campus Success

Meanwhile, life on the booming campus went on. While election success eluded the college, McLennan students involved in honor society Phi Theta Kappa were sweeping national and international leadership awards. In the April 11 edition of USA Today, McLennan math major Mary Gallery was featured as a member of the prestigious All-USA Academic First Team for Community and Junior Colleges. She was also named a 2005 Texas New Century Scholar, an award sponsored by the Coca-Cola Foundation to recognize the top community college student from each state.

Phi Theta Kappa students dominated the regional and international conventions for the organization, bringing home a school record-breaking 12 awards for leadership, scholarship, and service. Among the group

Organizers felt confident going into the March 2005 \$73.4 million bond election because the need for expansion was so great.



MCC officials look at what went wrong in bond election

Building package defeated Tuesday

By Mike Anderson
Tribune-Herald staff writer

McLennan Community College officials did some soul searching Wednesday about why voters narrowly defeated a \$73.45 million bond package for construction projects and how they should now deal with a student population that is outgrowing the Waco campus.

McLennan County residents on Tuesday rejected the proposed bond 3,059 to 2,799, or 52.22 percent to 47.78 percent. At one point during the vote counting, the margin was so close that the bond was winning by just 24 votes.

MCC officials decided to hold the election after a record spring enrollment of 8,543 students underscored issues of crowding on the nearly 40-year-old campus. The bond would have included funds to

construct three new buildings, renovate numerous others and to create new roads, sidewalks and 650 additional parking places.

On Wednesday, the bond's supporters speculated about several factors that may have contributed to its failure, ranging from local fiscally conservative voters to poor timing to low participation among students and faculty. While MCC trustees gathered Wednesday night for their



MCC President Dennis Michaelis says the result is only a statement on higher taxes.

regularly scheduled monthly meeting, they did not formally decide on a new course of action to accommodate a student population they say could grow to about 12,000 within 10 years.

MCC President Dennis Michaelis says he sees the vote not as a message that the public is dissatisfied with MCC.

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Vice President Lynn Abernathy, student Mary Gallery, and Dr. Michaelis at the International Phi Theta Kappa convention where Gallery received top honors.

was 15-year-old Troy Dodge, who later in the year would be one of only 30 community college students nationwide to receive the prestigious Phi Theta Kappa Leaders of Promise Scholarship. The following year, Troy would also be named a New Century Scholar, marking the only time in history for one college to boast back-to-back winners of the elite award.

Interest in the University Center swelled when, in the spring of 2005, Tarleton State University began offering the program's first doctoral degree, a Doctor of Education in Educational Leadership.

"The partnership between McLennan and Tarleton positions the two institutions to have an outstanding opportunity to respond to finding creative, affordable, and efficient ways to meet a community's needs for education," Tarleton President F. Dominic Dottavio said.

By the fall of 2006, Tarleton was the largest contributor of the 14 bachelor degrees, six master degrees, two post-master's certifications, and doctoral degree being offered on the MCC campus by University Center partners UTA, Tarleton, University of Texas at Brownsville, and University of Texas Medical Branch at Galveston. Midwestern State University would round out the partnerships by bringing a bachelor's in respiratory care technology to the mix in 2008.



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Celebration and Celebrity

The year following the disappointing defeat of the 2005 bond election proved to be a healing time of reflection on the past and focus on the future. As MCC approached its 40th anniversary, efforts were amplified to boost the college connection for students and community members alike. On Sept. 19, 2006, exactly 40 years to the day from when classes first began for the college, students kicked off the celebration with a "Rockin' through the Decades" event. As part of the yearlong celebration, the college hosted more than 50 concerts, plays, exhibits, and guest lectures.

Among the lectures presented by the McLennan Distinguished Lecture Series (DLS) were two celebrated science gurus. Nobel Prize-winning scientist Dr. James Watson, who with fellow researcher Dr. Francis Crick had first discovered the basic structure of life, came to campus in the fall of 2005. The MCC Conference Center overflowed with fans for his two lectures. With his discovery of the famed DNA double helix and its implications for genetic

engineering, cloning, and the future of life itself, Watson approached rock-star status among students in numerous disciplines, including medicine, genetics, criminal forensics, and law.

Feeding off the spectacular success of the Watson lecture, only months later, in April 2006, DLS organizers booked an entirely different kind of science lecturer, Emmy Award-winning television personality and author Bill Nye "The Science Guy." Again, Nye's wild popularity among young people from his many years on his PBS television show positioned the event to be a home run for the college.



Dr. James Watson, Nobel Laureate and co-discoverer of the structure of DNA, was the college's second Distinguished Lecture Series guest in 2005.



The college's 40th Anniversary celebration lifted spirits after the defeat of the 2005 bond referendum.

2000-2006

If At First You Don't Succeed

Amid all the anniversary revelry, enrollment at McLennan continued to grow. The fall 2006 headcount reached almost 7,900 students, setting yet another fall semester record. Clearly, the enrollment patterns the college had experienced for the previous five years were not a temporary situation, and some projections put the college's enrollment at 12,500 by 2015. In the 2005 annual report, Michaelis wrote: "The outcome (of the 2005 bond election) did little to alter our resolve to explore every alternative to assure the College will never close the door on educational opportunity for anyone who seeks it."

Naturally, that exploration included making another run at a bond election, this time with a dramatically different approach.

"We knew we needed to do this differently," says Trustee K. Paul Holt. "Many influential people, specifically U.S. Congressman Chet Edwards, came out of the woodwork right after the first bond election failed and told us, 'Let's get on this and move forward.' It gave us a lot of hope."

Holt likened the experience to a trampoline jump: "We hit a low point on the trampoline, but rather than staying low, we decided to bounce right back up."

On Aug. 22, 2006, the MCC Board of Trustees called another bond election, this time seeking \$74.5 million in support for essentially the same projects as

the previous bond package: a three-story classroom building to accommodate popular core classes and the growing University Center; a state-of-the-art science building to accommodate demand for science courses leading to health careers programs; an emergency services center to provide proper training — and cross-training — of police, fire, and emergency medical service students; and numerous infrastructure and building renovations. While paring down the sizes slightly, planners knew that all three facilities were sorely needed and could not be jettisoned.

"As we looked at the original bond package and a second election, the conversation always came back to whether we should cut anything out of the package. And if we were going to cut anything out, it would be the emergency services center," remembers retired Vice President Al Pollard. "I said, 'You don't want to do that because that is the facility that is going to save lives. Those are the protective services for older adults. We can't cut that out.' That's how strongly I was really, really advocating for that facility."



The repeat bond election attempt in 2006 made a broad appeal to the community about the need for more science classes, healthcare workers, and first responders.

The project stayed in the bond package. Ultimately, Pollard says, serving the first responder community with the training center was the key to winning the bond election. At the facility's dedication years later, Michaelis would single out Pollard as the driving force behind the idea.

As they approached the second try for public support, organizers determined that a highly public campaign, the opposite tactic of the quiet 2005 campaign, would help educate voters on the critical need for the projects.

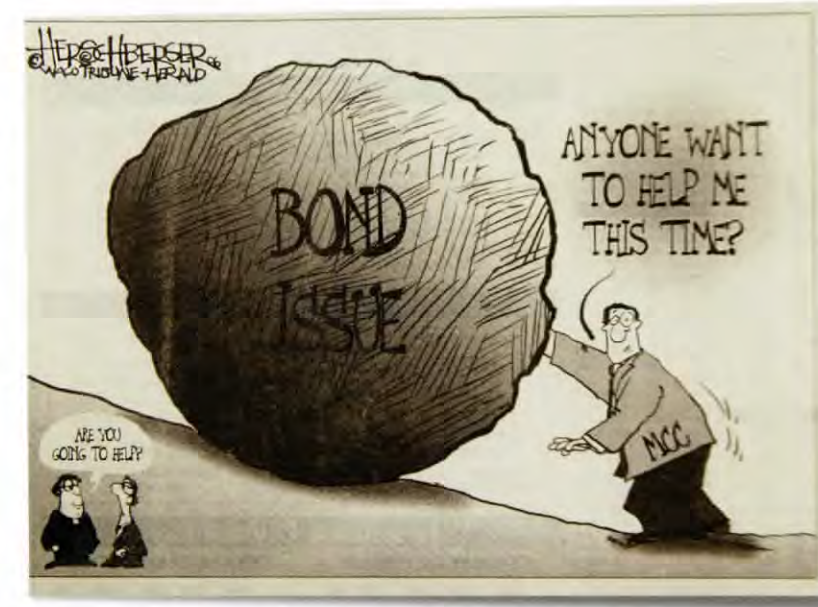
"After the first bond election didn't pass, we went back to the community and said we weren't kidding about needing to do this and we need help in promoting this," Trustee Bob Sheehy Jr. recalls. "And all kinds of people jumped on board to help."

To captain the effort, McLennan sought the leadership of real estate businessman Bill Goss, an alumnus and former Highlander baseball player, assisted by former Trustee

Ray Perry serving as treasurer. Goss and Perry assembled a blue-ribbon committee of 66 key business and community leaders to promote the proposal, and set out to raise the funds to share the message. In the end, supporters raised more than \$175,000 to fund the broad-based media campaign, almost nine times the amount spent the year before. Posing the rhetorical question of what the county might look like

if not for MCC, the campaign used hard facts about the college's enormous reach in the community, including that two out of three local health care workers receive their training at MCC.

On the night of the general election, Nov. 7, 2006, the community came through for the college, with 65 percent of voters supporting the referendum. Finally, after six years of growing pains, the college would be able to comfortably "Grow for the Greater Good."



Source: Waco Tribune-Herald



2000-2006

The McLennan Distinguished Lecture Series



The brainchild of President Dennis Michaelis, the McLennan Distinguished Lecture Series was launched in 2004 to enrich the cultural experience for students and the community at large by offering opportunities to hear from nationally known experts in politics, science, literature, and popular culture. The initial lecture by Afghan-American author Tamim Ansary was inspired by a collaboration with the Greater Waco Chamber of Commerce “One Book, One Waco” initiative, which had selected Ansary’s *West of Kabul, East of New York* as the year’s community book. Since that time, lecturers have included:

- 2004 Tamim Ansary, Afghan-American author
- 2005 Dr. James Watson, author and co-discoverer of the structure of DNA
- 2006 Bill Nye “The Science Guy,” author and television personality
- 2007 Robert Reich, author and former U.S. Secretary of Labor
- 2009 Alice Schroeder, author of Warren Buffett’s biography
- 2010 Lisa Ling, author and investigative reporter
- 2011 Dr. Ben Carson, author, groundbreaking neurosurgeon, 2016 presidential candidate
- 2013 Bob Woodward, author and investigative reporter
- 2015 Dr. John C. Maxwell, author and leadership speaker

In early 2012, shortly after the Dr. Ben Carson lecture, the McLennan Community College Foundation received a gift of \$500,000 from a community supporter to endow the lecture series in perpetuity. The biennial lectures continue to be planned and organized by a diverse campus committee of faculty and staff.



Distinguished Lecture Series Committee members Al Pollard, Kim Patterson, and Andi Ramon with speaker Bob Woodward in 2013.

2004



Tamim Ansary, Afghan-American author

2005



Dr. James Watson, author and co-discoverer of the structure of DNA

2006



Bill Nye, author and television personality

2007



Robert Reich, author and former U.S. Secretary of Labor

2009



Alice Schroeder, author of Warren Buffett’s biography

2010



Lisa Ling, author and investigative reporter

2011



Dr. Ben Carson, author, groundbreaking neurosurgeon, 2016 presidential candidate

2013



Bob Woodward, author and investigative reporter

2015



Dr. John C. Maxwell, author and leadership speaker





Chapter 2

A Vision Shared

As the year 2007 dawned, McLennan was in a celebratory mood. The college's 40th anniversary festivities that had begun the previous fall were in full swing, the campus adorned with colorful banners and the community papered with billboards, advertisements, and television messages reminding folks of how the college had improved the lives of virtually every person in the region. Faculty, staff, and students shared in the pageantry, donning commemorative shirts and passing out mementoes at numerous special events. The celebration culminated with the Oct. 11, 2007, unveiling of a 40th anniversary history book that chronicled the college's formation and first four decades.

Privately, McLennan's construction team, composed of President Michaelis,

Executive Vice President Johnette McKown, Visual and Performing Arts Director Donald Balmos, Facilities Director Sid Ross, Physical Plant Director Dianne Feyerherm, and Instructional Vice President Jack Schneider, was deliberating the immense construction ahead, each member cautiously elated about the opportunity to change the face of the institution. At the time the election was held the previous fall, the three major bond projects had been merely concept drawings. Now, it was time to turn \$74.5 million worth of ideas into reality.

"We had a good plan," former Trustee Randy Cox says. "With the money that we had, we had the right architects and we had the confidence that the plan for the University Center was right. We were on the right track."

As part of the college's commitment to sustainability, wooden benches on campus were made from trees felled during construction of the new buildings.

The wood used to construct this bench was harvested from trees on the MCC campus in 2008

When the campus was first built, planners exercised great care in selecting location, design, and colors for the buildings to blend harmoniously with the lovely natural setting. Ultimately, they selected a brick called Americana — the same brick that was used on the structures at the 1968 HemisFair in San Antonio.

“We wanted it to be natural and appropriate for the landscape and environment there,” President Wilbur Ball recalls. “I think we did a good job.”

Michaelis says the new construction team approached the plan for adding new buildings with the same mindfulness shown by their predecessors.

“We did a lot of listening to faculty and we did a lot of surveys and got a lot of feedback on what were the needs. There was a lot of looking forward as to what the future needs of this community were going to be,” he says.

The planning also included trips to 11 different universities across the nation to seek the latest innovations in college facilities. The spectacular results are seen today: “When we went to Albion College in Michigan, they had a winding staircase and the treads were made from trees that had been on the site,” Sid Ross recalls. “That led us to build the benches from the trees we lost in building. The science building at Notre Dame had a mural of the solar system in relief in the floor, so that’s what led us to plan the artwork in our science building. Those features are really neat, and I think the students appreciate them. They take better care of the buildings when they are proud of them.”

Facilities Planner Donald Balmos, who in 2011 would become the college’s instructional vice president, advocated for



useful but inspiring classroom and lab space, knowing that many faculty members had not had the advantage of seeing the natural lighting, glass, and artwork that had become the custom in modern academic buildings: “When we started to talk to the faculty about their needs, Dr. Michaelis said, ‘Here is the footprint for the building ... You tell us what you want inside,’” Balmos recalls. “And that was a good way to get the conversation started. But we brought them along to see the vision of what we had seen.”

Building location, too, was an important factor. Early in the process, plans were for the emergency services center to be



Dr. Donald Balmos

located at the college’s Highlander Ranch, near Bosqueville, or perhaps near the on-campus Community Services Center. The classroom building was planned for the site of the MCC tennis courts. But leaders were thoughtfully concerned about the oak trees, the feel of the campus, and student and traffic flow.

Ross recalls a President’s Council retreat where senior staff discussed building sites: “I don’t know if you remember this or not, but you (Kim Patterson) said, ‘You know, we really should strive to keep everything that we can on the inner core of campus for the students.’ And it was like a light bulb went on in the room. That’s the reason we have the science building where it is and the classroom building where it is. Then, rbdr (architects) came up with that crescent shape for the classroom building, and we adjusted it to accommodate those 20 beautiful

trees. Dr. McKown was worried about students crossing traffic, so we did a study and determined we could move the road (Highlander Drive) to accommodate a larger inner campus. And it just kind of clicked. That allowed us to create the Legacy Plaza and a mall over to the LTC, which is now the heart of campus.

“What people need to know is that it was a team that created all this,” Ross says. “It wasn’t any one person or one idea — it was everyone on campus who fed us information. All that information was processed and we got the best result.” Staying true to the vision of the original campus planners, those results more than once involved shifting an entire building, like the classroom building, to preserve a fine tree.

“Initially, I think the contractors thought we were joking when we told them not to damage that big oak tree,” Trustee Bob

Groundbreaking for the classroom building in 2007 marked the beginning of making the bond-funded projects reality.



Sheehy Jr. recalls about a similar campus project. "And at every board meeting, we would ask about the tree. They soon found out we weren't kidding."

Ross estimates the entire process to plan and build an additional 250,000 square feet of campus facilities took an astoundingly swift 18 months to complete. "That's pretty remarkable to get that much done in that period of time," Ross recalls. "There was meeting after meeting after meeting — with architects, construction people, faculty, staff, and our financial people with their cash spending plans who made sure the money would be available at each point along the way. Dr. McKown and her group did a remarkable job with managing the money; our bond counselor told us that he had never seen an institution maximize their funds that well. It was a real team effort."

Planners wasted little time before starting on the most pressing projects: the first bulldozers arrived in March 2007, a mere four months after the bond election had passed. Precision execution, primarily led by Ross and Physical Plant Director Dianne Feyerherm, would be needed to

accomplish such massive construction projects amid a working college campus filled with more than 8,000 students and staff. Parking lots had to be added and expanded to allow room for construction materials as well as to replace the parking spaces they consumed. Streets had to be re-routed to allow construction to proceed, and renovations to existing buildings were completed to accommodate displaced capacity. Infrastructure upgrades, including an upgraded central utility plant, were necessary to integrate the new facilities into the old. As Ross remembers, virtually no building on campus was untouched by the highly organized chaos.

Through it all, Michaelis and McKown were only a phone call away to make decisions. "They were always available,"



Construction of the massive new buildings in the midst of a bustling, 8,000-student campus required extensive planning.



Student Michelle Diaz plants a tree in 2008 as part of the college's sustainability efforts.

Ross says. "If we had three or four layers of administration to go through, we never would have gotten those buildings built."

The best description of life on campus during this time came from Michaelis himself: "These days, campus is filled with the hustle and bustle of students, faculty, staff, and ... construction workers."

Beginning with the groundbreaking for the classroom building on Sept. 27, 2007, hard hats and gold shovels became common on campus as groundbreakings and topping out ceremonies were planned for the three new buildings. For the leaders tasked with making the ideas reality, the moment the first shovel hit dirt launched the unforgiving countdown to grand openings for students in 2009. There was no time to waste.

Taking the LEED in Design and Sustainability

As design work proceeded for the three new buildings, one thing was certain: The construction and resulting buildings would be earth-friendly. Aside from symbolic gestures like benches crafted from campus oak trees lost in construction, the building projects were "green" to the core as the college pursued LEED (Leadership in Energy and Environmental Design) designations for the new facilities. LEED status, bestowed by the U.S. Green Building Council, grades projects on a Green Building Rating System based on energy-efficient features and meticulous construction recycling practices.





Trustee K. Paul Holt

Most recall that Trustee Randy Cox was the first to voice support for the sustainability effort, and Trustee K. Paul Holt, a veteran of the construction industry, had been attuned to the green building trend since the late '90s. "But we as a college didn't want to get too far ahead of the community and experience any backlash," Holt recalls.

"Probably the single greatest injection of excitement to move in that direction was the Chamber building," Holt says. "When the Greater Waco Chamber of Commerce leadership came out and said they were going to build the first LEED building in Waco, all fears were off." The timing was right for MCC to fully commit to leadership in sustainability. In June 2007, Michaelis solidified the college's commitment by signing the American College and University Presidents Climate Commitment "to adopt

and promote environmentally sustainable practices."

With this bellwether pledge in mind, rbdr architects Bernadette Hookham and Grant Dudley carefully included features in the building plans to earn the science and classroom buildings LEED Gold certifications and the emergency services center a Platinum designation, thanks to rainwater harvesting, geothermal heating and air conditioning, and a drought-resistant xeriscape. Ultimately, the building would miss the rigorous designation by just a few points, but all three new buildings would eventually be certified LEED Gold. The mindful construction that resulted in beautiful, environmentally smart buildings made a remarkable statement to the community that had supported the bond election and the college. "We were building better for longer," Holt says.

Soon, faculty, staff, and students wholeheartedly embraced sustainability efforts, and today, the evidence appears in every corner of campus: happy blue and



Believing in McLennan

For those who liked things tidy on the MCC campus, 2008 was not their year. Boxes, moving carts, and dollies were as ubiquitous as backpacks as MCC faculty and staff shuffled to accommodate building facelifts. The business of education shared space with construction commotion while work on the 102,000-square-foot science building and 96,000-square-foot classroom building proceeded at a rapid pace in the heart of campus. Designed into the projects was more than \$3 million of the most up-to-date technology available, including an Internet-based phone system, interactive distance learning classrooms, and cutting-edge science labs.

Groundbreaking for the 102,000-square-foot science building was in December 2007.

green bicycles available for long-term rent (another idea from the university campus visits) are parked outside buildings; HOV parking spaces encourage carpooling; solar panels gleam on buildings; quiet electric carts shuttle students to and from class; and saplings are planted to honor longtime employees.

"LEED is more comprehensive than just providing an energy-efficient building," says McKown today. "Being a LEED campus is really part of an entire sustainability movement." By 2015, four MCC buildings had earned LEED Gold status and one was LEED certified.

Fred Hills was one of the original members of the sustainability committee that led the efforts to conserve resources at MCC. "I think the sustainability movement has changed the culture of the college," Hills says.

While many focus on the earth-friendly nature of the movement, Ross views the sustainability efforts from a more pragmatic approach. "We added an additional 250,000 square feet of space, and our electric bill hardly reflects that. We haven't had to add any new dumpsters — we have recycle containers instead.

The new energy management technology lets us operate very efficiently. Shortly after we installed the new heat pump chiller, Atmos Energy came out to check our meter because they were sure it was broken. That installation saved us \$10,000 a month in natural gas ... They couldn't believe it. MCC is doing a lot of things that get us to a very small footprint."



Senior administrators don helmets to try out the new rentable bikes.



Since the late 1980s when President Michaelis arrived on campus, technology innovation had been at the forefront at McLennan. But it would be the bond projects that would truly and finally propel the college to the leading edge of technology innovation. Working side by side with the contractors, information technology staff outfitted the new facilities with Crestron smart classrooms, lecture capture technology, digital signage, and wireless capabilities. Eventually, the enhancements would make their way to every instructional venue on campus.



The new buildings contain more than \$3 million in the most up-to-date technology available to ensure a completely wired, and wireless, campus.

“The most important thing we do as an institution happens in the classroom,” says Mike Searight, information technology director. “Technology is simply the mechanism that fosters research and innovations. At McLennan, we have amazing professors and students who

leverage technology to share information, communicate, and cultivate learning communities. It was critically important for those new buildings to reflect that.”

Another point of pride for all involved with the projects was the decision that there be almost exclusive use of local contractors on the building projects; trustees and administrators were passionate about returning as much economic benefit as possible to the community that had supported the college’s needs.

“There was an absolute vigilance to make sure we weren’t paying a premium to have local people do it,” Trustee K. Paul Holt says. “Virtually everybody we used was local.”

Facilities Manager Sid Ross recalls the perfect timing of the projects. “When the recession of 2008 hit, we were the hottest thing going in Central Texas because we were employing a lot of the local subcontractors and suppliers when they were hungry,” Ross says. The result was tremendous value for MCC’s construction dollar, estimated by Ross to be as much as 35 percent less than what the same building would cost to build today. On the other end of the equation, a wise investment plan maximized the \$74.5 million, enabling the college to make the funds go as far as possible.

“We were very careful to place our bond funds at local banks, and we got very good interest rates,” McKown says today. “That investment strategy allowed us to do everything we told the taxpayers we would do without compromising our plans.”

With the promise of additional classroom and lab space soon to be fulfilled, MCC leaders were quick to realize that the parking hassles that had become synonymous with life at MCC could only

become worse once construction was complete. Adding a parking garage had been discussed for years, but the steep cost had deferred plans and leaders had opted for surface parking lots as long as space was available. But increasing enrollments, combined with diminishing free space, provided the justification to fund a four-story parking garage near the new classroom building. Construction of the 400-space Highlander Drive Parking Garage began in the fall of 2008 and was completed shortly after the classroom building opened in 2009.

“We thought we had built the parking garage for all people for all time. But we didn’t. We were glad the students were using it.”

—Trustee K. Paul Holt

“What we didn’t anticipate was getting an email at 8:15 a.m. on the day it opened telling us that there were six parking spaces left in it,” Holt says. “That was not the best day.” A second, 855-space parking garage added in 2011 on Cameron Drive near the new science building would finally ease the legendary congestion on campus.

While construction proceeded, the MCC faculty council proposed to the Board of Trustees that the new classroom building be named in honor of Dr. Michaelis, the man who had led efforts to make the new facilities reality. It was a fitting honor for the president who had arrived on a solid, mid-sized campus in 1988 and who had guided the institution through major transformations. At about the same time, Michaelis announced he would retire the following year. The leadership transition would coincide with the completion of the three new buildings, monuments to Michaelis’ legacy built on leadership in technology, sustainability, and university and community partnerships.

The 400-space Highlander Drive Parking Garage opened in August 2009 as the first step toward solving the college’s legendary parking problems.





The multidiscipline Emergency Services Education Center generated substantial media and community interest when it opened in 2009.

“As for whether I’m remembered as a student guy, or a community guy, or as a builder guy ... it doesn’t really matter,” Michaelis says today. “You could look at me and say ‘He’s the guy who built those buildings.’ But that was just the last few years I was here. All the other stuff that developed before that gave us the cache to be successful to build those buildings ... to grow enrollment from 5,000 to 10,000 students ... that’s all cumulative stuff. The community has to trust you before they’re going to say yes to \$74 million. They have to believe in you.”

A Historic Partnership

Not to be forgotten in the bustle on the main campus was the construction of the third main piece of the bond package, now named the Emergency Services Education Center (ESEC). After months of discussions about the location for this highly specialized facility, a chance meeting in 2007 between Michaelis and then-Waco City Manager Larry Groth forged an unprecedented alliance between the two institutions. The plan, devised by Assistant City Manager Wiley Stem, was to give 43 acres of city property near the Waco Regional Airport to the college to build a 49,000-square-foot training facility. The training center would jointly serve MCC’s police and fire academies and emergency medical services and criminal justice programs, along with providing training for City of Waco first responders.

From the city’s perspective, Groth saw an opportunity for better coordination between departments that trained together. “If we can take

Emergency numbers

\$11.5 million center would offer training for McLennan County lawmen, rescuers



McLennan County Sheriff's Office SWAT members train at the Waco police shooting range Wednesday. The shooting range will be expanded as part of a new training facility.

care of the absolute needs in our community for safety training and do that together, then we all win,” Groth said at the project announcement. The partnership officially began on May 8, 2008, when a contingent of college and city officials broke ground on the \$11.5 million facility.

Today, the joint vision of a unified training facility is flourishing, according to Waco Police Chief Brent Stroman. The City of Waco uses the McLennan Law Enforcement Academy as its police academy, with Waco officers and training staff providing instruction. The Waco Fire Department also has training staff on site and uses the McLennan Fire Academy to fill its ranks. The cutting-edge facility also has become a hub for regional emergency response meetings, speakers, and training.

“The ESEC is an example of how a vision shared can grow into a reality shared by many,” Stroman says. “The partnerships it took to build the ESEC continue to thrive and serve as the foundation for not only police/fire education and training, but also as a cooperative working model for the delivery of public safety services for McLennan County. I believe the training model offered through MCC and the ESEC is the new model for law enforcement and police service training in the state.”



2007-2008



“MCC Helped Mold Me Into the Person I Am Today”

Vinnie Johnson. Ballplayer. NBA Champion and Star. Builder of Communities.

When a teenage Vinnie Johnson left New York City in 1975 on his way to play college basketball in Waco, Texas, he fully expected to see horses traveling the roads along with cars.

“I came from a borough of 4 million people,” Vinnie says today. “Waco was a small town at the time, and when you think of Texas, you think of cowboys and ranches and all that stuff. As a kid who hadn’t traveled much, I wasn’t sure how I would make the adjustment.” Fortunately, Vinnie’s new teammates, including Waco-born Martin Schwartz, soon introduced him to the area’s unique brand of Southern hospitality and made the adjustment easy.

“There’s no doubt that going to Waco, going to McLennan, really helped me grow as an individual,” Vinnie says. “I learned a lot from those folks down there, and I’ll never forget it. MCC helped mold me into the person I am today.”

As one of eight children in a family growing up in Brooklyn, Vinnie was a regular at neighborhood street ball games at nearby Rucker Park. While his dream was to make it to the NBA, it was a chance meeting with McLennan coach Johnny Carter at a summer tournament that gave Vinnie his ticket out of what he termed the “rat race” of the city and onto his path of success.

“My friend Craig Smoak, who was playing in Texas, was giving Coach Carter

a tour of the summer leagues, and he happened to see me play. He liked what he saw and was determined to recruit me to Waco,” Vinnie recalls.

Once Vinnie settled in at McLennan, it did not take long for his newly adopted hometown to warm up to the high-octane shooting guard who averaged as many as 29 points per game. As a freshman, Vinnie led the Highlanders to two conference titles and the 1976 NJCAA national tournament, and he was named a junior college All-American in both 1976 and 1977. His play attracted such large crowds that McLennan fast-tracked construction of a new gym, The Highlands, in 1976. For a time, it was known as “The House that Vinnie Built.”

In the crowds were more than a few college coaches eager to attract the talented player, including Baylor Coach Carroll Dawson and his assistant, Jim Haller. Haller, who later went on to be head coach of the Baylor squad, says that attracting Vinnie to transfer to Baylor was his primary goal.

For Vinnie, transitioning across town was a good decision. In his two years at Baylor, he was named a two-time All-American and All-Conference player, and to this day holds the Baylor record for the most points scored in a game (50). Even today, Vinnie’s landmark style of play continues to earn accolades: he was one of three 2015 inductees named to the National Junior College Athletic Association (NJCAA) Men’s Basketball Coaches Association Hall of Fame.

Vinnie was drafted by the Seattle SuperSonics in the 1979 NBA draft and later was traded to the Detroit Pistons, where he, Isaiah Thomas, and Joe Dumars formed a guard rotation with a fearsome reputation as the brash and domineering Piston “Bad Boys.” In the mid-1980s, Vinnie’s ability to come off the bench and heat up the play famously earned him the nickname “The Microwave.” But his most memorable moment came during Game 5 of the 1990 NBA Finals, when his team was trailing the Portland Trail Blazers in the final seconds of play. With .07 on the clock, Vinnie sunk a 15-foot jumper, winning the game 92–90 and sealing the Pistons’ second consecutive NBA title.



Vinnie retired from the NBA in 1992, and at age 35 still had a lot left to give. Turning his legendary work ethic from basketball to business, in 1995 he and Pistons teammate Bill Lambeer started Piston Packaging in inner city Detroit’s Empowerment Zone, an area focused on helping improve distressed communities.

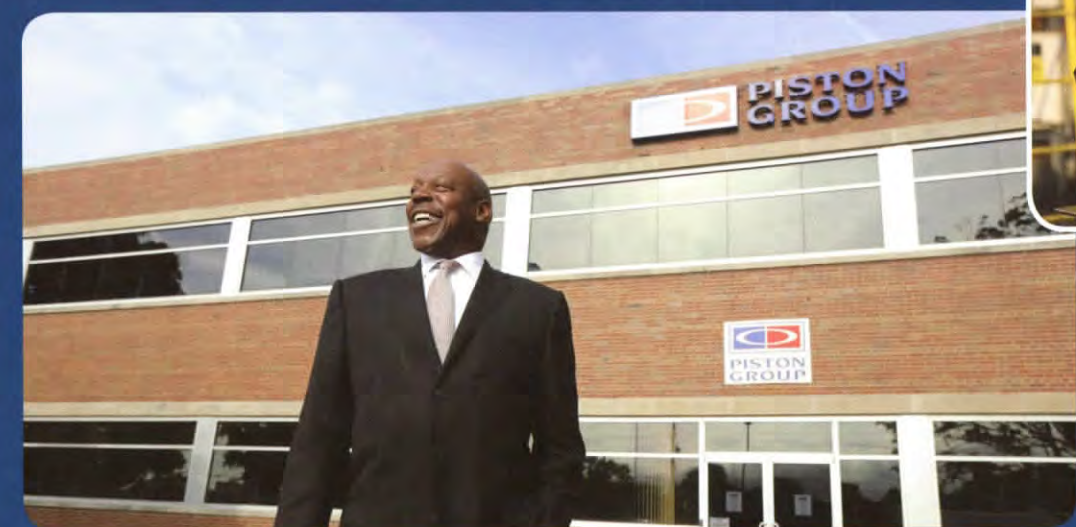
“Lambeer and I always talked about how, when we retired from the NBA, we wanted to give something back to the city of Detroit that supported us during the tough times and the good times,” Vinnie says. “The city was struggling, trying to create jobs, so we started Piston Packaging to help do that.” A year later, Vinnie established Piston

Automotive, a company that provides value-added assembly work for the major auto manufacturers. Later, joint ventures with automotive giants Lear Corporation, Continental Teves, and ZF Sachs further diversified the company’s reach into value-added assembly work.

In 2005, the Piston Group was honored by Inc. Magazine as a recipient of the Inner City 100 award for its investments in Detroit and for “transforming the urban landscape across the nation.” Today, Vinnie serves as chair of the Piston Group, with plants in four states and expansion plans for two more locations in Kentucky and Illinois. Many cars on American roads today are built with components pre-assembled by Piston Automotive. And, staying true to its original mission, the company continues to seek out and invest in employees who just need a chance to contribute.

“The people who don’t have an education, who don’t have the training, who don’t have the skills ... once you give them those things, they are some of your best employees,” Vinnie says. “People just need a chance, an opportunity.”

As he reflects on his many successes in basketball and business, it is clear that providing jobs and security for his employees is Vinnie Johnson’s greatest achievement. “I have close to 1,400 people depending on me to make the right decision for them and their families,” he says. “I love what I did in sports. But to do what I’m doing right now — making an impact on so many folks’ lives and their families’ lives — that is a really good feeling for me.”





Chapter 3

Transition and Celebration

Of all the momentous years in the fifth decade at McLennan Community College, no year can approach the enormous significance of 2009. On Feb. 24, Executive Vice President Johnette Edwards McKown was named third president of the college. For those on the outside looking in, it might have seemed that the longtime right-hand woman for Michaelis who had been with the college since 1989 was heir apparent to the job. Not so, say board members.

“She was part of the conversation, obviously,” recalls former Trustee Randy Cox. “But we knew we needed to do a national search to be sure we did this right. She was up against everyone who applied, 25 or so that I recall. She was not the inside choice at all.”

Trustee Bob Sheehy Jr. recalls that the national search validated McKown as the best choice. In the end, what won McKown the spot was her carefully articulated vision for the future of the college.

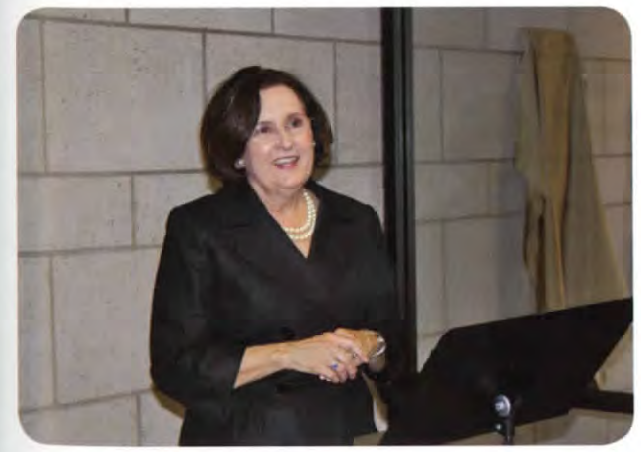
“It was almost an impediment to Dr. McKown because we had always seen her in one specific role,” says Trustee K. Paul Holt. “Yet, when she interviewed, I was certainly blown away by the way she stepped into a different role in a most respectful manner. She beautifully expressed her leadership style and how she would go about making decisions.”

Cox, too, liked what McKown had to say: “She employs a team and shared governance approach that is much like mine; I think this approach is why the transition between the two presidents was smooth.”

Holt says, “The changing of the CEO at any organization is a huge responsibility. With Dr. McKown, it was very clear that things would be different. It was the beginning of a different era, and we were excited to have Dr. McKown leading the college.”

“Unparalleled Vision and Foresight”

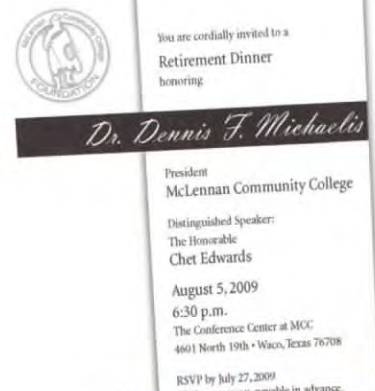
As the year progressed and the day-to-day business of serving students went on uninterrupted, extensive planning was underway to assure a smooth leadership transition. On Aug. 5, the MCC Foundation hosted a gala dinner to celebrate Michaelis’ 21 years as MCC president. More than \$50,000 raised that evening funded



Dr. Johnette McKown

two Presidential Scholarships, making a total of 25 endowed scholarships to sustain the program Michaelis had launched years before. In the crowd were numerous community leaders, notably U.S. Congressman Chet Edwards, who provided the keynote address. It was a fitting celebration for the president who had enhanced the college in so many ways, yet who remained humble about his role.

“My time at MCC was very rewarding,” Michaelis says today. “I have always felt that I have led a very blessed, charmed life, because I’ve had the opportunity to be a part of things and do things that most people would never dream of. I grew up in a little town in western Kansas and was a very average student and had an ordinary upbringing ... and I look back on what extraordinary things I’ve been able to do. How does that happen?”



Dr. Dennis Michaelis retired in August 2009 after 21 years as the college's second president.



College officials scarcely had time to wrap up the Michaelis retirement before preparing for the presidential inauguration the following month. The historic ceremony on Sept. 22, 2009, was filled with the pageantry of faculty and staff in colorful regalia blended with students and community members. Former Trustee Randy Cox voiced the pride and hopes of a campus that hummed with excitement at the dawn of the new era. “In the years I have known Dr. McKown, I have found her energetic work ethic to be unceasing, her faith in what is right to be never-ending, her knowledge of the workings of community colleges to be boundless, and her commitment to this college to be immeasurable,” Cox said at the ceremony. “We are most certain we have made the right choice. As Winston Churchill once said, ‘I am easily satisfied with the very best.’”



Dr. Johnette McKown became the college's third president on September 22, 2009.

In her inauguration address, McKown said, “It takes courage to grow up and become who you really are,” citing poet e.e. cummings. She proposed that courage would be the key to McLennan continuing to embrace innovation while adeptly preparing for the future and not just responding to the present.



Dr. George Vaughan, professor emeritus of higher education at North Carolina State University, delivered the presidential oath of office, challenging the new leader to fulfill the enormous responsibility of leading the institution forward. “In the 44-year history of McLennan Community College, this will be only the third installation of a new president,” Vaughan said. “What a tribute to the depth of commitment to the college that each of the two former presidents, Dr. Wilbur Ball and Dr. Dennis Michaelis, have demonstrated ... uncommon energy and courage, unparalleled vision and foresight, and outstanding dedication and longevity. It will be your privilege and your obligation to lead MCC to the fulfillment of its great promise on the road through this 21st century.”



Dr. McKown, who grew up in Farmerville, Louisiana, at about age 2.



Dr. Lynn Abernathy



Dr. Jack Schneider

As is often the case, the leadership transition triggered a number of retirements and moves, notably the retirement of Instructional Vice President Jack Schneider and Student Services Vice President Lynn Abernathy. The transition provided McKown the opportunity to form a new executive team for the college. Following nationwide searches, Vice Presidents Al Pollard and Dr. Paul Illich were joined by three new leaders: Dr. Ann Kirch from Grayson County College as vice president of instruction, Dr. Santos Martinez from Coastal Bend College as vice president of student services, and Gene Gooch from Vernon College as vice president of finance and administration.



Gene Gooch

Regardless of whether the new leadership team was working in instruction, with students, or on facilities, each of them had their work cut out for them. MCC enrollment continued its perennial ascent, culminating in a record of more than 9,000 students in the spring of 2009. With the three new buildings and a

parking garage almost, but not yet, complete, such large numbers of students on campus continued to stress both human and physical resources. Fortunately, unprecedented

growth in Internet classes and technological advancements like video streaming helped to ease some of the need for face-to-face learning and the logistical issues it presented.

In March 2009, after more than four years of dreaming and planning, the first of the projects, the Dennis F. Michaelis Academic Center (commonly known as the MAC), was ready to open to students and the public. On the day the doors swung open, guests were in awe of the building's soaring, three-story entryway, naturally lit hallways, and inviting student spaces. The facility provided 25 classrooms, 40 offices, two computer labs, study rooms, a lecture hall, and a book store, as well as a permanent home for the college's University Center and the Waco-based faculty of partner Tarleton State University. From the outside, the architecturally striking building immediately redefined the symbolic front door of campus. Michaelis describes the day as the single best day of his 21-year tenure for the simple reason that his entire family was in attendance to witness the opening of a building named in his honor.

"I am very grateful that they put my name on this building as it's a great honor to me and to my family," he says today. "But I don't take it all that seriously because time passes. The students who go to school here now have no idea who Dennis Michaelis is, or was. They see a portrait of an old guy in the lobby. But what matters is that I think I impacted a lot of students' lives, and therefore I changed the future for a lot of families in this community who might never know my name."

In the crowd for the ribbon cutting were high-level administrators from Texas Tech University. As if the grand opening weren't momentous enough, MCC leaders chose



Former President Dennis Michaelis says the opening of the Michaelis Academic Center was the single best day of his 21-year tenure.

March 26 as the day to announce a new partnership with Texas Tech to offer bachelor degrees through the University Center. The excitement in the air was evident; not only with the delight to see the first bond-funded building open, but with the promise of a new partnership with another highly respected and popular Texas university.

fall of 2015, Texas Tech opened a campus at Collin College modeled after the successful Waco site. Dr. Melanie Hart, Texas Tech vice provost for regional teaching sites and eLearning, says the partnership with McLennan is key to the university's mission.

"Partnerships like the one with McLennan Community College allow excellent students to receive a high-quality Texas Tech degree without having to relocate to Lubbock," Hart says. "Many of the students at our regional sites like the one in Waco have many other responsibilities, such as families and jobs, and they often would not be able to continue their education if it were not for these partnerships."



Commemorative bookmarks were made of wood from trees felled during construction.

At the lively ceremony peppered with shouts of "Guns up!" Texas Tech and McLennan administrators signed the official agreement sealing the first community college partnership in the university's history. At the event, Texas Tech President Guy Bailey predicted, "I look forward to our partnership with MCC becoming a model that we can replicate across Texas." In the



TEXAS TECH
UNIVERSITY.

This three-story, stained glass double helix artwork was tribute to the work of Dr. James Watson, co-discoverer of the structure of DNA, who visited the campus in 2005.

In 2012, the Red Raider relationship expanded with the addition of healthcare degrees offered by the Texas Tech Health Sciences Center, including the highly sought Bachelor of Science in Nursing degree. Today, the majority of registered nurses who graduate from McLennan continue studying in this career-enhancing degree program.

The spring and summer of 2009 were simultaneously exhilarating and exhausting for the McLennan staff members who worked to complete and open four new facilities. The college held a ribbon cutting and open house on July 16 for the Emergency Services Education Center, the new home for the college's criminal justice, forensic science, and emergency medical services programs, as well as the law enforcement and fire academies. The new, 405-space Highlander Drive Parking Garage was ready for students on the first day of class in August. And, the 102,000-square-foot science building — featuring 12 classrooms, 14 labs, 17 offices, a greenhouse, an aquarium, natural science museum, and outdoor classroom — became the largest building on campus when it opened on Aug. 17.

The 102,000-square-foot science building became the college's largest facility when it opened on Aug. 17, 2009. The building is LEED Gold certified by the U.S. Green Building Council.



For those who first toured the newly opened science building, the most breathtaking features were two works of stained glass art. The first is a circular fixture bearing science-themed images that lights a student commons area. The second is a dramatic, three-story double helix crafted of steel and glass that pays homage to Dr. James Watson, the groundbreaking scientist who inspired hundreds when he visited campus in 2005.

"I think that learning in a sterile environment, people become bored with it. I think if you put beauty in there, the artwork, then you're stimulated," says Nell Hawkins, who with her husband Jim donated \$575,000 to the MCC Foundation for the artwork.

In the mornings, when the early light illuminates the resplendent stained glass panels of Dr. Watson's double helix, Nell Hawkins sees inspiration.

"The art drives the imagination, and the beauty of it all makes it a better place to study and learn."

—Nell Hawkins



Jim and Nell Hawkins gave the largest gift to date to fund the science building artwork and fountain plaza.

Including the massive science building, the three new facilities added 30 percent more square footage to campus, bringing the total size of McLennan's campus to 1 million square feet. But more significant than the size was the promise the facilities represented.

"Opening three new buildings has incited new enthusiasm on and off campus," McKown said of the changes. "It is fun to see the excitement from students who could clearly see that these buildings were built with them and the environment in mind."

Access With Success

The events of 2010 soon made evident the subtle fingerprint of the new, deeply spiritual and student-focused president at MCC. In less than a year, McKown smoothly executed a personal transformation from construction planner, financier, and all-around detail woman to a gracious host and values-driven leader.

"I always thought of myself as the business-minded person," McKown says of her style. "But I've always had a heart for helping students. It's more of a ministry than a job." Among the new president's first action items was to articulate a set of core values for the college that would guide every decision: excellence, integrity, innovation, inclusion, stewardship, and collaboration.

Expressed values aside, it was clear that the best interests of students, staff, and the community would be at the heart of every decision the college would make from the trustee level on down. Community service projects flourished as faculty, staff, and students were encouraged to embrace volunteerism. The college's top students, the Presidential Scholars, enjoyed expanded programming and campus involvement alongside their new leader. And, for the first time in the college's history, MCC began hosting a December commencement exercise to properly honor those students who completed their degrees in the fall. It was a personal gesture for the woman who deeply understood the community college experience.



An intense student focus defines the presidency of Dr. Johnette McKown. Here, she tutors a student from her Learning Frameworks class.

"I remember attending the nursing pinning ceremony one December a year or so before," McKown says today. "And there was such excitement in the room. They had reached their goals, but they would have to wait until May to actually go through graduation. They deserved to experience that special moment right then."

Following McKown's lead, student success soon became a universal element of the campus culture. Remaining bond funds were used to dramatically enhance the student functions of enrollment and registration with the establishment of Highlander Central. Similar upgrades were made to the heavily used liberal arts and health, physical education, and math buildings. One of the most visible signs of a renewed focus on student success was renovation of a high-profile spot on campus, the student services building. The site that provided support for students had been designed decades earlier for a vastly different student experience, and updated spaces devoted to testing, advising, and student activities brought the facility up to date. In 2015, the building was tweaked yet again with the addition of a Completion Center to centralize student success functions. A jewel in the crown of this highly student-focused building was earning the college's fourth LEED Gold certification in 2015.

"The biggest change since I have been president has been the shift to student success initiatives," McKown says. "We are investing in student success the same way we used to invest in technology when it was new. When you have students in poverty, it



doesn't take much to cause them to give up. We have to understand that life sometimes gets in their way."

Championing the commitment to student success was the entire McLennan Board of Trustees, which in 2011 attended a workshop titled "The Governance Institute for Student Success." "The board members really became a driving force to ensure we were focused on student completion and success," McKown says. Simply enrolling students was no longer enough.

The investments in the student experience could not have come too soon. Enrollment records continued to be shattered, with the college welcoming almost 10,000 students in the spring 2010 semester. With the Highlander Drive Parking Garage full on its first day, leaders recognized the need for a second parking garage to serve the north side of campus near the science building. Construction began on the 855-space Cameron Drive Parking Garage in 2010, and it opened in July 2011.

For the first time in more than a decade, there seemed to be room to breathe at McLennan. It would be understandable for leaders to pause in expansion efforts; however, with enrollment continuing to rise, they were compelled to look to the future. Ironically, that vision included a project that had been a thorn in the side of administrators for the better part of two decades: the 23-acre Northwood Apartments property adjacent to the campus on College Drive. Acquiring that land was a historic achievement for the president who had,

Major renovations to the Student Center redefined the space to serve all student success needs, including a new Completion Center.

"It has been rewarding to be here at a time when we are not only talking about access, but we are facilitating student success."

—Dr. Jhonnette McKown

since 1990, been negotiating to buy the derelict property as it wound its way in and out of receivership. In early 2010, McKown negotiated a \$1.5 million purchase price for the property. While the college had no specific plans for it, finalizing the acquisition was a significant investment in potential future growth for the college.

"The college really needed the Northwood Apartments property to protect its borders and to capture land for future building sites," McKown says of the purchase. "After monitoring the property since 1990, seeing the apartments deteriorate over time, and attempting to purchase the property multiple times, we finally bought it on the courthouse steps. This was an important acquisition as we ensured campus safety today and planned for subsequent development."

Adjacent to the Northwood Apartments property was a smaller tract of land, home to Waco's iconic Northwood Inn restaurant. In 2008, when the college was striving to acquire the apartment property from a Dallas developer through eminent domain, Michaelis and McKown stopped by the restaurant to let the owner/chef know that the college had no intention of exercising the same strategy with his property. Jeff Lundy indicated that he was ready to sell his restaurant to McLennan,

and the college leaders envisioned it as a fine location for entertaining supporters and hosting meetings, weddings, and community events. Historically accurate renovations were completed later that year, and the house, once part of the historic Cameron family estate, today lives on in service to the community as the Northwood House.



This antique iron toy was found beneath the Northwood House property when it was remodeled. Today, the historic property from the former Cameron estate serves the college and community for upscale events.



“Had MCC Not Been Here, I Don’t Know That I Ever Would Have Started”

Vicki Menard. Mother. Scholar. First Female District Judge in McLennan County History.

In 1985, Vicki Sobel was a pretty, young mother whose days were filled with toys and playgrounds and making a home for her husband and two preschool-aged children. Like many young women of her generation, she had graduated from high school, moved out on her own, worked, gotten married, and had children with little thought of attending college. By the time she was 26, her path changed.

“I decided I needed to get an education,” she says. “And I decided, for whatever reason, that I was going to go to law school. Now, I didn’t know any lawyers, I had never been in a courtroom — why I decided to be a lawyer, I don’t know.” Reaction to her ambitions were often mixed. “And people said ‘uh-huh, sure you are ... with these kids’ when they heard my plans,” she says today. Undeterred, Vicki started attending MCC at night. Even for this former high-achieving student, the transition to college after so many years was daunting.

“I remember going out there and I had to take a test to see if I could even get into the classes I wanted. I registered and took my first classes, a math and an English, I think, just to start with the basics. I had been out of high school for a while.”

“But MCC was the perfect choice for me, because it had night school and it’s not like I could just pick up and go off somewhere to college,” she recalls. Vicki attended MCC for five semesters before

transferring to Baylor’s business school. During these years, she took a full load each semester and both sessions of summer school to expedite her plans. Along the way, she also had her third child, a daughter.

“I was very much out of the norm at Baylor — at the time, it was very unusual for a student to be pregnant. So, I made sure that my wedding ring was prominently displayed at all times,” she says. “I missed my last business final as an undergraduate because I was in labor.”

Despite having three children under age five, the young mother-scholar pressed on with pursuing the LSAT and admission to Baylor Law School. “My baby was 5 months old when I started law school. Now I look back on it and don’t know how I did it. But at the time, you just do it. I would still cook and all that stuff, and then when they would go to bed, I would study.”



Vicki graduated from Baylor Law School in 1990 and landed a job at one of the most highly respected law firms in Waco. That was followed by a stint at Temple-based Cowles and Thompson, where she stood out as a fierce female litigator for insurance defense and business lawsuits. During these years, Vicki weathered a divorce and was a single mother for a time. She later remarried, taking the name Menard, and started her own practice back in Waco.

In 2005, the state of Texas created a new district court in Waco — the 414th — and Gov. Rick Perry began taking applications for the judge’s position. “I had a few people mention to me that I should fill out the application,” Menard recalls. “People assumed that I was good friends with Rick Perry, but I had never met the man.” Menard bested dozens of applicants and won the appointment.

On Oct. 21, 2005, Menard, the former stay-at-home mom with only a high school education, was sworn in as the first female district judge in McLennan County. Today, her court handles about half of all civil and family law cases in the county.

For Menard, her ties to MCC continue. Her two daughters and two stepchildren all attended MCC; son Jacob, who died tragically in an auto accident in 2003, is the namesake for an endowed health professions scholarship at the MCC Foundation. A niece completed her Tarleton bachelor’s degree through the University Center and is now working on her master’s degree.

“MCC works for so many different people for so many different reasons. I think that’s why it has been so successful. Not everybody can do it the traditional way. For people like me, the older students who are established, you can’t just move away and go to school. MCC really is what started this whole process for me.

“Had MCC not been here, I don’t know that I ever would have started. The obstacles would have been enormous.”



Chapter 4

A LEAP of Faith in Student Success

In 2011, an article in Community College Week magazine recognized McLennan as one of the fastest-growing two-year colleges in the nation for its remarkable 16 percent increase in enrollment since the 2008–2009 year. Nationally, many community colleges had experienced significant growth during the early 2000s. Not many continued to grow at the pace McLennan had. Now that the

new classroom, lab, and parking facilities were in place, leaders finally could enjoy the college's popularity without viewing each enrollment report with apprehension about how they could serve so many students. And that's a very good thing, because the spring 2011 enrollment briefly touched 11,000 before settling in at an all-time record 10,947 students, more than double the semester headcount seen just a decade before.



But nationally, the winds for community colleges were changing and the student-centric mindset that McKown had brought to the forefront just two years earlier turned out to be prophetic. A groundbreaking report issued in 2012 by the American Association of Community Colleges read:

No matter how significant the contributions of community colleges have been in the past, the ground beneath their feet has shifted so dramatically in recent years that they need to rethink their role and mission ... They cannot effectively meet the needs of their students and communities without responding to the transformation in the larger economic and social environment.

In short, community colleges were charged with fundamentally changing the student experience and resetting a century-old system to better promote student success. Moreover, a legislative movement was stirring that no longer would colleges be judged, or be funded, by the numbers of bodies on their campuses. They would be judged by the numbers of successes they sent out into the world.

Photo credit: Jerry Larson, Waco Tribune-Herald



“It’s a new age of accountability for students. It used to be personal accountability. Now, it’s an institutional responsibility to see that students succeed,” says McKown today. “The new performance-based funding model has really made us focus on the meat and potatoes of the academic enterprise.” The transformation would force a delicate balance for a college that valued success while holding true to its commitment to access.



The Learning Environment Adaptability Project (LEAP) focuses on emotional intelligence and student success.

This paradigm shift was the seedbed for LEAP: the Learning Environment Adaptability Project. As McLennan prepared for its 2011 Southern Association of Colleges and Schools Commission on Colleges (SACSCOC) re-accreditation visit, faculty and staff worked for more than a year on a Quality Enhancement Plan (QEP) essential to the SACSCOC self-study process. That plan, dubbed LEAP, was designed to provide tools for students to achieve greater success in college. Virtually no person on campus was unfamiliar with the term or what it meant as the LEAP philosophy built enthusiasm for the new success-focused culture.

“LEAP is really an umbrella for college success,” explains Academic Dean Fred Hills. “The whole premise is how we can help the students help themselves.” LEAP uses a three-pronged approach of enhanced orientation for incoming students, Learning Frameworks courses that teach a college success curriculum to all new students, and courses to help students learn effective emotional intelligence skills.

“The majority of the issues for students are labeled as academic flags, but when we dig deeper they are not really academic at all,” Hills says. “They are life issues. Students are starting to recognize the services we offer and that’s a good thing.”

Paula Unger, MCC Faculty Council president, agrees. “Shifting focus from access to success is a natural progression for community colleges,” she says. “All systems evolve and adapt and that is exactly what McLennan is doing. Just as access to higher education was made possible by community



Success coaches work with students experiencing academic or personal issues that keep them from succeeding in the classroom.



Paula Unger

colleges in the 1960s, the 21st century demands more. We cannot just open the door to our learning environment; we must nurture students in all of the diverse ways they need it. Without a doubt, this success agility — for the college, faculty, and students — is much more complex than our previous focus on access. We still have much to learn but are moving in the right direction.”

Arriving on campus in 2012 to help transform the culture was new vice president of student success, Dr. Andrew Canham. Canham came from Texas Tech University where he was director of the Ombuds Office and served in the Student Judicial Programs



Dr. Drew Canham

and Resident Life Experience offices. He replaced Vice President Santos Martinez, who took a position at a college in Nevada.

Outstanding Experiences for Outstanding Students

In the 2011 annual report, McKown sums up the spirit of the campus: "All of our efforts are focused on providing outstanding experiences for students in the classroom and in support systems." These opportunities focused not only on the students who struggled, but also on the students who shined. Among these were honors students. MCC had first launched an honors experience in the early 1990s with the Tartan Scholars program, which provided students opportunities to participate in an honors colloquium, an annual study trip, and service projects like Toys for Tots. In 2010, the college rolled the Tartan model into a university-focused experience for high-achieving students with the establishment of the Honors College. The top-rated students in the program tackle challenging courses,

scholarly research, hands-on academic cooperatives, and in-depth cultural experiences.

"The heart of the Honors College is the student's desire for rich learning, combined with the mentoring they have had and the significance of those who walk with them along the way," says Dr. Linda Dulin, Honors College director. "Our research gets better every year, and our students get more sophisticated every year."

Case in point: in 2013, Honors College student Michelle Herbelin was one of only six students participating in the Great Plains Honors Conference to receive the Dennis Boe Award for Outstanding Undergraduate Research. Just two years later, Honors College students Brittany Wright and Stephanie Clevenger took two of the six coveted Boe recognitions for upper-level students, marking the only time community college students have been recognized in this category.



The McLennan Honors College provides top students with enriched learning experiences including research, study of great texts, and service work.



University High School graduate and Presidential Scholar Alondra Castillo plans to be a physician.

Alondra Castillo, salutatorian at University High School, also found her path through the McLennan Honors College and Presidential Scholar programs. "Through the Honors College, I had the opportunity to meet insightful, intelligent students," Alondra says today. "I learned how to balance my time and workload. It is a great program that challenged me academically. And being a member of the Presidential Scholars program with Dr. McKown has made my college experience unforgettable." Alondra will transfer to Baylor University to complete her undergraduate degree before beginning medical school.

Another student whose uncertain future was transformed by the Presidential Scholar program was Chase Mallet. Growing up, Chase's family never talked about going to college. When his senior year at Robinson High School rolled around, he realized the family's lack of focus on preparation for a life after high school had left him with few options.

"All my friends had acceptance letters to big-name universities," Chase says today. "I wanted to go to the universities as well, but the cost of tuition and rent were out of my budget. I had no clue what I was going

to do after high school." As a top 10 percent high school graduate, Chase was fortunate to earn the McLennan Scholarship that covered full tuition and fees at MCC. During his first semester, the naturally shy, first-generation college student struggled to adapt to the new environment. Then, he discovered the Presidential Scholar program.

"As a Presidential Scholar, I had the unique opportunity to be paired with some of the best minds and hearts at MCC," Chase says. "Dr. McKown has motivated me and taught me to become a leader in everything I do. She gives us a life lesson in every meeting to live by, including leadership, serving, volunteering, learning, or giving." Chase lives those lessons each week as he volunteers with the veterans at the Waco VA Regional Hospital.

Chase Mallet, the young man who grew up never thinking about college, recently graduated from MCC with his Associate Degree in Nursing with a 3.9 GPA. He has entered the Bachelor of Science in Nursing program with Texas Tech Health Sciences Center through the McLennan University Center and plans to become a Family Nurse Practitioner. As one would expect, it is an aspiration that was planted and nurtured by an MCC teacher.

Chase Mallet works at the VA Medical Center and plans to earn his BSN through MCC's partnership with the Texas Tech Health Sciences Center.





Judge Ken Starr and Dr. Johnette McKown sign the Baylor@MCC partnership agreement. The program was changed to the Baylor Bound program in 2013.

“We know there will always be a segment of our students who really have their heart set on going to Baylor,” McKown says of the partnership. “We want to make that transition as seamless as possible while still being affordable.” The first attempt at a structured McLennan-Baylor transfer partnership came together in 2012 with the signing of the Baylor@MCC Co-Enrollment program that would allow Baylor students to take classes at McLennan while still enjoying the social benefits of being a Baylor student. The program was modified in 2013 to the Baylor Bound program, a similar initiative in which students begin at McLennan in certain majors and transition to Baylor with the guidance of a dedicated transfer advisor.

Now a decade old and with solid legs under it, the University Center continued to thrive with additional degree options offered by Tarleton, Texas Tech, and the Texas Tech University Health Sciences Center. In 2010, UTA, the pioneering partner that launched the initiative, announced it would stop accepting new students into its five Waco degree programs owing to a change in the



Tarleton State University President F. Dominic Dottavio says his university invests in a partnership with MCC because “education changes the economic trajectory of an individual’s life.”

university’s overall mission. Rather than being deterred, McLennan administrators made finding replacement programs a top priority, and Tarleton soon began offering education, social work, criminal justice, and business programs to fill the void left by UTA’s departure.

F. Dominic Dottavio, Tarleton’s president, sums up the university’s eager investment in the Waco community: “Education transforms individuals and it opens opportunities for them. It can change the economic trajectory of an

individual’s life and their descendants’ lives. Education allows individuals to contribute to the workforce needs in the communities where they live. The partnership between McLennan and Tarleton positions the two institutions to find creative, affordable, and efficient ways to meet this community’s needs for education.” Today, Tarleton has more than 20 full-time faculty and staff in residence on the McLennan campus.

In 2012, Tarleton further exemplified its commitment to the partnership by opening a counseling center at McLennan. The new resource would provide all students access to free counseling services, provide Tarleton graduate students opportunities to perform clinical hours under the guidance of a supervisor, and pave the way to offer a doctoral program in psychology at the Waco campus.

Outside of the University Center umbrella, McLennan faculty and transfer advisors worked diligently to set up articulation agreements with Texas universities in specialized fields like engineering and public health to build clear pathways for students to transfer to those campuses.

Tarleton State University opened a counseling center in 2012 to serve students and provide a lab setting for graduate students in counseling psychology.

Partnerships

From the time the first whispers were uttered about forming a new community college in Waco, never far from the conversation was the concern that Baylor University leaders might view MCC as a competitor. As it turned out, the worries were unfounded: then-Baylor President Abner McCall was among the most vocal proponents of the idea. The two institutions peacefully co-existed for several decades; but shortly after new Baylor President Kenneth Starr made the acquaintance of new MCC President Johnette McKown, the relationship between Baylor and MCC flourished. Talks commenced about taking the collegiality to an entirely new level.



*Hands On. Spacesuit On.
Rock On.*

As the role of partner universities continued to expand, a transformation toward a more university-like experience for undergraduates took hold as McLennan positioned itself as a highly desirable, not just affordable, educational option. Instructional Vice President Donald Balmos attributes the shift to the college attracting an outstanding pool of faculty applicants who hold advanced degrees and an interest in replicating the research-based learning they personally experienced at universities.

The Mars 101 simulation in Utah allows students and faculty to experience what life is like on Mars and conduct scientific research.



As a result, research projects moved from solitary academic undertakings to hands-on global experiences as MCC students explored their interests in unique environments.

Again, McLennan distinguished itself from the typical community college by encouraging students to experience inquiry-based learning early in their college careers.

A pioneer in the field study initiative was the Geology Field Course, an 18-day geologic trek across Texas, New Mexico, Arizona, and Utah that gives students



an up-close look at rock formations and fossils while hiking in the national parks and camping in the desert. A similar but otherworldly excursion is the Mars 101 simulation at the Mars Desert Research Station near Hanksville, Utah. In 2012, five McLennan instructors tested the experience of living in cramped quarters, eating dehydrated food, and wearing spacesuits as they conducted geological and biological research. The experience was deemed so valuable that McLennan began offering it as part of a course for students in 2013.

Also in 2012, McLennan marine biology students first conducted underwater research on the Mesoamerican Barrier Reef in Roatan, Honduras. The course was taught in conjunction with a Texas Tech University instructor developing a "research pipeline" for students to begin research in their early college years and carry it through to their upper-level and graduate studies. Other students traveled to Australia and New Zealand to study economics, Costa Rica to learn Spanish, and New York City to learn business principles.

This type of experiential learning drove the launch of the Highlander Undergraduate Research Institute in 2013. HURI promotes applied- and inquiry-based learning across the McLennan curriculum through independent study, academic cooperatives, and field courses.

"HURI is like the Honors College experience, but it applies to a larger cross-section of the student population," explains Dean Fred Hills. "Students in their normal classrooms get to do this kind of work. The students' interests drive the research."

In 2013, McLennan hosted the inaugural Scholars Day, where more than 150 students demonstrated their art, engineering, marketing, music, science, and Honors College research projects to the campus and community. Within two years, Scholars Day participation had more than doubled, spilling out of The Highlands gym into several campus classrooms.





Dr. Fred Hills

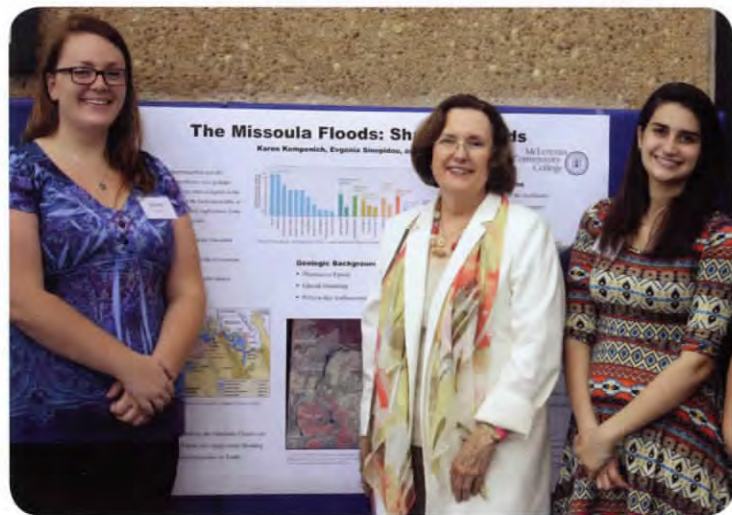
“The most exciting thing to see is the cross-pollination of ideas — students finding out what other students are studying,” Hills says. “Engineering students are talking to the marketing students about selling their inventions. We are building investment in these students.

They are investing in learning, growth, and social development.”

Student-researchers from McLennan have been published in academic journals and have presented at national and international conferences.

“The whole point is to make those learning connections so students see what works and doesn’t work through inquiry and investigation,” Hills says. “We want to get them on these pathways early and let them see the possibilities at the other end — the possibilities of a wonderful career and a wonderful life.”

In May 2015, McLennan’s commitment to attracting high-performing students who



Scholars Day allows students to showcase their research projects.

value academic rigor and enhanced learning opportunities paid off handsomely when a record-breaking 24 graduates crossed the stage with perfect 4.0 GPAs.

Active Learning

When working with rocks, hands-on learning is a wonderful thing. When working with human patients, hands-on learning must wait. In January 2012, McLennan opened the Health Professions Simulation Lab, the centerpiece of the college’s Health Professions complex created to expand in-depth healthcare training. Equipped by more than \$375,000 in grants and private funds raised by the MCC Foundation, the simulation lab features two 20-bed units with high-tech computerized mannequins that replicate real experiences. As in real life, a patient who seems to be stable can suddenly and unexpectedly be in life-or-death crisis, and students must learn to think and act on their feet. So advanced are the new-generation mannequins that one of them even delivers a baby; it, too, is fully computerized to challenge even the most skilled neonatal nurse.

“Most people are visual and tactile learners; but in healthcare, when situations arise in a clinical setting, high stress during the actual event leaves no room for error,” says Dr. Sandy Goss, former nursing program director. The McLennan lab provides a simulated training setting unparalleled in the area. It is so advanced, in fact, that it caught the attention of the Waco Family Medicine Residency Program, an affiliate of the Waco Family Health Center.

“The simulated clinical environment eliminates silos and enhances students’



The Health Professions Simulation Lab opened in 2012, offering Health Professions students real-life training in a simulated hospital or emergency room setting.



Glynnis Gaines

learning outcomes by improving communications, critical thinking, teamwork, and patient management skills,” says Health Professions Dean Glynnis Gaines. “Our relationship with the community has

been strengthened even more through the use of our amazing facilities.”

Today, resident physicians from the Family Health Center work side-by-side with student nurses to experience scenarios, complications, or diagnoses they might not otherwise encounter in their hospital rounds.

Dr. Jackson Griggs, curriculum director at the Waco Family Medicine Residency Program, says the partnership has transformed physician and nursing education from an ad hoc process that is dependent on risky, life-and-death scenarios, to a proactive learning system. “(It) is translating into

“I cannot recall an educational collaboration that has borne as much fruit, and as quickly, as the medical simulation project with MCC.”

—Dr. Jackson Griggs

physicians better trained for the high-stakes tasks they face in the hospital and clinic.”

The partnership was a logical outgrowth of the union that first occurred in 2011 when McLennan opened a Family Health Center-operated community clinic on campus in the Community Services Center. The clinic provides a convenient, high-quality health care option for students, staff, and community members in the college’s North Waco neighborhood.



"MCC Will Always Be My Foundation"

Troy Dodge. Groundbreaking Child Scholar. Phi Theta Kappa Leader. Future Lawyer.

Troy Dodge never planned on becoming a celebrity. The summer before he turned 12, the quiet, home-schooled student visited relatives in California. When he came back, his mother presented him with the study book for a college entrance test. "She says 'I want you to start studying for this. You're going to MCC in the fall.' She certainly caught me off guard," Troy recalls.

He was not one to argue; after all, his mother, Marlaina, had been his closest confidant for years as she home-schooled her youngest, and brightest, child, who had taught himself to read at age 3. She had run all the traps with the MCC administration to allow her academically gifted son to enter college early. So, in the fall of 2002, Troy arrived on campus for his first college class, World Civilization I, with Dr. Michael White.

"Attending MCC as a kid was definitely a fish-out-of-water experience," he says. "I mean, you're sitting there in the classroom with the baseball team, and they're talking about the parties they're going to and the game coming up. And I'm a 12-year-old, thinking 'I can't even hit on the girls.'"

For the first couple of weeks of class, Troy recalls, his fellow classmates treated him with apprehension. "They didn't know exactly what was going on ... But over time, they came to realize I fit in. I was a bit of a mascot." Never far away from her young



prodigy was Marlaina, who, at the request of MCC administrators, attended every class with her son until he turned 15 and began attending full time. The pair became a familiar sight on the MCC campus. "You have to remember, the whole time I was at MCC, I didn't have a driver's license. So, even when she wasn't in class with me, she wasn't far away."

It didn't hurt that the "whiz kid" earned one of the highest grades in every class he attended, either. In the fall of 2004, the 4.0 student was invited to join the McLennan chapter of Phi Theta Kappa, the international honor society for two-

year colleges. "Once I got that invitation, I realized how much I could help out at the college and what opportunities there were through PTK."

And help, he did. During Troy's years in the Pi Chi chapter of Phi Theta Kappa at MCC, the group was involved in a dizzying array of campus and community projects, among them working to register student voters for the 2005 and 2006 MCC bond elections. So notable were their achievements that the group swept the 2005 regional and national conventions, bringing home 12 awards for McLennan. In 2006, Troy would be named a New Century Scholar, one of only 30 community college students nationwide to earn such recognition, and he was featured on the front page of USA Today as a member of the All-USA Academic Team.

On May 9, 2006, still two months shy of his 16th birthday, Troy crossed the stage at MCC's commencement ceremony as one of seven highest honor graduates with a perfect 4.0 GPA. Aside from his diploma, he had in hand a full-ride academic scholarship to Texas Christian University. He would attend TCU the following fall as a Chancellor's Scholar, a group of the university's most accomplished, talented students. He graduated from TCU in 2009, just short of his 19th birthday and again with high honors and accolade for being among the brightest, and youngest, ever to attend.

Throughout his youth and young adulthood, Troy also followed his passion of playing and refereeing soccer, and his work as a referee has provided opportunities at both Division I college and semiprofessional levels. Today, he works as a legal assistant for the Dallas-area Pinkerton Law Firm and is an escrow officer for the firm's affiliate, Federal Title. His next goal is to attend law school with dreams of becoming

legal counsel for a professional sports team, preferably professional soccer.

"Looking back on the experience I had at MCC, I think it's really critical to stress the importance of community colleges in the American educational system as a whole," Troy says today. "Without MCC, I would never have been able to go to a university as elite as TCU. Where I was in life and with the upbringing I had, I didn't really dream about getting offers from schools like Cornell, Miami, USC, TCU, and Baylor. And that was all possible because the experiences I had at MCC will always be my foundation."

No, Troy Dodge never intended to become a celebrity. But for four years at McLennan, he was certainly celebrated as he dared to be different in a new and marvelous way. Perhaps it's difficult for a supremely bright, handsome, polite, and willing young citizen (who just happens to have been born on the Fourth of July) to avoid such a charmed fate. It's a safe bet that for Troy Dodge, the best is yet to come.



Chapter 5

The Compassionate Institution

The significant investments McLennan had made in student success and perseverance clearly paid dividends in 2013. Thanks to the all-time high enrollment set in 2011, a record 1,300 students experienced the life-changing accomplishment of becoming a McLennan graduate two years later. Many of them were the first in their family to reach the milestone.

Among the 551 students graduating that May were several survivors who had been deeply affected by the region's most devastating disaster in recent memory. Scarcely a month before, on the warm spring night of April 17, 2013, a fertilizer plant in the small northern McLennan County town of West caught fire. Twenty-one minutes after the first call came in, with volunteer firefighters on scene, the plant exploded. Twelve first responders

and three community members perished in the blast, and hundreds of homes and businesses were flattened or sustained significant damage. The town and its people were devastated. Within minutes, the occurrence in the Texas farming community of 2,800 people became an international news event.

In the days that followed, it was difficult to find anyone on the McLennan campus who had not been personally or peripherally affected by the tragedy. Especially hard-hit was the college's Veterinary Technology program, which lost adjunct instructor Kevin Sanders. Sanders, a member of the Bruceville-Eddy Volunteer Fire Department, was participating in an Emergency Medical Technician class in West and responded to the fertilizer plant to assist. Minutes later, he was killed in the blast.



Above: Kevin's son Reeve was only a few months old when Kevin was one of 12 first responders killed in the West fertilizer plant blast.

Left: Kevin Sanders, center, was passionate about the vet tech profession and teaching students.



"After the explosion, the faculty and students were in shock and disbelief, but held out hope for those who were at the scene," recalls Veterinary Technology Program Director Sue Allen. "It was sometime later that we learned he had passed. The students were devastated." At the memorial service held for the fallen first responders, the MCC group stood out in Superman t-shirts in honor of their teacher and the favorite hero he represented.

The effects of the West disaster were felt elsewhere on campus, as well.

"McLennan treated me as a family member and not just an employee during this time," says former McLennan administrator Crystal Anthony, who lost her home and most possessions in the blast. "Once people found out about my loss, they were so helpful. The college assisted me with storing what we were able to save, and Dr. McKown always asked how my recovery was going. McLennan became my 'safe place' during that difficult time of my life."

The response in the days and weeks that followed was fitting for the institution with not one, but two hearts at the center of its college seal. Admissions representatives and academic advisors set up shop in West to help students who had lost books, notes, computers, and precious class time. Faculty worked one-on-one with affected students, the MCC Foundation gathered donations, and student groups pitched in to help with cleanup. Most significantly, the Heart of



MCC employee and West, Texas, resident Crystal Anthony, center in pink, says her MCC family helped her through the tough times following the West explosion. She is shown here with the First Generation scholars.



McLennan Presidential Scholars volunteered numerous hours in the community of West following the April 17, 2013, fertilizer plant explosion.

Texas Retired and Senior Volunteer Program headquartered at McLennan acquired a \$195,000 grant from The Corporation for National and Community Services to fund an 11-month recovery project for West. For longtime MCC administrator Al Pollard, the fervent campus-wide response to their neighbors' suffering was not surprising.

"I call it 'the compassionate institution,'" Pollard says. "It's very compassionate. We look out for each other when there is illness and when there is happiness. People really tune into those things."



Al Pollard, who retired from McLennan in 2015 after 42 years, calls MCC "the compassionate institution."

Drafting the Future

After a record-shattering decade of growth that began in 2000 and culminated in a peak of almost 11,000 students in 2011, McLennan, like most community colleges in the state, experienced a significant enrollment decline in the ensuing two years. The adjustment was not unexpected. Thanks to the many enhanced learning and support efforts underway on campus, students were having an excellent experience. However, changes to federal grant eligibility implemented in 2011 dramatically altered the landscape for all colleges, especially those like McLennan where 70 percent of students depend on aid. The new rules presented uncharted territory for students who had to realign their plans and a college that had largely defined itself by its thriving enrollment for so many years.



Leaders project that the natural beauty and location of MCC position the college for future growth and riverside development.



In 2013, the challenging enrollment pattern led leaders to begin a closer analysis of the future for the college through a study of potential emerging markets, asking what might the McLennan campus of 2020 look like. With the college's affordable cost and riverside location offering the potential for numerous lifestyle amenities, leaders envisioned a destination college where more students from around the state and the world would seek a high-quality, affordable, and socially rich student experience. With that thought in mind, committees studied the feasibility of the college adding dormitories and expanded student life options.

Ultimately, the emerging markets study determined that a dramatic change of focus for the college to include housing and student life amenities was not advisable at that time. As the comprehensive emerging markets study drew to a close in late 2013, the "McLennan on the Move" strategic expansion and effectiveness project was implemented to focus on the future of the college through advancement in nine key areas: promoting McLennan,

University Center and articulation agreements, Baylor-McLennan partnerships, academic programming, international students, student life, facilities, funding, and high school initiatives. The nine teams, supported by the executive team, continue to implement the task force recommendations.

"There are challenges in changing enrollment patterns," McKown says of the efforts. "Some of the things we investigated with emerging markets are not ready. Financially, the time is not right for them. But looking at how we can help every student no matter where they are, making sure they get on successful pathways, that is where my heart is and that is where this campus will be. We will focus on serving the students we have to the best of our ability."

Regardless of whether the college adds student housing, Faculty Council President Paula Unger sees McLennan evolving into less of a commuter campus. "Because of the new emphasis on success, I think we will become more campus-centered," she predicts.

"Prioritizing success requires collaboration and living out loud that 'we are all in this together.'"

-Paula Unger

McLennan's commitment to student success was rewarded in 2014 when it was one of only 12 institutions nationwide selected for the Achieving the Dream (ATD) National Reform Network. ATD is a nonprofit network that helps community college students realize greater economic opportunity and achieve success through increased student retention, persistence, and completion rates in college. The ATD grant pays a portion of McLennan's

membership in the network and provides coaching assistance from community college leaders on how to identify problems, set priorities, and measure progress toward increasing student success.

ATD would be a perfect complement to the ongoing five-year Learning Environment Adaptability Project (LEAP) initiative implemented in 2012 as part of the college's SACSCOC Quality Enhancement Plan. The two-year-old LEAP initiative that emphasized quality orientation, emotional intelligence, and success coaching was beginning to show positive outcomes. However, some segments of the student

population at McLennan continued to struggle with retention and completion, and that is where ATD will help.

"Once you are an Achieving the Dream school, it signifies that you are trying to be a part of the national solution to the problem of students not achieving in college," former Trustee Randy Cox says of the program. "We are already doing a lot of these things to help students succeed. But it's good to be part of a concerted effort."

In 2014, Dr. Paul Illich, who had been at McLennan since 1997 as the college's head researcher and vice president of research, planning, and information technology, accepted the role of president of Southeast Community College in Lincoln, Nebraska. For 17 years, Illich had been the stimulus behind many of the college's boldest and most far-reaching initiatives, including strategic enrollment management, data-based decision making, and emerging markets concepts. Dr. Phil Rhodes, formerly senior director of institutional effectiveness at Houston Baptist University, joined McLennan's senior leadership team in the head research and institutional effectiveness role.



Dr. Paul Illich



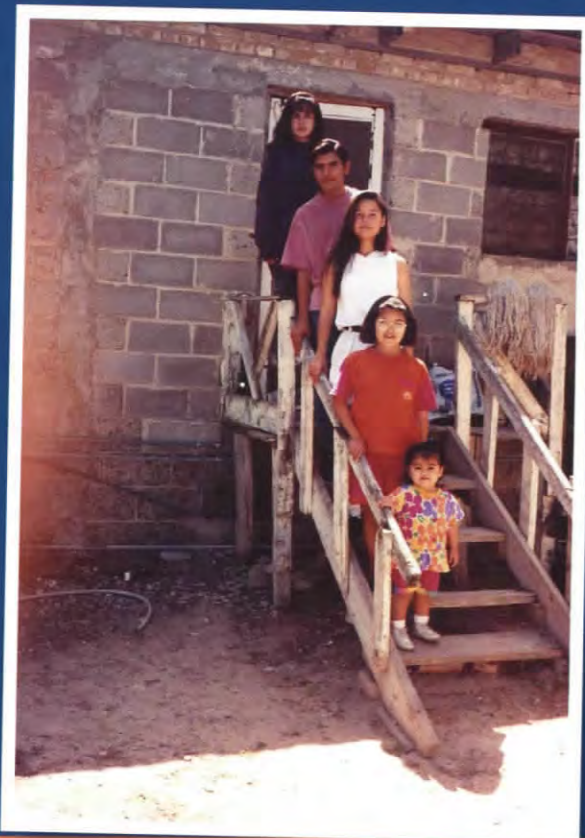
Dr. Phil Rhodes

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“They Believed in Me When I Did Not Believe in Myself”

Sandra Victorino. Migrant farm worker. MCC Honors Student. Changer of Worlds.

On any given day in Providence, Rhode Island, Latino women who suffer from mental illness also suffer the fallout from their condition: they are labeled, considered morally weak, and eventually shunned. Many who have experienced trauma, such as sexual assault or family violence, fear the cultural stigma and potential for retaliation, so they remain silent. Latinos and other minority populations are often the last to seek, and receive, help.



Such is the case until they meet Sandra Victorino, associate director of the Behavioral Outpatient Program at The Providence Center. For some reason she doesn't quite understand, the women open up to Sandra, and giving them a voice has become her life's work. Sandra knows what it is like to be labeled and segregated: during her formative years, she and her nomadic family followed the crop harvests as migrant farm workers. Such a rootless, labor-intensive existence left little time for school; the schools she attended (a dozen of them in five states) often housed her “type” in trailers separate from the regular students. The rest of the time, the family learned life lessons in the fields, harvesting cucumbers, sugar beets, asparagus, and cherries.

“I felt inferior,” Sandra says today about her upbringing. “Time and time again, I was told I would not amount to much since my parents had chosen this lifestyle for me.” Despite the obstacles, she was determined to learn far beyond the “cat” and “hat” spelling words that comprised much of her schoolwork. At home, her parents, Jorge and Sanjuana, emphasized learning for their five children, even under the difficult circumstances.

Fortunately for Sandra, at the time she turned 18 and was ready to begin college, her family was working in Central Texas. Nearby was McLennan Community College.



“I chose MCC because I was afraid to attend a large college and not make it,” she says. “MCC provided me the safety I was looking for at that time. It was not daunting.” Along with the welcoming atmosphere at MCC, Sandra found teachers who embraced her.

“My professors helped me learn my personal history and taught me to have pride in myself. They believed in me when I did not believe in myself.” Principal among those mentors was history professor Henry Apperson.

“Sandra’s achievement and testimony describe, to a significant degree, my body of work in life,” Henry says with pride. “She had every tool to be successful, but she didn’t see it in herself. With her background, she also had every reason to fail. But she chose success. She defied the odds. This is what we try to do for all students at MCC.”

So empowered was she that Sandra went on to earn a bachelor’s degree in psychology and Spanish and a master’s degree in community counseling from the University of Mary Hardin-Baylor, and a Certificate of Advanced Graduate Studies in Mental Health Counseling from Rhode Island

College. In 2012, the girl who once lacked confidence became a licensed mental health counselor for the State of Rhode Island, and today, she manages 25 licensed clinicians serving almost 2,300 clients.

In a recent email to her former professor, Sandra writes: “Thank you for teaching me how to be proud of being a migrant worker’s child and helping me believe I could also be part of the white-collared world. I hope I can one day give what you gave me to someone else.”

The giving continues: the self-acceptance and empathy that Sandra learned in the classroom at MCC now define her work at The Providence Center, where she provides a safe haven for Latino women who allow her into their shame-filled worlds. Sandra is creating the first Latino Intensive Outpatient program in Rhode Island, an initiative she believes will be transformative to the state of mental health care for Latinos in the region.

“MCC, and Henry Apperson in particular, gave me knowledge and challenged me to think outside the box,” Sandra says. “I finally believe I do have the power to make a difference in my community.”





Chapter 6

Transforming Lives and Communities

As McLennan Community College celebrates its 50th year of serving the community, a logical question begs an answer: How has the college transformed its community and its students, and what does the future hold? As for what McLennan has achieved, it depends on who is asked. First and foremost, since 1966, almost 30,000 students have accomplished that life-altering milestone of becoming a college graduate.

Among those graduates is Shannon (Spivey) Tiner, who attributes her success in life to her time at MCC: “My success at MCC influenced my overall character as a person. I credit this institution with where I am today,” she says.

As a China Spring High School student, Shannon’s main dream was to make the McLennan Dance Team. Following two highly successful seasons as an MCC dancer, she applied to the Honors College and the Presidential Scholars programs, stretching herself both personally and academically while pursuing her Associate Degree Nursing (RN) degree. Today, she works as an intensive care nurse at Baylor-Scott and White Hillcrest Hospital. “Without the help and dedication of Sandy Hinton and Dr. McKown, I don’t know where I’d be,” Shannon says. “Both of these women not only gifted me with the financial ability to get through school debt-free, but they also genuinely loved me and embraced the person I am. For this, I am forever grateful.”



From the beginning, training healthcare professionals has been a key part of McLennan’s mission.

Midway High School graduate Evgenia "Evi" Sinopidou says that attending MCC was one of the best decisions she has ever made. Through her involvement with the Presidential Scholars, Sinopidou was offered the opportunity to intern for Texas Sen. Brian Birdwell, an experience she says has opened her eyes to local and state issues and honed her interest in politics. She also traveled to Washington, D.C., as part of a political science class. "That trip was possibly

the most defining event of my academic career," she says. Stories like these are illustrative of the thousands of individual lives that have been transformed by this 50-year-old idea called McLennan. And, unlike many other colleges whose graduates take flight after commencement, those transformed lives frequently take root right in McLennan County, having a quiet, but seismic, impact on the fortune of the community that has supported the dream since 1965.

"These kinds of things don't happen at most community colleges, and I am lucky enough to attend the one where they do."

-Evi Sinopidou

Midway High School graduate and Presidential Scholar Evi Sinopidou, third from right, says that attending McLennan was one of the best decisions she has ever made.



Waco Mayor Malcolm Duncan Jr.

"MCC is a vital partner in this community," says Waco Mayor Malcolm Duncan Jr. "It has become more of a key partner not only because of the evolution of higher education, but because of the recognition that

it is critical for us to have a more educated workforce for our community to prosper. With the cost of higher education being what it is, the value is clearly in technical and community colleges."

McLennan County Judge Scott Felton, whose wife and three children all attended McLennan, says the economic impact of a college that teaches its own and keeps its own in the community is extraordinary. "If they attend MCC, then the University Center, or Baylor, and then settle down here with a good-paying job, and marry and raise their family here, the positive economic impact of that decision goes on for generations."



McLennan County Judge Scott Felton

Felton serves on the Waco-McLennan County Economic Development Board with Waco City Manager Dale Fisseler and businessman Bill Clifton. Together with the Waco Chamber of Commerce Economic Development team, the group works to attract and retain good-paying companies to the Waco area.

"Their first question is always logistics — whether McLennan County is the right place for them to locate. Well, we can't move," Felton says. "So then we look at what we can control, and that's the skill level and education of our workforce. That's what helps us close the deal. MCC is a huge part of helping us be successful in recruiting new businesses to this area. I couldn't be more proud to live in a community that has the educational resources we have."



McLennan's Corporate and Professional Training division has brought more than \$12 million in skills development grants to Waco from the Texas Workforce Commission.



Boosting the skill level of the existing workforce is another benefit McLennan brings to the economic development table. Since 1997, the college's corporate training division has brought in more than \$12 million in skills training grants from the Texas Workforce Commission to provide customized training to local employers. As a result, more than 14,000 Waco-area employees have gained career-enhancing skills, while the area's manufacturing, healthcare, transportation, and logistics sectors have strengthened their collective competitive edge.



Frank Graves

Frank Graves, dean of workforce and public service, says MCC provides lifelong learning opportunities for both young and adult learners through more than 100 workforce degrees and certificates as well as customized noncredit training. "Building a well-prepared workforce is at the heart of the college's mission," he says.

As for what the future holds for McLennan, it is clear that transforming lives will remain Job No. 1 for the college that

always has and always will focus on student success.

Trustee Bob Sheehy Jr., who hiked the rocky, tree-covered terrain of the early McLennan campus as a boy, says the college will continue to thrive because of the commitment of leaders who are focused on what the college can do for the community and its residents. He believes the demand for an MCC education will continue to be strong for the next 10 years because there continually will be people who need to train and retrain for an ever-changing workforce.

McKown agrees. "I want to make sure we are educating students for careers where there are jobs. I don't want to train them for jobs that aren't there. And I want to help them transfer and be able to do so without any debt. That way, they have a better chance to be successful in life."

Trustee K. Paul Holt says, "Every single commencement is an absolute joy. It is an almost childlike joy, because this is what we are about — seeing the students cross the stage and knowing some of them, knowing their parents, knowing that many are the first in their family to graduate from

college. At that moment, they have hit a big milestone in their life. And they are headed for something else — something even bigger — because they made this milestone. That's what it's all about.

"For the board, the focus is not whether we have beautiful buildings," Holt says. "Yes, we built these good buildings, some of which are beautiful, a couple of which are pretty simple. But the focus is still on the students. That's where it should be and where it always has been. It's where it always needs to be. And that contributes to the success of McLennan."

Like Dr. Ball and the planners in 1969 who followed the lead of the students before deciding where to pour the sidewalks, today's visionary leaders like Holt continue

to take their cues from their most important guides:

"You can't fail when you keep your eyes on what's best for the students. You cannot fail."



Trustee K. Paul Holt, pictured here with graduate Meagan Hughes, says the focus on students contributes to the success of McLennan Community College.



The Foundation for Success



From his first interview for the MCC presidency in 1987, Dennis Michaelis was charged with building a prosperous fundraising arm for the college. Fortunately, he had some experience with this concept that was gaining traction at community colleges throughout the country.

“One thing I was hesitant about at MCC was that Baylor was here and I was sure there was no way we were going to be able to raise any money,” Michaelis admits today. “But I was wrong. Because of Baylor, people in Waco see philanthropic giving as a positive thing. It’s an environment where people are expected to give.” In 2001, Michaelis hired local CPA and community volunteer Harry Harelik as executive director of the MCC Foundation to follow in the founding footsteps of prior directors Buzz Sawyer and Danny Uptmore. Harelik’s deep roots in the community and his tireless work on numerous boards and fundraising initiatives, along with a passion for the mission of community colleges, positioned him to take the Foundation to new heights.



Executive Director Harry Harelik

“The Foundation has become a critical component of how we are able to support students and employees,” President Johnette McKown says today.

When he arrived on campus, Harelik’s goal was to grow the Foundation to \$10 million. Today, the endowment is almost \$16 million. It has awarded more than \$4 million in scholarships to 4,000 students and has returned more than \$2.4 million to the college for

capital improvements. In total, the last decade has seen more than \$19 million in gifts to the MCC Foundation; each one a financial achievement celebrated by the college.

“There is the adage that four-year colleges depend on alumni and two-year colleges depend on the community,” Harelik says. “We have been so blessed, truly, by a very supportive, giving community. We have a great story to tell, and most people in this community have been touched by the college in some way.”



In the fall of 2006, that community reach was revealed through the actions of one unpretentious woman named Lucille Saunders. Her father had invented the popular Big Red soft drink in Waco in 1937. Saunders, heir to the family wealth, had quietly lived for years in the Waco community, observing the goings on with a sharp eye for excellence. Her gift of \$250,000 in 2006 assured that 20 nursing students per year could pursue their degrees. Later, in 2014, following large gifts from the Meadows Foundation, Jim and Nell Hawkins, and others, the college received a record-shattering gift of \$1.8 million from the estate of Iris Jeffress, whose husband, Victor, had once served as MCC’s library director.



Victor Jeffress

With more than \$6 million in major gifts under his belt, Harelik still says that the Rapoport First Generation Scholarship program has been the Foundation’s most successful achievement.

“I feel like maybe we made a little difference in our little corner of the world that wouldn’t have otherwise happened,” Harelik says of the program that provides annual funding for a select group of students who are the first in their family to attend college.



Bernard Rapoport

So groundbreaking was the First Generation program that it attracted the support of several organizations, most notably TG Benefits of Round Rock and the Waco-based Rapoport Foundation, which in 2010 gave the program a \$1 million endowed gift to sustain the program in perpetuity.

By the late 2000s, with improvements transforming campus facilities and extraordinary growth occurring in scholarships, it would be hard to believe that any corner of the McLennan campus was less than top-rate. The ironic truth was that inside the college’s richly acclaimed music and theatre programs were gap-toothed practice pianos that dated back to the college’s startup. Despite many years of Foundation galas that focused support on the arts, the vast need for instruments remained. In 2009, the MCC Foundation board voted to raise just under \$1 million to purchase 27 new Steinway pianos and endow a permanent maintenance fund. It was the boldest fundraising effort to date for the college, but the purchase earned MCC the distinction of being the 111th All-Steinway School in the world.

“Steinway pianos represent perfection of musical quality and appreciation in value,” says Visual and Performing Arts Director Rob Page. “Those qualities mirror our values in the arts at MCC. We hope that our students find their education appreciating in value as they move forward in their careers in the arts.” Thanks to a tremendous outpouring of support, the Steinway campaign reached its goal in under four years. Fittingly, two of McLennan’s Steinway concert grand pianos will be at center stage for the college’s 50th Anniversary Gala in 2016.

The MCC Foundation’s reach has extended beyond just scholarships and capital projects. In 2008, it established the Highlander Alumni Association under the leadership of then-Associate Director Kim Patterson to help link the college with its vast network of alumni and friends.



“The alumni network has been significant in what we have done this decade,” Harelik says. “Giving former students the chance to stay in touch with McLennan is important — and at some point that will pay dividends for the college.” Today, the association has more than 4,000 members representing 31 states and five foreign countries.

“My best days are knowing about students or hearing from students where this college has made a difference,” Harelik says. “That’s an amazing thing, transforming those lives—not only for the individual and their family, but also for the community.”

2015 50th Anniversary Hall of Fame Honorees

Alumni: Dr. Timothy Bittenbinder, Jay Buhner, Bill Goss, Landon Hengst, Vinnie Johnson, Judge Vicki Menard, and Dr. Ricardo Rodriguez

Community Supporters: Jim Hawkins, Paul Marable Jr. (posthumous), Ray Perry, Bernard Rapoport (posthumous), Clifton Robinson, and Murray Watson Jr.

Administration: Dr. Wilbur Ball, Dr. Dennis Michaelis, Dr. Johnette McKown, and Alvin Pollard Sr.

Faculty: Henry Apperson, Rick Butler, Vince Clark, Paul Holder, Jerry MacLaughlin, Nancy Ray-Mitchell, Dr. Ruth Pitts, and Martie Sauter

Staff: Fay Gutierrez, Dr. Marylea Henderson, and Sandy Hinton



McLennan Athletics: Building a Legacy

In the beginning, there was never a question that intercollegiate athletics would be part of life at McLennan. Former President Ball approached the idea of the college serving the entire community with an almost religious fervor. Fortunately, that fervor included a comprehensive athletics program that would not only stimulate school spirit but also provide opportunity for young athletes to hone their athletic and academic skills. Former Trustee Randy Cox says that the fine reputation of McLennan Athletics helps the college be known for excellence all over the state and nation. The evidence over the last decade is clear:

Since 2005, Highlanders basketball has lost only 18 games at home. The team has won five conference championships, appeared in every

regional tournament since 2002, and has had two All-American players. In 2016, the team qualified for the NJCAA Division I national tournament for the first time since 1998.

Highlassies basketball has appeared in seven regional tournaments, won one conference championship, and had two All-American players.

The Highlanders baseball team, which won the national championship in 1983 under Head Coach Rick Butler, has sent dozens of players to the pro ranks. In 2015, second-year Head Coach Mitch Thompson took the team back to the national championship for the first time since 1983 and brought home the runner-up trophy. The program has had three All-American players.

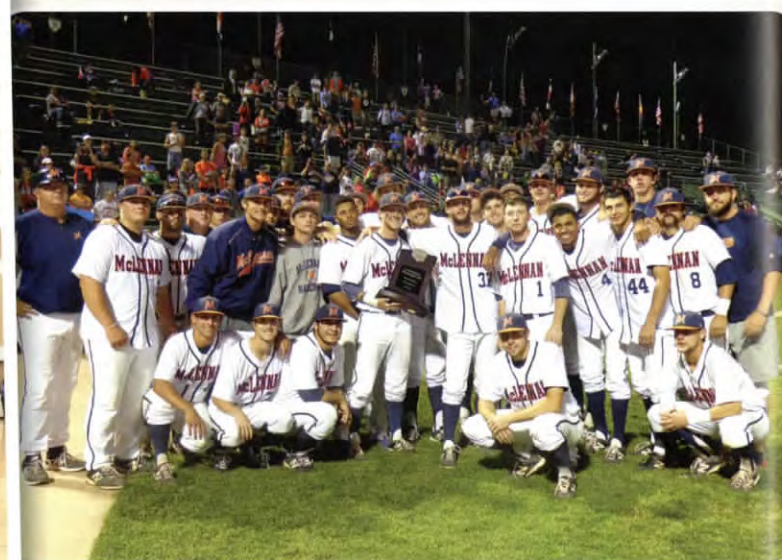
Highlassies softball made national tournament appearances in 2007, 2008, and 2011, and one player has been named an All-American.

Men's golf won two national championships in 2009 and 2010 under the leadership of Head Coach Vince Clark. In the last 10 years, the program has had 14 players named All-Americans. Clark was inducted into the NJCAA Men's Golf Coaches Association Hall of Fame in 2016.



By far, the most prolific competitor has been the McLennan Dance Company, which has been under the leadership of Director Sandy Hinton since its inception in 1975. The team won National Dance Alliance (NDA) national championships in 2009, 2010, 2011, and 2012. Twenty-one McLennan dancers have been named All-Americans.

"Athletics at McLennan plays a big part in who we are," says Cox. "It brings a cohort of students together and that's an important part of McLennan feeling like family. And, it is a venue for our local kids to stay here in Waco for college and not go off to other area colleges. It gives them another reason to choose McLennan and be successful."



Women's golf won the national championship in 2007 under Head Coach Stan Mitchell. The program has had 27 players named All-Americans in the last decade.



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*McLennan Community College
Alma Mater*

*High above still Bosque waters
We with reverence sing to thee.
Of our love and our devotion
Of our pride and loyalty.*

*Long may McLennan stand
Honor is her due.
May a grateful generation
To her name be true.*

*Hear us now O' Alma Mater
As we proudly sing to thee,
Take from us our hearts' devotion
Hail to M.C.C.*

-by Robert S. Page

DEWIS F. MICHAELIS ACADEMY CENTER





When a handful of community visionaries assembled to talk about the idea of forming a community college in Waco in the early 1960s, they could not have dreamed how beautifully their story would turn out. As McLennan Community College marks 50 years of growth and success, we celebrate the thousands of lives that have been transformed and the community that is undoubtedly a better place for those provident efforts. Told by a longtime employee of the college who has witnessed much of recent progress, the story of “Bricks and Mortarboards” revisits the beginnings of the college and then walks through the exciting events of the past decade, events that have truly transformed MCC into a shining model of learning for the 21st century. This book also shares the extraordinary stories of five McLennan alumni who came from unlikely backgrounds but who, thanks to their experience at MCC, went on to make their mark on the world in some significant way. The hope is that their stories, and this account of how “Your Opportunity College” came to be the fine institution it is today, provide inspiration for future generations of Highlanders.



Kim Patterson began her career with McLennan Community College in 1995 as a part-time writer in the Public Information Office. In 1999, Dr. Dennis Michaelis asked her to serve as the college's director of community relations and marketing, a position she held for many years before transitioning to the MCC Foundation, where she contributed to several major fundraising initiatives and established the Highlander Alumni Association. She currently serves as associate director of the McLennan University Center.

Patterson is a graduate of Baylor University with degrees in journalism and marketing, and she is completing a master's degree in management and leadership from Tarleton State University. In her 30-year career in the Waco area, Patterson has successfully led a wide variety of institutional and community initiatives, employing media relations, communications management, strategic branding, and marketing expertise. She is the recipient of numerous local, regional, and national awards for marketing and communications and has served in a voluntary capacity for dozens of civic causes. She and her husband, Frank Patterson, have two grown children: Stephen, a financial analyst, and Kate, a student at Baylor Law School. Her first book, “Currents of the Brazos: An Illustrated History of Brazos Electric Power Cooperative,” was published in 1991.