

WSUV-Clark partnership fills big gap

Perched within the scenic shadow of volcanic Mount St. Helens, Washington State University Vancouver builds upon its own academic eruption with the new Clark Center on its campus.

The center, which opened to classes in January, represents another link in a strong partnership forged with Clark College. It fairly bubbles with academic energy and promise.

That partnership allowed higher-education opportunities to blossom in Southwest Washington, especially Clark County.

WSUV Chancellor Hal Dengerink believes the partnership between Clark and WSUV, which also benefits Lower Columbia College in Longview, "is at a higher level" than any in the state.

From 1933, when it opened, until the late 1980s, Clark College was the only higher-education school

between the north bank of the Columbia River and Longview. A study of higher-education access was launched soon after the Higher Education Coordinating (HEC) board was formed in 1981. It found the state ranked fifth in access to community colleges, and 49th in access to four-year and advanced degrees.

More depressing was access in Southwest Washington, labeled the worst area in the state for people graduating from high school and attending a state four-year school. "Underserved by higher education, business and civic leaders. "We had the best cause in the world, (and) we had the greatest need in the world," then state Sen. Al Bauer, D-Vancouver, recalled in a story in *The Columbian* on the eve of opening the 348-acre WSUV campus on June 28, 1996.

**TOM
KOENNINGER**



WSUV began at Clark College

Until the new campus was opened, WSUV existed in a building on the Clark College campus that was renamed Bauer Hall. Bauer played a key role in acquiring the new campus, immensely aided by his position as chairman of the Senate Higher Education Committee.

He was not alone. Bob Schaefer, a Vancouver attorney and former speaker of the state House of Representative, was a strong and persistent advocate, finally pushing through a Joint Center for Higher Education, a precursor to WSUV. Other higher-education activists were Joe Johnson, president of Clark at the time; Lynn Degerstedt, Clark College; former legislators Denny Heck, Shirley Galloway, Kim Peery and John McKibbin; Jim Parsley, former Vancouver schools superintendent, and Joe Tanner and Bob Levin, representing business.

There were many more applying pressure for a greater higher-education presence in those early years. It also helped to have Joe King of Vancouver as House Speaker. Later advocates have included former Rep. Val Ogden, Sen. Joe Zarelli, former Sen. Don Carlson, Rep. Bill Fromhold and many others.

Growth has been continuous on the Salmon Creek campus. The new \$19.7-million Clark Center is a perfect example. At the May 2 grand opening of the three-story, 63,334-square-foot building, Wayne Branch, president of Clark College, saluted the strong partnership. "We are excited at the possibilities the Clark Center provides ... for the strengthening of an already strong partnership between Clark and WSUV."

Columbian reporter Howard Buck described the new nursing lab, mimicking a hospital, as the "shining star" signifying Clark College's "bold presence" on the WSUV campus. The center includes physics, chemistry labs, classrooms and faculty office space. The building, open and well lighted, features an interior two-story work of art, "Flight of the Mind, Exploration of the Heart," by Johanna Poethig.

A co-admissions agreement signed between WSUV, Clark and Lower Columbia permits virtually seamless transfer of students from the community colleges to WSUV. A "proportionality agreement" to be signed June 8 will guarantee access for every student who goes through the co-admission agreement, Dengerink said.

There's more coming: A new student services building near the Clark Center. And funds will be sought for a classroom building on the south campus. More growth, for an essential personal and economic need in the present and the future: education.

TOM KOENNINGER is editor emeritus of *The Columbian* and a member of the Washington State Board for Community and Technical Colleges. His column of personal opinion appears on the *Other Opinions* page each Wednesday. His e-mail address: tom.koenninger@columbian.com.