

# School to surmount tough times

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Bob Knight  
Clark College president

## President Bob Knight spells out triumphs, challenges for the institution in his annual address

By **HOWARD BUCK**  
*Columbian staff writer*

Clark College President Bob Knight used a quirk of the calendar Thursday to punctuate his annual State of the College address.

Among other things, Jan. 20 is dubbed "Penguin Awareness Day."

Google confirms it, Knight noted — before he listed Clark's attributes and many of the challenges few "Penguin Nation" students and instructors could miss.

The challenges include soaring tuition rates and financial aid needs. Overloaded classrooms and closed class sections. Scarce parking, longer lines, higher stress — and all else that owes to recession-fueled record enrollment of 16,000 students, juxtaposed against budget cuts that jeopardize valued programs and personnel.

And yet, Clark's students and faculty surmount such hurdles and continue to excel, Knight told the capacity Gaiser Student Center audience.

"In tough times, people succeed because they are resilient," he said, accentuating the positive. "Our people are resilient. We believe in our future."

Knight didn't sugarcoat the present.

"Honestly, this year will be even more difficult" and the next two years promise more of the same, he said. Clark leaders are looking to pare \$2 million more from the school's operating budget, in anticipation of state funding reductions for the 2011-13 budget cycle.

"We are going to have to make cuts that no one wants to make. They will be painful," he said.

Knight said the college will collaborate on decisions on how best to preserve academic programs required by law or accreditation needs, then focus on those that "we take pride in, because they reflect our aspirations for our students and the region."

## Proposed building likely delayed

Clark and school district partners pine for a proposed \$36 million science, technology, engineering and mathematics classroom building, originally slated for start of construction this year. But, groundbreaking in 2015 or later now seems likely due to Olympia's massive budget deficit.

The delay "isn't necessarily disastrous," Knight said after the speech, since Clark would lack sufficient funds to staff or operate the building any sooner.

Clark's financial aid workers doled out \$43 million to students during the 2009-10 school year, a one-year increase of 36 percent, he noted. The record high underscores the workload of Clark staff, who processed nearly 11,000 student files.

More ominous is the fact Clark has already dispensed \$51 million in aid during the current year just entering

STEVEN LANE/The Columbian

Clark College President Bob Knight used his annual State of the College address on Thursday to praise accomplishments of students, faculty members, other employees and alumni in 2010. He acknowledged "painful" changes due the next few years, forced by budget reductions.



STEVEN LANE/The Columbian

A large Gaiser Student Center crowd, mostly teaching and other employees, listens to the State of the College address Thursday by Clark College President Bob Knight.

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its second quarter. It's a grim off-set for back-to-back 7 percent tuition hikes imposed on students, while Gov. Chris Gregoire has called for 10 percent hikes each of the next two years.

Knight also touched on the "very painful time at the college," following distribution of a White Pride flier in October. Its presence set off safety worries, counter-rallies, debate on and off campus, and, finally, the drafting of new intervention and free speech policies.

"We all have learned from this experience," he said. "Clark College should always be a place where individuals can come together for open, thoughtful discussion. The college should never be a place for hatred or fear."

### SPECIAL MENTION

Despite the setbacks, the past 12 months saw impressive success by Clark students and faculty members.

Knight spent a good portion of his 45-minute address heaping praise on the school's high achievers and hard workers — from award-winning instructors, to humanitarian aid work by world traveler and 2010 outstanding Clark alumnus Rico Selga, to the league-champion women's cross country squad.

He called out Neil Oldaker, a Clark student who pulled an 80-year-old driver from a burning car that badly torched a nearby McDonald's restaurant.

Knight also awarded special

presidential coins to four "exemplary" Clark employees:

- Monica Knowles, bookstore manager, praised for her focus on innovative customer service.
  - Janet Owens, administrative assistant for Corporate and Continuing Education, for leadership and professionalism.
  - Charlene Montierth, veteran geology professor and a key player in Clark's recent extensive accreditation process.
  - John Maduta, specialist for student advising services, earning high marks for his work ethic and guidance.
- Knight also saluted the 2010 passing of "two great leaders" for Southwest

Washington and the state.

He announced new \$3,000 student scholarships funded by the Clark College Foundation in the names of Bill Fromhold, former Vancouver state legislator and longtime education professional and advocate, and Tom Koenninger, a Clark alumnus whose unflagging support marked his 57 years as a reporter, editor and columnist, including 37 years at *The Columbian*. Fromhold once served on the Clark board of trustees, while Koenninger was Clark's 1990 outstanding alumnus and served more than a decade on the Washington State Board for Community and Technical Colleges. Both men died on Sept. 30.

For a takeaway message, Knight borrowed from the Atlanta mayor, who declared that harsh economic realities must not choke the higher goals of its citizens and leaders.

"We need to be very clear where just surviving takes you: It takes you to a lifestyle of just survival," Knight quoted Mayor Kasim Reed as saying.

Clark must continue to

"dream" and to grow, Knight said: "We are staying focused on our aspirations."

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