defining moments

JOHN TYLER COMMUNITY COLLEGE
1967 - 2007
Dear Friends,

In 2005, John Tyler Community College adopted a new College slogan, “Defining your Future.” Like most things under the sun, the slogan was really not so new after all; it was a shortened version of a tagline the College used for many years, “Preserving the Past, Defining the Future.” While the original slogan was a bit long, it does capture what I hope we are able to do every day at John Tyler. Our past is a proud one – full of people who helped make this college the strong and vital institution it is today. What we have all accomplished together over the last forty years is a past we can be proud to preserve.

Education is, of course, always about the future. The work we do every day makes our community’s future brighter, economically richer, and more culturally diverse. As John Tyler Community College celebrates its first 40 years, I am pleased to dedicate this publication to everyone who helped shape the College’s exciting present and to those of you who are shaping tomorrow’s bright future.

Sincerely,

Dr. Marshall W. Smith
President, John Tyler Community College
The interesting thing about trying to capture the history of something as complex and extensive as a community college is that memories often blur and collide. There are piles of photos, corners of bright minds, and countless bookshelves of memorabilia to sort through when we try to discover all that we have accomplished over the last 40 years at John Tyler Community College. But, there are those moments in our rearview mirror that are in fact, “larger than they seem.” These are the memories of a fresh, young faculty and eager students who, in 1967, set the tone for years to come. These are the memories of creative risks and strategic challenges taken over the years, which remind us that although our mission is complex and sometimes daunting, what we do is vitally important to our students and to our community. These are the people who have filled the College with life and energy over the last forty years. These are the moments that make us who we are. These are our defining moments.
During the 1964 session, the General Assembly of Virginia passed legislation providing for the establishment of two-year technical colleges in the Commonwealth. The plan called for a partnership between the Commonwealth and local cities and counties. The new legislation prompted the Appomattox Basin Industrial Development Corporation, a group of young men in Hopewell who had already established Hopewell College, to re-examine their operations. Since the community already had a two-year college in Richard Bland, the group decided the community could best benefit from a technical college. Accordingly, they began to work in partnership with other local leaders to study the region’s needs and raise funds for the College. Early on, it was decided that the College would be named John Tyler Technical College after the tenth president of the United States, who was a native of the College’s service region. His home, Sherwood Forest (left), is located in Charles City. But, the name John Tyler Technical College would not last long. In a matter of months, legislation would expand the mission of all two-year colleges in Virginia, making them community colleges.
John Tyler Community College’s Board of Directors chose the young Dr. Thomas Hatfield (pictured at right in photo) as the College’s first president. The 31-year-old from Texas brought with him a sense of idealism and a youthful energy that he used to promote John Tyler to various constituencies in the College’s service area. “We were young people in a new institution,” says Hatfield. “For many people it was their first time teaching at a college, and they wanted to do well and be thought well of. We all were concerned about how well we would do. We wanted to get it right. Not only was it a new institution and you’re new to the job yourself, but community colleges were an innovation. They were utterly new in Virginia. There had never been anything like them - the notion of an open door college that said, ‘You all come and study anything you want to study. We have it for you.’ If you wanted to come and study for a vocational skill or technical skill or college transfer or art, we can do that for a very low price.”

Hatfield and a handful of other early employees of the College, including Melba Scherer, reported to work each morning at this single-story brick house on Old Hundred Road in Chester. Hatfield’s office was in a bedroom. The living room was filled with secretaries replying to more than 4,000 inquires from prospective students.
On Wednesday, October 4, 1967, Governor Mills E. Godwin dedicated John Tyler Community College at a 2:30 p.m. ceremony. Approximately 1,000 people were invited to the celebration, which also included the unveiling of a portrait of Harold T. Goyne, who donated the College’s original 100 acres of land between Interstate 95 and Route 301, and a speech by Eugene Sydnor, chair of the State Board of Community Colleges (left). John Tyler was the first community college to be built from the ground up in Virginia, and the dedication ceremony was a momentous occasion well attended by members of the local community who would now have access to the College’s library and many continuing education programs. The following Monday, 1,208 enrolled students would make history as the first class to enter John Tyler Community College.
Margaret L. Hopkins, who served as the College’s first coordinator of library services, came to John Tyler from Iran. When she first started at the College, Hopkins had little more than a small desk in the house on Old Hundred Road and boxes of books stacked in the closet. When Hopkins was finally able to move into the library facility on campus in the weeks before the College’s dedication, she still had little more than four bare walls. Hopkins and her assistant David May borrowed extra shelving from the science department until shelves could be ordered for the library. On the College’s opening day, the library still had no tables or chairs, but the staff simply explained the situation to students and encouraged them to begin to explore the book collection. “I believe a college library that is only used for décor is expensive,” said Hopkins in a 1967 newspaper article. “A community college cannot afford that luxury.”
The original campus of John Tyler Community College was situated in Chesterfield County, near Route 10 in Chester. The 100 acres of trees, bushes and flowers surrounding the buildings - lovingly cared for by R.W. Haw, Jr. and others from the building and grounds staff - provided “a lovely park-like setting” for learning. The campus had three buildings then: Bird, Goyne and Godwin halls. The facilities at the time featured a student lounge, a bookstore, and a greenhouse. Behind Goyne Hall, bright plastic chairs lined the walkways, and students often gathered around the nearby fountain and moat that meandered through campus. Pranksters were known to release fish in the moat, which was eventually overtaken with algae and had to be filled in. Even in the late 1960s, space was tight at the College. Faculty offices were in large open areas often referred to as “bullpens” by faculty members, and students were already making known their desire for a larger library, a gymnasium and more parking spaces.
On July 1, 1966, two weeks after construction began on what was originally to be John Tyler Technical College, the General Assembly of Virginia passed legislation that expanded the purposes of all planned two-year colleges in Virginia. The Commonwealth’s two-year colleges would offer not only occupational-technical education, but also adult education and freshman- and sophomore-level courses in arts and sciences that would prepare students to transfer into baccalaureate programs. The expanded institutions would be “community colleges,” and they would aim to serve many community needs. With tuition at just $45 for 12 or more credit hours per quarter, arts and sciences classes proved popular with traditional-age college students.
Because students had many different options for their futures, the College employed counselors to help guide students with class selection, future goals and the challenges of college life. Carole Royall came to the College as a young member of the counseling department, and she would remain at the College for more than 30 years. She was well-known for her involvement in college life and her skill in counseling.
Because full-time students who enrolled in 12 or more credit hours paid a flat rate of $45 per quarter, many students enrolled in a full schedule of classes and stayed on campus the majority of the day. There were few choices for lunch or entertainment beyond the campus, so the College provided students with a small cafeteria and a student lounge filled with ping pong and pool tables, as well as space to eat and study. The lounge was an active scene in those days. It was often filled with students, faculty and staff during the day, and in the evenings, the College used the space to host dances, concerts and receptions.

Being on campus all day also meant that students had plenty of time for extracurricular activities, including intramural sports, *The Tyleration* student newspaper, and the folk music club. A student government association was also formed. The SGA took an active interest in events on campus – parking was always a hot-button issue – as well as local politics, the College administration, and faculty appointments. At the time, students with various political interests marched in the hallways, and faculty members, most notably Bob Ward, an assistant professor of history, often publicly voiced their political views or engaged each other in political debates.
Registration was done in person in the late 1960s, and the process often involved waiting in long lines, like this one in January 1968. Surprisingly, many students did not complain about the process, simply saying to reporters that students expect registration to be an all-day event.
Elba Scherer was a true original at the College. On March 1, 1967, Scherer started as the president’s secretary, and she would remain on the job for the next 30 years. In that time, Scherer worked for a total of twelve College presidents – six full-time permanent presidents and six short-term acting presidents. To mark Scherer’s retirement, the Richmond Times-Dispatch ran a story entitled “John Tyler’s Loss” in July 1997. The article highlighted Scherer’s irreplaceable institutional knowledge and her sharp wit. While on the job, Scherer was known to help with everything from College Board minutes to appointments and personnel matters, all of which she handled with the utmost discretion.
Though many of the faculty and staff at the young College were young themselves, the institution did have the benefit of having several older faculty members who came to Virginia from other states with existing community college systems. In a 1967 newspaper article, Dr. Thomas Hatfield reported that “most of the 35 faculty members offered contracts so far” came from the North Carolina system. Others, like George L. Courly, an assistant professor of history (left), came from New York. With the help of these more experienced faculty members, younger faculty and staff and the new student body began to instill tradition at the College. Early on, a very pale blue and burgundy were chosen for the College colors, and members of student government designed a ring for John Tyler Community College graduates.

Many of the new traditions were visible on June 10, 1969 when the College held its first graduation exercises. Dr. Dana B. Hamel, the founding chancellor of the Virginia Community College System, addressed graduates who earned associate in applied sciences degrees in accounting, data processing technology programming, electronic technology, nursing and secretarial science. Also participating in the ceremony were students who earned certificates for data processing key punch operator, data processing – unit records, machine operator, and welding. In total, 61 students graduated that day in front of Goyne Hall.
On December 14, 1969, Dr. Thomas Hatfield called a College assembly to announce his resignation; he had accepted a post-doctoral fellowship at UCLA. Under Hatfield’s leadership, John Tyler Community College had become accredited by the Southern Association of Colleges and Schools, and the College was growing both in enrollment and public awareness. Dr. W. Marshall Denison joined the College administration in January 1970 as the institution’s second president. Unfortunately, his tenure at the College was tragically short. The man called a “fine, young, intelligent and dedicated educator and administrator” by the College Board died of Hodgkin’s disease at the age of 35, just seven months after accepting the John Tyler post. During his brief time at the College, Denison was an outspoken proponent of student activities. In 1981, the Student Government Association paid tribute to that memory by establishing the Marshall Denison Society to recognize individuals who have made extraordinary contributions to the student activities program.
Dr. James R. Walpole became the College’s third president in the years when it seemed that “every time you blinked your eyes we had a new president,” says math faculty member Joe Jordan, who has been with the College since January 1968. “Walpole was military and strict in his way,” says Brian Lonon, another longtime math faculty member who came to the College in September 1968. “He insisted we would have standards, and he helped us establish ourselves.” Walpole came to the College in January 1971 and was the longest standing president when he resigned to accept a teaching position at Piedmont Virginia Community College in July 1974. Under Walpole’s guidance, the College community finalized a master plan for new construction and equipment and undertook a self-study to determine areas of improvement.
Richard E. “Dick” Fox (pictured at right in photo) originally came to the College in 1967 as an instructional aids technician, but by 1970, his responsibilities had expanded to include public relations. With his background in fine arts, Fox became the College’s first graphics illustrator, creating the catalog and other pieces to promote the College. Fox also took photos, many of which are in this publication, filmed clips to promote the College, and taught classes in calligraphy.
In a January 1971 edition of the student newspaper, *The Tyleration*, President James Walpole wrote, “Until my arrival here, I had known John Tyler Community College mainly by its widespread reputation for first-rate people – people filled with creative ideas and eagerness to try them. Tyler sounded like one of those places where it would be fun to come to work in the morning – and so it has proved to be. Its people, then, were what attracted me to Tyler, and its people, in the short time I have been here, have already convinced me that the future of our school is one of ever-growing opportunity.” Some of the people who have made that statement true throughout John Tyler Community College’s existence include: Dr. Bob Tutton, Dr. John Eckman, Dr. L. Ray Drinkwater, William Stone, David P. Jones and R.W. Haw, Jr.
In a 2006 interview, Vernon Gwaltney, a math faculty member at the College since 1969, said “Math hasn’t changed much since 1969,” and for many years the same was true of the Math Department. Gwaltney, Ed Jordan, Joe Jordan (left) and Brian Lonon were permanent fixtures at the College from the late 1960s until Ed, an original member of faculty, passed away in 2003. Joe Jordan, Gwaltney and Lonon all remain on the faculty, and they are still close friends and colleagues. “The four of us never had an argument we couldn’t resolve within ourselves,” says Joe Jordan. “…For the most part, I think that is true of the College. We may disagree with each other, but we find a way. It’s been a very workable faculty over the years.”
Intramural sports and physical education were an important part of college life at John Tyler in the 1970s. *The Tyleration* regularly published scores from intramural games, and coaches Gene Evans and Steve Fritton (left) were active and popular members of the College community. Students, faculty and staff even participated in annual “Play Days” with other community colleges; in 1973, representatives of students, staff and faculty at John Tyler traveled to Thomas Nelson Community College in Hampton to compete in basketball, bowling, tennis, horseshoes, ping pong, pool, golf and softball. That year, John Tyler won the overall trophy and brought it home to the College’s trophy case.
1975 marked a major milestone for the College, as construction was completed on an extension of the engineering technology laboratories and classrooms in Godwin Hall and the addition of Moyar Hall. Moyar, a two-story “learning resources” building, housed a library, audio-visual facilities, classrooms, laboratories and student services administrative offices. The two-year construction project approximately doubled the facilities at the College. 1975 marked another change for the College as Dr. John W. Lavery was announced as the College’s fourth president.
The College’s original technical programs, including welding, continued to flourish in the 1970s as John Tyler promoted itself as a tool for a better trained workforce and an economic engine in its service area. Faculty members, local board representatives, and administrators collaborated with local businesses to ensure that graduates of the College’s technical programs had plenty of hands-on training to prepare them for immediate employment in the area.
The original purpose statement of John Tyler Community College stated that the College is “dedicated to the belief that each individual should be given a continuing opportunity for the development of his skills and knowledge along with an opportunity to increase his awareness of his role and responsibilities in society.” Accordingly, when the College was approached about offering off-campus business degree programs at the Federal Correctional Institution in Petersburg in the mid-1970s, Assistant Professor of Business Management Arthur H. Friedman took on the project. The program began in September 1975, and by May 1978, two groups of men had completed the program and earned their associate degrees. In the same time period, three groups of men had earned certificates. As seen here, the College conducted a graduation exercise for each class at the correctional institution.
Supported by the counseling and continuing education departments, the Center for Women’s Opportunities opened at the College in 1976. Its goal was to offer workshops, seminars, counseling services and general support to women re-entering college to pursue career goals. Gretchen Naff, a counselor at the College, and Margo Matarese, a member of the English faculty, often staffed the center.
In January 1978, the College debuted a new closed circuit TV program, *The Tyler Report*. The weekly program was broadcast on monitors in C-19 and Moyar Hall and featured anchormen Jeb Mann and Ben Hamlin (pictured at right in photo). Hamlin would go on to have a bright career in broadcasting in Richmond. In 1980, he went to work for NBC12 as a sports reporter, and since 1986, Hamlin has served as the station’s sports director. Although the College’s broadcasting program was just in its early stages when *The Tyler Report* began production, there were many students, faculty and staff willing to do all the writing, editing, directing, photography, artwork and camerawork necessary to make the weekly television program a success. One especially popular on-the-spot report in February 1978 featured a sweat-suit-clad Hamlin “pumping iron” in the Universal Gym while he interviewed coach Steve Fritton about an upcoming weight-lifting contest.
Dr. Freddie W. Nicholas, Sr. was announced as the College’s fifth president effective September 15, 1979, and the decade that followed would be marked with a kind of stability the College had never experienced before. When Nicholas assumed the presidency, the College was just starting its 13th year, and already, five men had served as president. Nicholas would remain at the College until his retirement on June 30, 1990, but his legacy would live on at the institution in many ways.
In 1980, the College opened the Fort Lee Outreach Center to serve both active-duty military and their family members on base. Assistant Coordinator of Off-Campus Centers John Heslin (pictured at right in photo above) worked at the site counseling prospective students. Often, the College offered classes such as accounting, business, data processing, English, and psychology at the base. The College would remain on-site at Fort Lee until 2002, when budget cuts would necessitate the difficult decision to close the outreach center. In 2006, the College began re-establishing its on-site presence at Fort Lee in response to base realignments, which greatly increased the need for educational opportunities on base.
In 1982, the College introduced a new degree – the Associate of Applied Science Degree in Business Management with a minor in Beverage Marketing. The Beverage Marketing Program, which was developed through major support from the beverage industry in the area, was the only college-level degree program of its kind in the United States. In their first year of the program, students studied accounting, retail management, and economics. In the second year, they participated in more specialized classes such as Production and Use of Beer, Sales Promotion, and Principles of Display.
The College’s “occupational-technical curriculums” were extremely popular and prosperous in the 1980s. The College had programs in everything from automotive diagnosis and tune-up to computer information systems, commercial banking, machine shop operations, and public purchasing and materials management. The number of technical programs grew in great numbers in the 1980s as the College strengthened ties with local business and industry and expanded its offerings to include not only associate degrees and certificates, but also career studies certificates.
As the College continued to grow in size, so did the number of support staff necessary to keep operations running smoothly. Over the years, facilities staff at the College have provided key services, including grounds-keeping, housekeeping, mail delivery, and shipping and receiving. Administrative Data Processing (ADP), which would update its name to Information Technology Services Center (ITSE) in the early 1990s, maintains the College’s computers, telephones and other electronic equipment. Dollie Balenga, or “Mrs. B” as she was sometimes referred to in *The Tyleration*, managed the campus bookstore for many years. Since opening, the bookstore has sold books and supplies, as well as John Tyler Community College merchandise to students, faculty and staff.
My favorite memories from John Tyler are all about the different people I’ve worked with and the friendships we’ve formed. Between faculty and staff, there are so many caring people here. It is nice to be in the party with that group,” say Joy James, who has worked in various positions at the College since 1986. Social events throughout the years, including family days, international food festivals and spring flings, have fostered that close camaraderie between faculty and staff.
Nursing has always been a popular degree program at the College, and graduates of the program have consistently done well on national licensing exams. The Nursing Program, like many other technical and professional programs at the College, works to place students in situations that closely simulate working environments. In the late 1980s that meant training student nurses to use an EKG machine (left).
What makes me most proud,” says Dr. Freddie Nicholas, “is the people – and I’m saying this sincerely – that I was able to bring to the College during my eleven years as president. People like Tim Brown (above left), who was a stabilizing force in our recordkeeping and financing, and Dr. Melton Jones (above). Dr. Jones came to the College with a bubbling personality and a willingness to listen to faculty…There are just a lot of good people that I was able to employ while I was there who were very, very effective and who stayed with the College for a long time.”
Because they were always in close proximity to each other on campus, faculty and staff at the College got to know each other very well over the years. Franklin W. Thornton, Jr. (left), a funeral services faculty member, was known not only for his skill in the classroom, but also for his intense interest in Japanese culture and the plastic bag collection in his bottom desk drawer. Ed Jordan, an original member of the math faculty, grew beautiful day lilies. William Stone, who was at one time the College’s coordinator of public relations, was a beekeeper.
In 1980, the College began to expand its offerings into the Midlothian area of Chesterfield County. The College’s original outreach office was in the Sycamore Square Shopping Center. Registration and testing took place at the office, but classes were held at schools, libraries, churches and community centers in the area. In 1984, Chesterfield County gave permission for the College to occupy Watkins Annex, an unused elementary school that had been vacant for a number of years. When College faculty and staff, like Margo Matarese, assistant professor of English and journalism, arrived at the school, most of the classrooms were vacant, but there were traces of the building’s previous life, including children’s drawings on the chalk boards. The building was also known for its crumbling ceiling tiles and snakes.
John Tyler made another ground-breaking move in 1988 by becoming the first two-year college in Virginia to establish an alumni association. The majority of the leadership of the association were not only alumni of the College, but also faculty and staff members. The group held its first meeting in January, and by May, it had organized a spring fling event. The spring fling would become an annual occasion. English Professor Dan Dalton was a fixture at the grill, serving up hot dogs and hamburgers, and the whole college community competed to test their skill in events like tricycle races, balloon tosses, and sack races.
On December 3, 1988, the John Tyler Community College Alumni Association and the Student Government Association jointly sponsored their first major function – the Poinsettia Ball. That night, faculty, staff, students and alumni filled the student lounge and danced to live music by Casper. “I made it my business to attend student functions,” says Dr. Freddie Nicholas. “My wife and I attended functions and participated….We didn’t just go to sit on the bench to cheer. If they were dancing, we danced and just always had a good time….My undergraduate degree was from VSU here in Petersburg, so I had kind of grown up with that esprit de corps where everybody participated.” Larry Rubes, Deborah Campbell and Dr. Carolyn Mosby all joined Nicholas on the dance floor that night. Just nine days later the lounge would be gone.
The morning of December 12, 1988 lingers in the minds of many of the College family. That morning, as they began their days, many of John Tyler’s faculty and staff learned that the College was ablaze. “I woke up to come to work, and it was on the news….They said, ‘John Tyler is burning,’” remembers Johnnie Humphrey, a faculty member since 1971. “I just put my raincoat on over my nightgown and came to the College. They wouldn’t let us come on campus, so I just walked over. I had to know where the fire was. About half the faculty were standing out in the field together that morning.” The fire would burn for many hours in the icy darkness, eventually consuming the majority of Bird Hall and melting the building’s iron girders. All in all, the College would lose 14 classrooms, 10 administrative and faculty offices, the student lounge, the bookstore and the reprographics department.
Dr. Freddie Nicholas, along with several members of his staff, stayed on the campus for two days while firefighters continued to fight hot spots from the fire. Up to a week later, as crews worked to demolish what was left of Bird Hall and repair Godwin Hall, small fires would be found. “Psychologically I felt a deep responsibility to just stay there and see what was going to happen,” says Nicholas. “Finally after two days, they’d gotten it under control. It was just devastating. But it all was a blessing in disguise – out of that came our new student services building.”
In many ways, the tragedy of the fire strengthened the College community. The blaze struck just one week before final exams, and through tireless efforts, exams were held as scheduled. “We began that afternoon [the afternoon of December 12] to take steps to recover,” remembers Dr. Ray Drinkwater. “We held exams as scheduled. We opened the winter quarter – one week and only one week – late. We had 20 some trailers on campus in a matter of weeks – ready to go, operational….I remember walking up and down the halls, particularly in Bird Hall. It was dark, and there were four or five inches of water. I walked those halls so often I actually lost my voice; there was so much smoke. But, I think the way the College came together and acknowledged the crisis was remarkable. When I was with Dr. Nicholas at that time, there was never any doubt that we would do anything but open for business as usual. And we did. I think that is a testament to his leadership and the people who were working at the institution at the time.”
The John Tyler Community College Foundation was incorporated in 1967 to raise funds to create academic programs, renovate and modernize labs, purchase equipment, provide scholarships for students, and enhance professional development opportunities for faculty and staff. The Foundation, under the leadership of College staff and faculty, as well as community and business leaders, experienced renewed growth in the 1980s. For many years, as a gesture of thanks, the Foundation held an appreciation dinner for donors who supported student scholarships. At the dinners, donors were seated with the students who benefited from their generosity and the faculty members who recommended the students for scholarships.
In 1988, Watkins Annex became unavailable for classes, and the College administrators began to look for alternative space for classes in the Midlothian area. They found it in the Featherstone Professional Center off Huguenot Road, where classes would be held for the next 12 years. In fact, the Featherstone location proved so popular with students that the College rented all available space at the site. In 1991, when the Featherstone site became larger than ten other campuses in the Virginia Community College System, the College applied to have the site designated as an official campus. When the site was given campus status, it was becoming increasingly clear that a permanent campus was needed in the Midlothian area.
John Tyler’s Business, Industry and Government Services (BIGS) Center was formed in 1991 to offer workforce development services to local business, industry and government. BIGS employees worked with businesses to create customized workforce training. The group also administered workforce assessments and offered non-credit business-related classes. In the mid-1990s, BIGS sponsored Virginia Works, an annual conference on Virginia’s workforce (far left). In 2003, BIGS joined forces with J. Sargeant Reynolds Community College’s workforce development group to create a new entity, the Community College Workforce Alliance, a single source for workforce development in the Richmond metropolitan area. Ron Laux (left), who led BIGS throughout its existence, oversaw the transition and became vice president of the Community College Workforce Alliance. In July 2007, Laux will retire after 16 years of service to John Tyler and CCWA.
As the College prepared to celebrate its 25th anniversary in 1992, enrollment was four times as high as it was in 1967. Instead of offering just 24 programs of study, the College had 16 degree programs, 7 certificate programs, and 22 career studies certificate programs. In just 25 years, the College had served over 200,000 people – 11,000 of them in the 1991-92 academic year. For that reason, registering for classes at the College still required standing in sometimes lengthy lines.
As a part of its 25th anniversary celebration, the College awarded medallions of merit to Homer Eliades (left), one of the original members of the John Tyler Community College Board, and Dr. Dana B. Hamel (right), the founding chancellor of the Virginia Community College System, at the 1992 commencement ceremony. Dr. Marshall W. Smith (center), who became president of the College on September 1, 1990, presented the medals. Each year, commencement holds special moments for both graduates and faculty. Here, John Tucker, a faculty member at the College since 1969, carries the mace.
Commencements at the College are always momentous occasions. In the 1990s, the College was proud to see one of its own, Rena Mallory, graduate with honors with an associate of applied science, information processing degree. In 1992, many employees who were also graduates of the College represented their graduating class in a special 25th anniversary celebration. As a part of commencement each year, members of Phi Theta Kappa, a two-year honor society, wear special regalia. 2000 was a special year for several of the College’s employees – Dr. Howard Hunnius, Kathy Comer, Dr. Bob Tutton and Jim Cosby – who all saw their children graduate from John Tyler.
The president’s statement in the 1992 John Tyler Community College Foundation Annual Report records Dr. Marshall W. Smith’s gratitude to the community for its support over the College’s first 25 years. But Smith’s gratitude also fell kindly to several members of the College community, most notably Theresa Windham. “Any mention of debts of gratitude must assuredly also include an appreciative acknowledgement of the best foundation administrator anywhere, Ms. Theresa Windham,” wrote Smith. “This energetic and creative professional seemingly spends every waking moment encouraging the rest of us to greater efforts by force of personal example. The management textbooks say otherwise, but at this institution, she is the indispensable woman.” Sadly, the College community would face a terrible loss when Windham died April 2, 1993 of a brain aneurism at age 36. In her six years at the College, Windham not only wrote countless grants, invigorated the scholarship program, initiated endowed scholarships, and took the Foundation assets pass the $1 million mark for the first time, she also constantly inspired her coworkers with her energy and dedication. “It is impossible to overstate what she did for this College,” says Smith. The College named the remodeled auditorium in Bird Hall after Windham, and Windham’s friends and coworkers planted a tree in her honor. For many years, members of the College community gathered to decorate the tree during the holidays.
Out of the ashes of the fire at the Chester Campus in 1988 the College would build a large student center. Ground was broken for the building in the summer of 1992, and the project was completed in the fall of 1993. The project began under the leadership of Dr. Freddie Nicholas, who immediately made known his wishes that the student lounge lost in the fire not be rebuilt as it was originally designed. The new building housed the student lounge, bookstore, classrooms and a large multi-purpose room. To honor Dr. Nicholas’ legacy at the College, the Foundation Board named the building the Freddie W. Nicholas Student Center.
Community colleges in Virginia must be built on land that is donated, not acquired through purchase. Accordingly, in 1991, the College and the Louis Reynolds Marital Trust began discussing the possibility of the Trust providing the land for John Tyler Community College’s permanent Midlothian campus. On February 23, 1994, after two-and-a-half years of negotiation, the Trust signed an agreement that provided 126 acres of land in Midlothian. Over the next few years, administrators at John Tyler, principally Dr. Marshall W. Smith, would be heavily involved in securing funds from the General Assembly, choosing an architectural firm, and working with a construction company to build the new Midlothian Campus. “All of us who have been around a while know that we wouldn’t have this campus, particularly in Midlothian or this location, if Dr. Smith hadn’t devoted hours and hours and hours of effort to it,” says Dr. Ray Drinkwater. “Although he still has many years before him, if Dr. Smith doesn’t accomplish anything else other than this campus in his career, that is quite a lot.” The new Midlothian Campus opened for summer classes in 2000 and was formally dedicated on October 3, 2000. The campus consists of three buildings: an administration building, an academic building and a warehouse/physical plant facility. The Academic Building houses the library, 12 classrooms, two tiered lecture halls, four science laboratories, four computer laboratories, a compressed video classroom and 32 faculty offices.
The College has a long tradition of hosting community events, including an annual Veterans Day celebration. At the event, members of the community are invited to join faculty, staff and students in honoring our nation’s veterans and to share their own memories of service. In the past, the College has also hosted community events featuring speakers such as anthropologist Margaret Mead, civil rights attorney Oliver Hill, and child safety advocate Marc Klaas. In the 1980s and 1990s, the College also welcomed the community to campus for a “popcorn forum,” informal occasions to discuss issues such as black history month and crime in Metro Richmond.
The Foundation Board continued to grow in the 1990s, forming partnerships with new and existing businesses in the area. Leaders from a variety of businesses and organizations who serve on the board meet regularly to discuss needs at the College and devise ways to meet those needs. In addition to raising dollars for scholarships and other general uses, the Foundation Board strengthens ties between the College and the business community. These linkages have provided significant support for the academic efforts of the College. Johnston-Willis Hospital provided the total support for the creation of a Physical Therapist Assistant program in 1992, equipping a laboratory and underwriting the salaries of the first faculty members. In 1997, the Foundation Board accepted a gift of a Computer Design Engineering Laboratory at the Chester Campus from Timmons, a local engineering consulting firm. In 1998, the Foundation recognized Bryce Jewett, a machining business owner who led an informal consortium of fellow businesspeople in renovating the machining facilities and acquiring major new equipment, by naming the precision machining laboratory for him. These and similar efforts ensured that the Foundation would be a growing force for support for the College’s activities.
With new studio space on the Midlothian Campus, the College’s Art Program grew greatly in reputation and size. Many of the program’s students transfer successfully to Virginia Commonwealth University in Richmond, one of the nation’s top-ranked art programs. Each year, the art faculty hang several shows of students’ works at the Midlothian Campus, and visitors, including poet Rita Dove, have been known to purchase the work. Art students also compete in the annual Foundation Art Award Contest. The winner’s artwork is used in a poster that is distributed to donors and friends of the John Tyler Community College Foundation.
In 2004, Governor Mark R. Warner (far left) spoke to graduates at the College’s commencement exercises. Warner garnered loud praise from graduates when he said, “It is time we respect police officers, nurses and Internet technicians the same way we treat our doctors and lawyers.” The former governor is just one of many distinguished commencement speakers at the College. In 1982, Senator John Warner arrived in his helicopter to give his address. A few years later then Governor L. Douglas Wilder (left) would speak to graduates. In 2002, Virginia Secretary of Education, Belle S. Wheelan (above left), would tell graduates, “Someone let you stand on their shoulders so that you could do this – so that you could succeed in school and graduate – and now it is your responsibility and honor to offer your shoulders to someone else to stand on. It doesn’t matter what profession you go into, you must give back … The future of the community is you.”
Starting in the 1980s, the College began to explore international education through exchange programs with students and faculty from Japan and Norway. International education would take on an expanded role at the College starting in the late 1990s. Since that time, faculty have led students on trips to countries as diverse as Vietnam, Italy, England, Greece and Ghana. New destinations for trips in 2007 include Peru and Iceland. When faculty and students return from their trips, they share their experiences with others through the lunchtime Explore! Series and special evening events like The Mystery of China, An Evening in Africa and Fiesta Latina. Faculty and staff also have a chance to explore other countries through a faculty and staff exchange program sponsored by the Virginia Council on International Education and the Virginia Community College System. The program matches faculty and staff at the College with their counterparts in the United Kingdom, the Netherlands and India.
April 1, 2006 was a groundbreaking day for the College. The Fool for Art Festival attracted over 3,000 people to the Midlothian Campus for a foolishly fun and educational day. The daytime family festival featured arts and crafts vendors, free class sessions and activities for all ages and interests, jesters, food, music, games and a silent auction. The event drew the community to the Midlothian Campus and highlighted the College’s many programs through interactive exhibits and classes. The festival was such a success that it is now an annual event.
In 2006, John Tyler Community College was able to relocate, consolidate and expand its Nursing Program thanks to a donation valued at $1,762,303 from CJW Medical Center. Through this public-private partnership, the hospital gave the John Tyler Community College Foundation approximately 15,000 square feet in a new building on the CJW Johnston-Willis campus. The new space includes classrooms, nursing and computer laboratories, and faculty office space. To celebrate the new partnership, representatives from HCA and John Tyler and members of the media gathered outside the building on the morning on August 23 to hear Governor Timothy M. Kaine discuss the importance of increasing enrollment in Virginia’s nursing programs. Other distinguished guests at the ceremony included Dr. Glenn DuBois, chancellor of the Virginia Community College System; Patrick Farrell, president of HCA’s Richmond Division; Margaret G. Lewis, board chair of the John Tyler Community College Foundation and president of HCA’s Capital Division; Peter Marmerstein, CEO of CJW Medical Center, an HCA facility; and Senator John Watkins, a member of the CJW Board of Directors.
As the College approached the 40-year mark, more and more faculty members had the experience of seeing the cyclical effects of teaching. “I see students who say, ‘You taught me in the 70s,’ and if they can tell me what year it was, I remember them,” says Steve Fritton, a faculty member who came to the College in 1971. “I’m teaching students now whose parents or grandparents I taught. That’s nice to hear. Early on in the semester, they will say, ‘Do you remember so and so? They told me about your class.’” John Tucker, a psychology faculty member since 1969 agrees, “One of the most fulfilling things for me is that I’ve had at least four students who had me in psychology come back after graduate school and become teachers for John Tyler. Of course, my present boss, Dr. Donna Alexander, was a student of mine twenty-some years ago in my general psychology class. I’m very proud of her… I see myself as a people-builder. That’s how I define teaching. I build people, and I invest myself in them and their lives while I have them. I try and have a positive impact. I don’t just teach what’s in the book. I teach about life and living, along with the book.”
In 2005, the College would look to the past to find inspiration for a new logo and slogan that would be used to rejuvenate marketing efforts. The current College logo incorporates elements of President John Tyler’s signature, and the new slogan, “Defining Your Future,” is a shortened version of a previous College slogan. Even the logo used to mark the College’s 40th anniversary in 2007 would point to the past. Its playful shape and bold color palette were inspired by advertisements from the late 1960s and early 1970s. As seen to the left, the College’s archives are rich with newspapers, advertisements, catalogs and newsletters that mark many defining moments in John Tyler Community College history.
People in the Virginia Community College System are serving the people of the Commonwealth of Virginia, and every person in the system from the maintenance worker, to the top professor, to the president is making it possible for Virginians to stand on their shoulders and look over the horizon. You all are providing hope, and that is so important,” says Dr. Dana B. Hamel, founding chancellor of the Virginia Community College System. “The system truly has made it a great day to be alive in the Commonwealth, because today you can be here, and tomorrow you can go any number of ways. The system will provide the opportunity.”

To continue that mission, the College is planning an expansion of the Midlothian Campus, which reached capacity five years sooner than expected because of booming population growth in the Midlothian area and unprecedented enrollment increases at the College. More and more members of the community are realizing the flexibility and transferability of a community college education and are enrolling at John Tyler. Ground will be broken on a new academic building in 2007; the building will house a larger library, more classroom space and faculty offices. Master plans for the Midlothian Campus eventually call for a bell tower, amphitheater, workforce center, student center and possibly sports fields.
Defining Moments would not have been possible without the help of many individuals who kindly agreed to be interviewed and others who shared their mementos, memories and knowledge for the publication. The list includes, but is not limited to, Vicky Carwile, Jim Cosby, Dr. L. Ray Drinkwater, Homer Eliades, Steve Fritton, Senator Elmon T. Gray, Vernon Gwaltney, Dr. Dana B. Hamel, Dr. Thomas Hatfield, Johnnie Humphrey, Joy James, Joe Jordan, Brian Lonon, Rena Mallory, Dr. Freddie W. Nicholas, Sr., Dr. Don O’Donohue, Kay Robertson, Dr. Marshall W. Smith, Sarah Story, John Tucker, and Sandy Via. Peter McTague, Linda Luebke and the Richmond Times-Dispatch archivists also graciously allowed us to explore their archives. Richmond Times-Dispatch photos are reprinted with permission on pages 12, 14, 16, 20, 24 (black and white), 25 (black and white), 26, 82, 83, 84, 86 (far left) and 87 (far right).