



COMMUNITY COLLEGES & APPA

Powerful Forces in Higher Education

By Joseph Wojtysiak

during my 40-year career in the steel industry, my perception of community colleges was that students attended basic education classes in an old, red brick building in an urban location. Like many, I neither understood nor appreciated their role in higher education. However, in October 2002, I accepted the position of director of facilities management at Harrisburg Area Community College (HACC) and my eyes have opened. Unfortunately, even today, the challenge continues—to educate the public and our political representatives concerning the important role and contribution of community colleges to higher education. It is not the continuation of high school (13th grade) nor is it a place to go when you can't get into a "real" college. There are more than 1,200 U.S. community colleges that provide an accessible, affordable, high-quality education to their communities, to their states, and to the nation. They provide the foundation for those either going on to complete their four-year degrees or to those who directly enter the workforce with newly acquired knowledge and skills.

HACC, Central Pennsylvania's Community College, was the first community college established in Pennsylvania and is currently the second largest of 14 in the commonwealth. More than 19,000 students currently attend classes at our five campuses. Curricula include Nursing and Dental, Geospatial Technology, Engineering, Computer Skills, Childcare, Theatre & Arts, Business Administration and the Alex Grass School of Business Leadership, as well as technical trades such as HVAC, Welding, Electrical, and Home Remodeling and Repair. HACC offers associate and transfer degree, certificate, and diploma programs with credits being accepted at most U.S. four-year colleges and universities.

Other major programs offered are Culinary Arts, Hospitality Management, and Travel and Tourism. There is a certified General Motors Training Center where students and mechanics can train for careers in auto mechanics. Another 40,000 students receive on- and off-site training through our Public Safety Center and through Workforce Development efforts. Nearly all firefighters, paramedics, and police officers in Central Pennsylvania are trained at our Harrisburg Campus. Through the Workforce Development department, training needs are identified in industries with HACC developing programs to address those needs.

APPA is an international organization of more than 5,200 facilities professionals representing more than 1,500 educational institutions throughout the United States, Canada, and abroad. Services provided by APPA include training in four core competency areas, supervision, and leadership. There are also extensive research, certification, and recognition opportunities. And the value of networking with other facilities professionals and receiving support from the APPA staff cannot be overlooked.

After only six weeks in my position, HACC's vice president of finance & college resources, George Franklin, to whom I directly report, had the "audacity to suggest" that I attend APPA's Institute

for Facilities Management. He had attended one of the core sessions and felt I would find value in attending. Well, after spending 32 years in management and reaching the level of plant maintenance superintendent, I balked but followed through with his recommendation. What I found out was

that you're never too old to learn.

Now having been initially introduced to APPA, and after about six months of implementing my own departmental changes, it was suggested to me that we have APPA conduct a Facilities Management Evaluation Program (FMEP) for



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our college's five locations. Yet again, I went ahead with the suggestion, and the adventure was just beginning. The FMEP both validated the changes that were being implemented and provided a roadmap for continual improvement. The vision and support provided by our vice president has allowed our Facilities Management staff to continually improve our performance to support the mission and vision of the college.

While completing the APPA Institute, and now a recent graduate from the Leadership Academy, I have met many APPA members from both community colleges and from prestigious four-year colleges. I have learned that we have many common challenges and can learn from each other by attending APPA sessions and by networking afterward. While APPA provides the tools, we must implement and use them instead of returning to business as usual.

The APPA recognition programs also provide opportunities for growth. Attending my first APPA banquet, I quickly recognized the pride that APPA members displayed when receiving their graduation certificates, and when their college and staff were recognized for having been presented with the Award

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for Excellence. Looking at the list of recipients of the award, I noticed there were no community colleges listed.

That evening I made a commitment to give back to our college for its investment of time and money, and to ultimately become the first community college to receive the AFE. This process took several years and required us to first address all recommendations identified in the report of findings from the FMEP. We failed in our first

submission. However, we felt that we had still won because of our continual improvement efforts in both performance and process. With the second application, we were successful.

Hopefully, there is a new appreciation for community colleges and for APPA. Recognizing their importance has been long overdue. ☺

Joe Wojtysiak is executive director of facilities management at Harrisburg Area Community College, Harrisburg, PA, which was a 2007 recipient of APPA's Award for Excellence in Facilities Management. He can be reached at jwojtyasi@hacc.edu.

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