

Knight sees bright future for Clark College

Despite cuts that will remove \$1.4 million from the Clark College budget this year and more in the years to come, college president Bob Knight expressed positive thoughts about the future of the community college during his Jan. 15 State of the College address.

"When it comes to the long-term future of our college," said Knight, "I am not just optimistic—I'm excited."

Knight said the college has dealt with 4.3 per cent in cuts for this academic year through reductions in travel and not filling open positions. He repeatedly stressed the importance of meeting the needs of students as budget cuts take place.

Knight said the governor's proposed budget includes a 6 percent cut for community colleges in each of the next two years. "That's a lot," said Knight. "But it's much better than the 20 percent cut that had originally been discussed."

Knight said the college could lose an additional \$600,000 in state funding next year which might be offset with tuition increases.

Clark College has operated with an annual budget of about \$51 million. "When it comes to the budget, at this point, I am cautiously optimistic," said Knight.

Knight said the college got its start in tough economic times during the Great Depression. Since its beginnings in 1993 with six faculty members and 20 students, the college has grown to 13,000 students and a faculty of 600 today, he said.

Knight mentioned continued accreditation as important for meeting the college's mission.

"We welcomed educators from the Northwest Commission on Colleges and Universities for our 10-year accreditation visit," said Knight. The college was first accredited in 1937, and "since that day, we have never lost our accreditation."

The accreditation team visited the college in 2008 and will make recommendations in its final report, due later this month,

said Knight. The recommendations will echo those developed in the college's self-study, including doing a better job of planning and evaluation, and reviewing educational programs.

Clark College celebrated its 75th anniversary in 2008 with 75 hours of special events held Oct. 1-4. Knight said the college will open a time capsule in May 2009 that was created 25 years ago. "We will also dedicate a new one, to be opened during the college's 100th anniversary celebration," said Knight.

Knight said the Clark College Running Start Program, which allows high school students to earn college credit even before high school graduation, is breaking records. The program had 1,300 students enrolled in December. "We are now the largest Running Start program in the state of Washington," said Knight. "And, given the economic climate, we expect to keep breaking records."

More than 1,000 students take classes online, said Knight, and it is now possible for students to earn a degree by taking classes on weekends.

Knight said the college awarded more than \$25 million to nearly 5,000 students in financial assistance for the current academic year, a number higher than all of last academic year.

The college has added new academic programs in surveying and medical radiography.

Knight noted that some buildings have been remodeled, including Gaiser Hall in which he gave the annual speech. The college's new facility at Columbia Tech Center in east Clark County is due to open in October 2009, and a new building at Fort Vancouver Way and Fourth Plain Blvd. is slated to be under construction by 2011. Long-term plans call for a new site in northern Clark County, said Knight.

Knight, who has been president of Clark College for about 1 1/2 years, noted that Pres. Barack Obama, as well as Arne Duncan who Obama named as



ROBERT KNIGHT, president of Clark College in Vancouver, gave a positive outlook for the future of the college during his State of the College speech Jan. 15. With Knight is Tami Jacobs, disability support services manager at the College, who served as interpreter.

Secretary of Education, and Washington Gov. Chris Gregoire, all have described the importance of community colleges in recent speeches.

"Our founders brought higher education to Southwest Washing-

ton," said Knight. "They opened a college at a time when few believed it could be done. They focused on success for each and every student. They believed passionately in a bright future for Clark College. So do I."