

# Clark College, 75 and going strong

**T**he Penguin Nation, 75 years proud, began a yearlong celebration of its diamond jubilee this morning. That would be Clark College, formerly known as Vancouver Junior College, formerly known as Clark Junior College when it was part of the Vancouver school district.

Community and technical colleges — 34 of them now scattered across the state — severed the umbilical cord to school districts with the Community College Act of 1967.

Clark has outgrown its Hidden House birthplace of 1933, and outgrown four other campus sites. It is growing beyond its downtown Vancouver location, with a satellite campus opening next year at Columbia Tech Center in east Vancouver. In time, a north satellite could emerge in Ridgefield or La Center. The Clark College Foundation has provided a strong boost to Clark's growth. The alumni-funded Chime Tower is a campus landmark.

Oswald, the Penguin, is the college's unlikely mascot with kinfolk thousands of miles south, mainly in Antarctic regions, and as far north as the Galapagos Islands at the equator off South America. But they reside in high spirit at Clark College, with the exuberant support of Bob Knight, Clark's eighth president and former commander of the Vancouver Barracks. Why rally 'round a creature

more closely connected with the Antarctic than the moderate Northwest? Oswald is sleek and smart, a cohesive force for students and faculty. President Knight proclaimed Clark College

"the Penguin Nation" in his 2007 state of the college address. In that speech, Knight said, "Our students are at the heart of everything we do," and noted Clark's new address, 1933 Fort Vancouver Way.

Clark Junior College (briefly, Vancouver Junior College) opened at Hidden House in downtown Vancouver Oct. 1, 1933. Classes began the following Monday, with Robert T. Oliver as its first dean and president. Lewis D. Cannell, legendary Clark College dean, described conditions at Hidden House. He reported all records were contained in a roll-top desk purchased for \$5. Sheets of wallboard were turned into blackboards with blackboard paint. Students sat on breakfast room chairs purchased, unpainted, for 60 cents each. It was, at times, chilly. "The presence of a number of warm bodies did as much for the temperature of the little classrooms as did the balky furnace," Cannell said.

Larry Rakestraw, Washougal, was the first student. He brought a 1932 Christmas gift with him: a blue-coated wooden penguin about 4 inches

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tall. Placed on an incline, it would waddle down the slope.

Aside from an enrollment stalemate during World War II, the Penguin Nation has neither waddled nor wavered in a steady upward progression. On Sept. 22, the college began its 75th year with 12,213 students taking at least one class, an increase of 500 over opening day 2007.

Bolstered by returning veterans, college enrollment surged when World War II ended.

In my time on the Fourth Plain campus (1950-1951), roofs of the World War II buildings sometimes leaked, but the quality of education was always hot. We had Dean Cannell for inspiration, and outstanding faculty including Homer Foster, Hermine Decker, Elmer Clausen, Deloyce Frost, and Bill Hall. Ruth O. Fink, my journalism instructor, hammered home the principles of quality writing and ethical reporting.

Today at 2 p.m., the community room in Gaiser Hall is to be dedicated in honor of Ellis Dunn of Ridgefield, former interim president and longtime Clark administrator. He typifies the strength and quality that is the foundation of Clark College.

Clark, which has built a strong partnership with Washington State University Vancouver — its higher education brethren — and excels in service to its community, is poised to flourish through the 21st century and beyond.

Happy 75th, Clark College! May the light of learning reflected in those birthday candles grow ever brighter in the coming years.

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