



Photos by ANDREA J. WRIGHT for The Columbian

Clark College President Bob Knight said in his State of the College speech Thursday that Clark will help drive economic recovery in Southwest Washington. He also expressed optimism about Clark and other colleges escaping the worst of budget cuts from Olympia.

Knight sees 'bright future' for Clark despite economy

College will play key role in area's recovery, he says

By HOWARD BUCK
Columbian staff writer

Some good chuckles came during a video message from Vancouver Mayor Royce Pollard, who ducked off-camera, only to reappear wearing the garb of Oswald, mascot for the Penguin Nation.

The rest of the annual State of the College address delivered by Clark College President Bob Knight on Thursday?

Pretty serious stuff.

Faced with perhaps the worst economy since Clark opened its doors in October 1933 during the Great Depression, Clark will stand strong to serve its students and the community, Knight emphasized.

"Tough times eventually pass. ... Today, 75 years later, we are here because of that belief in a bright future for Clark College," he said.

This winter, state budget woes forced Clark to trim its



The audience reacts to the State of the College address by Clark College President Bob Knight on Thursday. Although Clark had to cut its budget 4.3 percent, faculty layoffs have been avoided.

operating budget by 4.3 percent.

The school expects to cut another 6 percent over the next two years, as proposed in the budget plan of Washington Gov. Chris Gregoire, Knight said.

Yet, no faculty layoffs have been planned. Rather, many instructors have volunteered to take on more students per classroom, as Clark's enrollment keeps swelling — up about 10

percent this month from a year ago, Knight said.

"Clark College is still doing well, and it's strong," he said following the speech to a full Gaiser Student Center crowd dotted with civic and business leaders. Other than some larger class sizes, "we have not had to impact the students," he said.

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■ To view Pollard, aka Oswald, salute Clark with a "Go Penguins!" cheer, see: www.clark.edu/news_events/75th_anniversary/pollard.php.

■ Gov. Chris Gregoire and U.S. Rep. Brian Baird, D-Vancouver, also sent congratulatory videos to mark Clark's 75th anniversary. Highlights from the dedication of the Ellis F. Dunn Community Room in the remodeled Gaiser Hall also were played.

■ Four Clark employees were awarded presidential coins to honor exemplary service: Paul Casillas, mathematics instructor; Nancy Heidrick, assistant financial aid director; Tami Jacobs, disability support services manager; and Skip Jimerson, grounds manager.



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Clark College President Bob Knight greets Mayor Royce Pollard, left — sans the Penguin outfit — following Knight's State of the College address Thursday.

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"We're going to do what we did last time (the 1930s): Help this community come out of it," he said.

Knight listed several campus accomplishments and said progress remains on-track, on several fronts:

■ The satellite classroom campus at the Columbia Tech Center will open on time this autumn, with a dedication set for Clark's next birthday, Oct. 1.

■ An accreditation review commission is expected to give its final report soon on the Clark campus, completing an exhaustive, two-year self-evaluation by faculty and staff members.

The review team has already highlighted five commendations for good service, Knight said. "I am confident Clark College will receive full accreditation for the next 10 years," he said.

■ Clark has reason to believe legislators will agree to pay for design of a new science, math, technology and engineering building proposed at the corner

of Fort Vancouver Way and East Fourth Plain Boulevard. The STEM classroom building could open by 2013.

■ At least 1,000 Clark students now take classes online; more than 1,300 local high school students are enrolled in Clark's early-college-credit Running Start program; and Clark has awarded a record \$25 million in financial assistance to more than 5,000 students, in only half a year.

Knight said he's optimistic that Clark and the state's other community colleges can escape the worst of looming

budget cuts from Olympia.

History shows the schools play a critical, successful role in retraining for workers who lose their jobs, and are a powerful economic engine. "That's an important message that we'll be taking to our legislators," Knight told the audience.

Afterward, he predicted a prolonged battle to stave off cutbacks: "We need to stay on the Legislature: We don't want them to mess with us."

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