

Central Oregon Community College

COCC magazine

2021



OUR CENTRAL STRENGTH

COCC alumni play an essential part in Central Oregon's economy and its recovery

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CONTENTS

FEATURES

- Our Central Strength** 4
COCC and its alumni play an essential part in Central Oregon's economy and its recovery
- On the Front Lines** 9
In professions of helping and healing, recent grads put their training into action as essential workers during the pandemic
- To the Fullest Degree** 16
An academic collaboration between COCC and OSU-Cascades optimizes the path for those on the bachelor's degree track
- When Connection Matters Most** 18
How COCC is helping students overcome technological barriers to succeed with remote studies



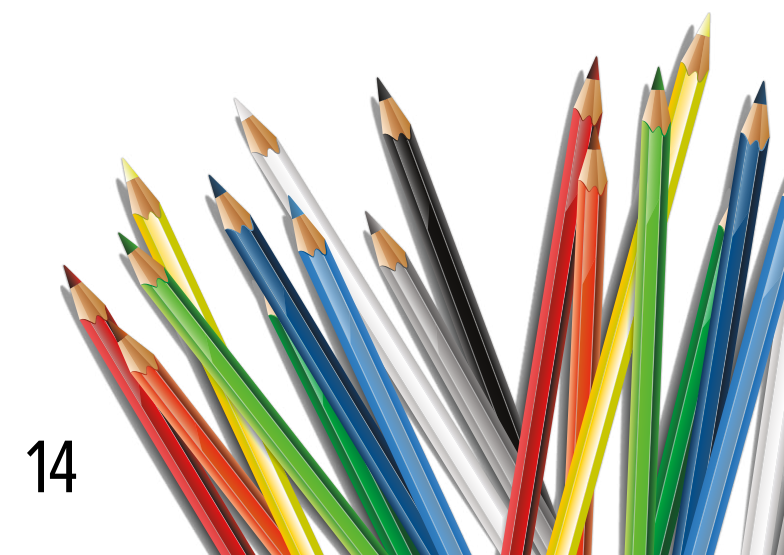
COVER: COCC graduate Jill Ward with Gunner, a shelter dog seeking adoption from Redmond's BrightSide Animal Center, partner to the Vet Tech training program. Photo by Timothy Park.

18



DEPARTMENTS

- Letter From the President 2
- Where There's Smoke 3
- A Schoolhouse Story 14
- Foundation Scholarships 15
- Notebook 20



Letter From the President

Greetings and welcome to the 2021 edition of *COCC Magazine*, our place for sharing the activities, stories and many, many voices of your community college. Within these pages, you'll get a feel for how education and access align at Central Oregon Community College, where faculty and staff are dedicated not only to broadening individual horizons, but also to impacting the greater region.



Established in 1949, COCC is the oldest two-year college in Oregon. And we serve the largest community college district in the state, encompassing nearly 10,000 square miles of urban and rural populations. We offer more than 70 unique academic programs at the College, many with immediate pathways into the workforce and transfer options, and numerous non-credit learning and career-focused opportunities.

But there's something we're also known for that isn't measured by dates or data: our collaborations in the region. COCC prides itself on the numerous relationships we nurture throughout Central Oregon, from working with industry leaders to linking with other educational partners.

You'll read about some of these collaborations in this issue, such as the hand-in-hand approach we're taking with St. Charles Health System to train more nursing assistants in a time of need. You'll see how a cooperative effort with Central Oregon STEM Hub encourages a new approach to early learning, by training teachers how to inspire and engage young children with subjects like engineering and science. Our longstanding—and well-utilized—collaboration with Oregon State University - Cascades, described in "To the Fullest Degree," gives students on a four-year degree path the roadmap and resources for an affordable, attainable education. It's a wonderful and versatile partnership.

This edition of our magazine will take you places. You'll travel from an Alaskan outpost to the heart of New York City, from the front lines of the COVID-19 crisis to the core of our Central Oregon economy, seeing the diverse ways in which COCC alumni impact the world around them. It's incredible to see the many journeys our graduates take.

With the administering of COVID-19 vaccines, we're arriving at a place of renewed optimism. I want to extend my heartfelt thanks to our region's essential workers for their continued service to Central Oregon. I am lifted by the strength of our students, our employees and our communities—and by the bright potential of what's to come.

Be well and take good care of each other,

Dr. Laurie Chesley
COCC President

Central Oregon Community College
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Where There's Smoke

As the heavy curtains of smoke drew tight across Central Oregon's late summer skies, Paula Simone knew her students would be out there, digging in against the state's fast-roiling fires. 2020 would become an historic fire season for Oregon, the second largest on record, scorching some 1.2 million acres and blazing a stark—and deadly—mosaic across the state.

"We have 167 active Structure Fire students right now, and all of them were involved in fire season," says Simone, COCC Fire Science professor and department chair. "Lionshead for sure...a lot of them went to Holiday Farm. Our folks are out there every day." Other College programs, like Forestry and Nursing, saw students deploy to the fires as well. Faculty went, too—every instructor in the Paramedicine program, for instance, is a career firefighter.

While many students and staff don hardhats and Nomex fire gear each summer, COCC's Bend campus also serves as the instructional center for the East Slope Training Area, part of a larger federal fire-training network. Regional offices of the U.S. Forest Service and Bureau of Land Management, from as far away as Burns and John Day, send their personnel for the multi-day sessions, coordinated by the College and taught by federal employees.

"We have 167 active Structure Fire students right now, and all of them were involved in fire season."

"It's all national standard material that we're teaching," says Jeff Priest, fire operations specialist for the Ochoco National Forest. A former COCC student, Priest now designs and helps teach the curriculum, providing qualifications in things like "Basic Air Operations" and "Wildland Fire in the Urban Interface." He runs military-style tactical simulations on plywood-sheet tables—kitty litter for soil, yarn for roads—to help tomorrow's division supervisors and incident commanders hone their decision-making. "I'm a 'sim' guy for the region," he says.

The training arrangement grew from the College's Wildland Fire program, which several years ago consolidated into a general Fire Science degree. "The program started in '89 or '90," says Simone. "It was just a few classes for the Forest Service." Today, it provides instruction for hundreds of fire professionals each year.

Fighting wildfire is a narrative shared by many staffers at COCC. Simone herself was a crew boss and later a fire lookout. Past vice president Matt McCoy is a former smokejumper and hotshot. Instructional dean Michael Fisher saw the Yellowstone fires of '88 from behind the handle of a Pulaski. Season by season, forest by forest, flames may define the horizon—but there are those who stand the line. ■



Share your wildland firefighting memories with us.



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Our Central Strength

COCC and its alumni play an essential part in Central Oregon's economy and its recovery

The combination of a tennis ball and a fun-loving goldendoodle normally creates the very picture of canine bliss: a flung ball, a whirl of sprinting fur, a tail that won't quit. Even inseparable bonds, though, can sometimes go too far.

"From the time he came in, he was my patient," says veterinary technician Jill Ward of Redmond, recalling the playful pup who ingested his chewed-up ball only to have it lodge dangerously in his stomach. "From the initial exam, to drawing blood, running bloodwork, to giving medication. I also got him ready for surgery, assisted with surgery and recovery, and did all of

the release instructions so he could go home." For this dog and his family, the episode—requiring "foreign object retrieval," not uncommon with canines—ended with a grateful wag.

It's just another day at the office for this recent graduate of COCC, a lover of animals who works at Redmond's Cinder Rock Veterinary Clinic and is practiced at everything from dentistry to filling prescriptions to giving ultrasounds. "Working in veterinary medicine was always something I wanted to do," says Ward, who grew up on a dairy farm and dove into her new profession after spending 20 years as a hairdresser.

Ward's meaningful new career began in her own community, through COCC's Redmond-based Veterinary Technician program, which combines classes at the Redmond campus with hands-on learning at the program's nearby training facility. A working partnership with BrightSide Animal Center adds to the rigor of the learning experience.

"I've worked with a lot of men and women who went to different schools all over the country," she adds. "I do feel like COCC's program was just as good, if not better, than a lot of other programs I have heard about. I'm super happy to be in this new career—I wouldn't change it for the world."

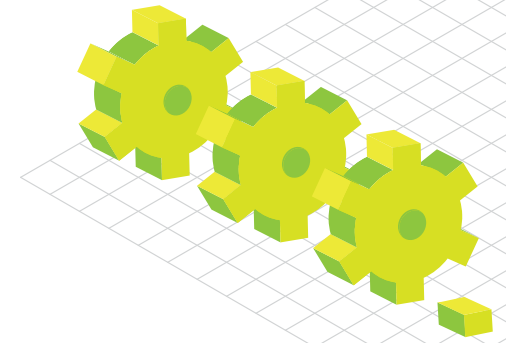
Ward is one of many thousands to have received her higher education with COCC—through one or more of the College's four campuses—and enter the Central Oregon workforce. She exemplifies the study-local, stay-local formula that benefits both

students and the region. When careers are kindled, so is the economy.

In fact, findings from an economic study commissioned last year by the Oregon Community College Association revealed that COCC's former students currently employed in the regional workforce generated \$219.4 million in annual income. Put another way, that's the equivalent of supporting 3,075 jobs annually in the tri-county area.

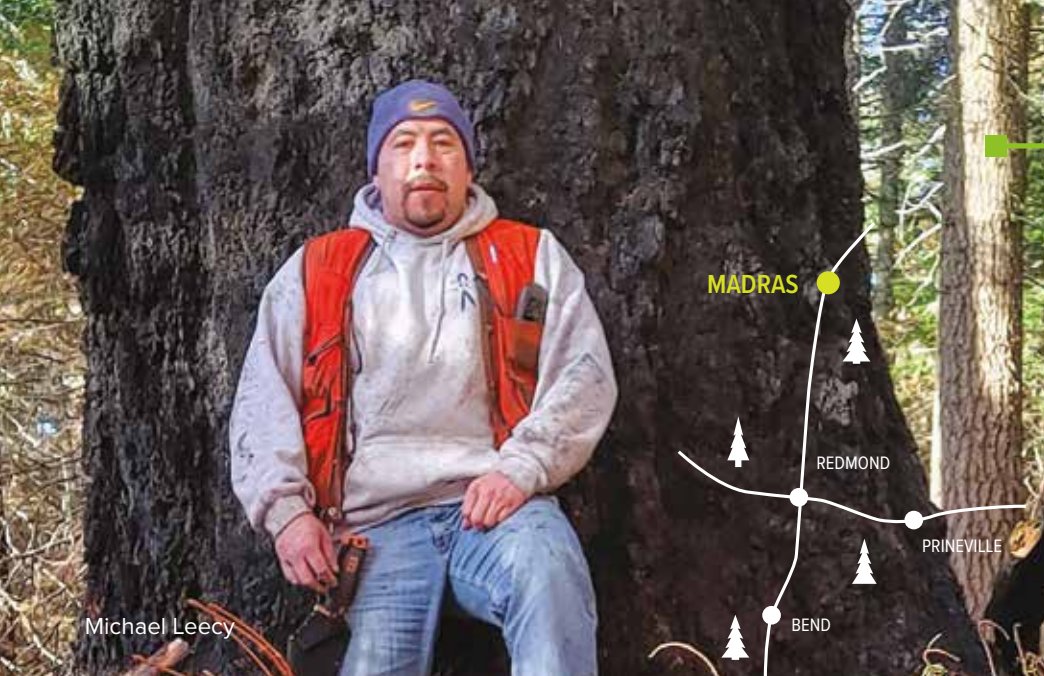
COCC graduates become engineers and teachers, welders and pastry chefs, computer coders and pharmacy technicians. While each person brings their own individual talents and imprint to the workforce, they're part of a collective whole, an enduring impact that contributes to the economic well-being of Central Oregon.

3,075
2018-19 ANNUAL JOBS
IN THE TRI-COUNTY AREA



Ward is one of many thousands to have received her higher education with COCC — through one or more of the College's four campuses.





Michael Leecy

Small class sizes and one-on-one time at COCC Madras helped tremendously.

GATEWAYS FOR GROWTH

Up the highway about 30 miles from the Redmond campus, the view at COCC Madras seems to take in the full panorama of Jefferson County: a rural sweep of open country, big skies and close-knit communities. The campus sits on a commanding rise just about a mile east of downtown, and serves a wide region, from Culver to Warm Springs.

Here, an educational hub is a gateway to continued learning, where students can take classes for degree programs or sample various studies, from technical writing and public health to algebra and drawing. In just the past

three years, 160 Jefferson County residents have graduated from COCC.

Among them is Michael Leecy, a lead forest technician for the Confederated Tribes of Warm Springs, who earned his associate degree in Forest Resources Technology and now manages timber, restores aspen populations and serves as a resource advisor during fire season to protect tribal resources. Having the Madras campus nearby helped him make academic inroads.

“Math is one of my weak links,” Leecy shares, crediting the small class sizes and one-on-one time at COCC Madras as a learning catalyst. “It helped tremendously.” As did the short commute: “For those who are also working, it helps to minimize time away from work.”

As degrees open opportunities, they also elevate earning potential. In fact, the average COCC associate degree graduate, working in Oregon, will earn \$8,000 more per year compared to someone with only a high school diploma.

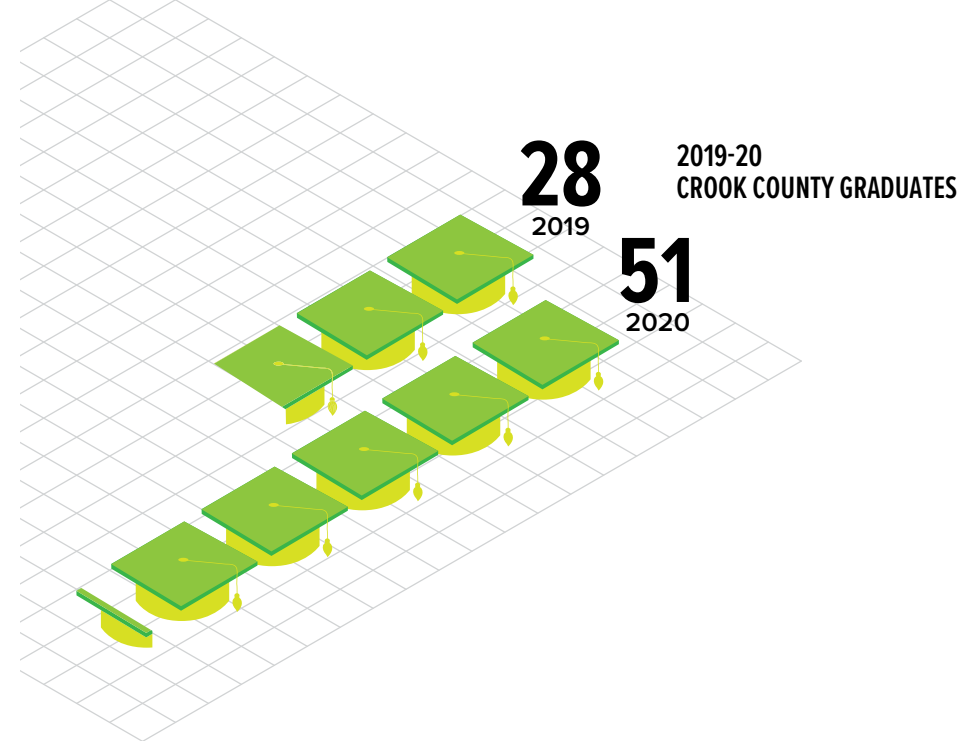
“Central Oregon’s rural communities have access to top-notch instructors, educational resources and the ability

to achieve both degrees and certificate programs,” says Jeremy Green, Madras campus director. “It’s an opportunity that changes the potential trajectory of life. Our Jefferson and Crook county campuses allow people in rural communities to thrive where they live.”

While each person brings their own individual talents and imprint to the workforce, they’re part of a collective whole, an enduring impact that contributes to the economic well-being of Central Oregon.

While many COCC programs—from Culinary to Outdoor Leadership—operate solely from the 200-acre Bend campus, and the Redmond campus has its own lineup of coursework and standalone programming, such as Veterinary Tech and Manufacturing, the Madras and Prineville campuses provide gateways for transfer and terminal degrees and certificates.

Thirty-one miles away, southeast through fields and farmland, and anchoring the southern city limits of



Prineville, the COCC Crook County Open Campus serves approximately 10,000 residents of Prineville and the county’s outer populations. Last year, 51 Crook County residents graduated from COCC—a noteworthy jump from 28 grads just the year before.

“Being able to do all my prerequisites in Prineville was so helpful,” says dental assistant Ashley Kingsford, who

graduated this past June. “It saved me a lot of time and money, with not having to travel to Bend to get them done.” Now working for Gentle Dental in Redmond, she’s part of an essential industry with a rewarding mission. “Seeing a patient come in with some problems and then being able to help them achieve the look and smile they want...is amazing.”

“Being able to do all my prerequisites in Prineville was so helpful. It saved me a lot of time and money.”



Ashley Kingsford

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FIRM STANDING

As Central Oregon contends with a long-term economic rebound in the age of COVID-19, COCC will play a fundamental role on a larger scale. Alumni are an important part of this recovery—so is the full reach of the College, its operations and employees.

In 2018, COCC employed 530 full-time and part-time faculty and staff. Factoring in the full economic impression of all employees, students, alumni and expenditures, the College added nearly \$300 million in income to Central Oregon in 2018-19—some 2.5% of the total gross regional product. Though the data pertains to pre-pandemic times, it reflects the evident impact and firm standing that COCC provides.

Over at the Bend campus, an automotive class is underway, with students and staff masked-up and safely distanced for a high-tech alignment demo that utilizes wall-mounted digital cameras. For now, while most classes at COCC are offered virtually, some hands-on



programs, like Automotive Technology, have been able to scale back and stay in-person. It's one of many programs at COCC that constantly update curriculum and training to stay current with ever-evolving technology.

For Roger Lee, CEO of Economic Development for Central Oregon, reliably current curriculums help define inner strength for the region. "Considering

"Considering that many of the manufacturing and tech jobs we'll need to fill in five years don't even exist today, technical training and education provided by COCC is essential for ensuring the emerging and existing workforce is prepared for employment, and our nearly 1,000 traded-sector businesses have access to that human talent."

that many of the manufacturing and tech jobs we'll need to fill in five years don't even exist today, technical training and education provided by COCC is essential for ensuring the emerging and existing workforce is prepared for employment, and our nearly 1,000 traded-sector businesses have access to that human talent," he says.

As Central Oregon works to emerge from a period of economic uncertainty and find strong footing again, COCC is an integral cornerstone in the region's recovery. With education and community, so much is possible. ■

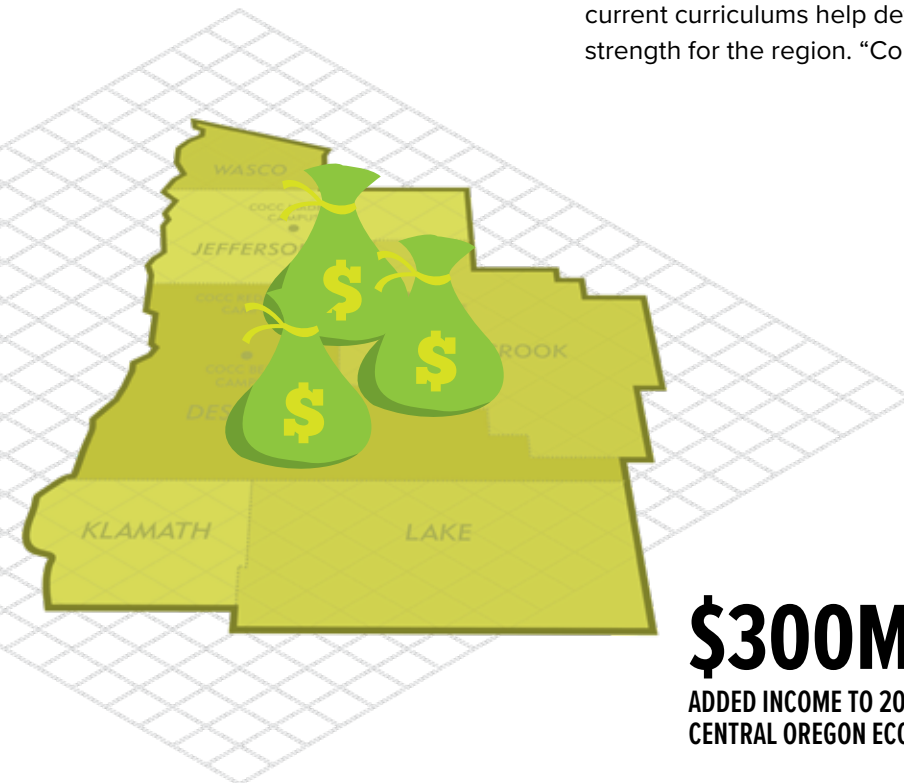
ON THE FRONT LINES

In professions of helping and healing, recent grads put their training into action as essential workers during the pandemic

When the air conditioning conked out at Interfaith Medical Center in Brooklyn, New York, last June, the sweltering hospital was already flooded with COVID-19 patients and their caretakers, who wore stifling layers of personal protective equipment. It was an extreme scene, remembers Nicholas Reid of Bend, who'd heeded the call to help an overwhelmed city in crisis, journeying there as a travel nurse.

"It must have been 95 or 100 degrees in the hospital," he recalls. "It was in the middle of where the pandemic was the worst in Brooklyn." The 287-bed facility, located in a low-income area, would discover how tragic the summer's surge would turn. "One night," Reid says gently, "we coded 20 people."

But for this RN, who earned his nursing degree from COCC in 2019, and who ultimately spent four months in the midst of New York City's first COVID-19 wave, the call to do something was compelling. "They needed us out there," he says. "I just felt this really big pull to go to the front lines."





“We were breathing for them, we were giving them all the lifesaving measures. To have them recover, that’s what kept me going. You hold onto those little successes.”



Nicholas Reid

Nurses from near and far banded together to meet the coronavirus head-on, hour by hour, patient by patient. Many lives were pulled back from the brink. “We were breathing for them, we were giving them nutrition, all the lifesaving measures...to have them come back and turn back into people, that’s what kept me going,” Reid shares. “You hold onto those little successes.”

For weeks on end, Reid would work six long days with a single day to recover. Every shift was an unnerving ritual of disappearing into one-piece Tyvek “bunny suits,” then gowns, respirators and goggles—like armor for health care workers.

The brightly colored walls and painted fish of the pediatric floor he worked on—refashioned as a coronavirus wing for adult patients—served as a constant calming influence amid the intensity. Outside, beyond the chaos

of the hospitals (Reid also worked at Mount Sinai Beth Israel), a strange and silent world existed. On his second day in the city, he visited a site that reliably ranks as the busiest tourist spot in the nation: “I walked out in Times Square, and there was nobody—I was the only person out.”

Now back in Bend and working as a critical care float nurse at St. Charles Health System, Reid is once again in the thick of things, as evidenced by a recent workweek. “Seven in-a-row nights, six of those were with COVID patients,” he says. “It’s pretty intense over there right now.”

In his float role, Reid never knows what the day will hold, whether he’ll be assigned to inpatient rehab or working with psychiatric patients. But he does know that his work reinforces a mantra he shares nightly with his two young daughters at bedtime: We care for others.

When this nurse graduated from COCC, he was one of 48 in his cohort, the typical size of the program’s graduating class (though it’s planned to expand to 56 this fall)—and a timely, vital wave of front-line workers at a moment when the national nursing shortage has converged with the pandemic.

Waves of other COCC grads join “helping” professions each year, including as certified nursing assistants, health information managers and public health workers. In 2020 alone, a high number of students from the Medical Assistant (21), Fire Science (11) and Paramedicine (19) programs graduated and began to put their training into action. Near and far, COCC alumni are making an impact.

STAYING ON THE LINE

In the deep clutch of Alaska, where the broad, braided waters of the Yukon River fill the flatlands south of the Arctic National Wildlife Refuge, there’s a small dirt-road community of several hundred residents who call a former trading post home. Fort Yukon might be remote, but when summer fires flare up in this rugged span of country—a sea of forest, national preserves and conservation areas—it serves as a crucial air base.

“They had four different fires going on at the same time,” says Angel Cisneros, a paramedic with the U.S. Forest Service, “and they would fly me into

one of those incidents in a helicopter.” For Cisneros, her three-week June deployment morphed into one long fluid day. “That’s right at the Arctic Circle,” she says, still marveling at the memory, “and the sun doesn’t go down.”

Fire-line medics follow the crews, staging themselves nearby. They tend to everything from minor nicks and heat exhaustion to chainsaw cuts and burns—and occasionally things more grave. Vehicles sometimes roll over in unstable terrain. Trees topple. Helicopters can go down (which happened last summer at Oregon’s White River Fire).

Medics wear the green-and-yellow Nomex gear of a firefighter, shoulder a 40-pound medical pack and are usually identifiable by their blue hardhat.

Cisneros earned her Emergency Medical Services (EMS) degree at COCC in 2015—inspired by an instructor to become a fire-line medic—and her Fire Science degree at the College a year later. For this recent graduate, it’s a rewarding path, one characterized by daily challenge and constant travel. “I like the whole variety,” she says. This past summer alone, in addition to her stint in Alaska, she deployed to fires in Washington, Colorado and Oregon, including the Holiday Farm and Lionshead fires that engulfed Oregon. Things got dicey on Mount Jefferson.

“I was on Lionshead for 21 days solid,” she says. “There were a lot of very intense moments where they had called us off the mountain...when the wind events came up and you couldn’t see past the front of your car sometimes with all the smoke and the dust with the wind. When it’s blowing like that, and the winds are changing, too, you can start to get crowning, and that means fire is going from treetop to treetop and embers can start flying everywhere. You don’t ever want to be in a position like that.”

Part of Cisneros’ focus this year had little to do with normal paramedic work. “The challenging part of this whole fire season, of course, was COVID,” she says. As a seasonal paramedic for both Blue Mountain Hospital in John Day and Cascade Medical Transport, and a longtime volunteer for the Sisters Fire Department, she’d already trained on COVID-19 protocols prior to fire season.

The Forest Service quickly appointed her as a COVID-compliant field operations tester, with temperature checks and nose and throat swabs for colleagues becoming the new routine.

By the time she got to Colorado, the virus was spreading faster than wildfire in the West. At the runaway Cameron Peak Fire, where at one point some 1,200 to 1,500 personnel were revolving through every two weeks, her work was crucial at identifying and isolating cases. “You had crews from all over the United States, including Alaska and Hawaii,” she says of an abnormally long deployment that stretched into early December. When she left, there were only about 60 positive cases, dating back to August. The situation could have been dire. Cisneros helped keep cases corralled—on this fire and others—ensuring that firefighters could stay healthy and stay on the line during a prolonged, catastrophic season.



Angel Cisneros



“The challenging part of this whole fire season, of course, was COVID.”

VITAL VOICES

Aimed at improving care and advancing equity, a Continuing Education program is training Spanish interpreters to speak the language of health

Navigating health care in the U.S. can be a disorienting endeavor: the vocabulary is distinct, the places unfamiliar, the overall “roadmap” is tough to read. And that’s only if English is a first language. For native Spanish speakers—a growing population in Central Oregon—traversing the care continuum can be a daunting task.

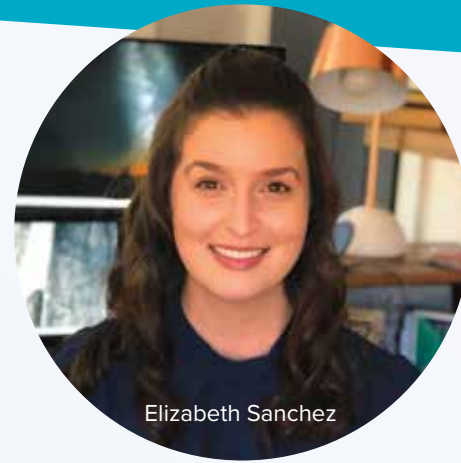
During the past decade, a specialized program through COCC’s Continuing Education department (formerly operated by the Cascades East Area Health Education Center), has trained individuals to become Spanish language health care interpreters. “It’s really about providing health equity and better health outcomes for patients whose first language is Spanish, for those with Limited English Proficiency (LEP),” explains Nancy Jumper, program manager. “Without a qualified interpreter, there are opportunities for errors and Spanish-speaking patients may not ask questions to clarify.”

Taught bilingually, the state-certified training covers medical terminology,

anatomy and physiology, and normally takes four to six months to finish, with a clinical practicum as the final measure.

“I am convinced interpreters save lives,” says Elizabeth Sanchez, who completed the program in 2015 and works as the language access coordinator for Deschutes County Health Services. State data, she says, reveals that those with LEP have a 63% higher likelihood of hospital readmission. Many simply end up with longer stays, which creates other dilemmas: “In the 20% longer stay that LEP patients typically have, they incur 40% higher emergency room test charges.” With better communication, better and more affordable care follows.

Another alumnus of the program, Tamara Salazar, is a recent graduate of COCC’s Health Information Management program who works as an intake specialist for The Center in Bend. Most of her interpretive work has been as a volunteer with Volunteers in Medicine. “I saw the opportunity to put my skills to use,” she says.



Elizabeth Sanchez

“It’s really about providing health equity and better health outcomes for patients whose first language is Spanish.”

COVID, of course, has complicated all in-person care for LEP individuals—with masks and language comprehension creating something of a double barrier. “It’s hard to hear patients, even in a small room,” adds Salazar. “Everyone is more focused on keeping a distance, protocols are different... things are changing on a regular basis.” But she’s helping bring a vital voice—in a crucial moment—to those in need, serving an LEP population that’s estimated to be nearly 220,000 in Oregon.



Brian Hodges

Building that strong therapeutic relationship with a client is the single most important part of any treatment process.

IN A PERFECT STORM

Amid the increased stress, sustained isolation and economic upheaval of this past year, many Americans have turned to alcohol consumption and drug use as a way of coping. For those seeking drug and alcohol treatment, it’s been something of a perfect storm.

Drinking during the pandemic has increased by 19% for adults aged 30-59, a study by the RAND Corporation discovered, with binge drinking notably on the rise, particularly among women—who recorded a 41% spike. As of this writing, the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention predicts that 2020 will reach a new apex in drug overdose fatalities. Support for those struggling with substance abuse is more crucial than ever.

“COVID and the stress related to everything that comes with it has definitely made seeking and achieving

recovery more difficult,” says Brian Hodges, CADC II, a clinical supervisor of substance use disorder for BestCare in Prineville. “A big part of addiction,” he adds, “is someone’s inability to manage stress appropriately, resorting to drugs and alcohol to manage those stressors.”

In the U.S., nearly 20 million people are in substance use recovery, according to a recent National Survey on Drug Use and Health. Hodges is one of them. “I got into the treatment field because I had struggled with addiction most my life,” he shares. “I’ve seen firsthand that someone can make the changes and better their life with the assistance of someone who cared and could guide them into better thinking.”

Having earned his associate degree in Addiction Studies last year at COCC, he’s become that guide for others. Hodges uses his training and own

life narrative to best connect with others, a tricky but imperative task in the telehealth format. Building that strong therapeutic relationship with a client, he explains, is the single most important part of any treatment process. “About 90% of communication between people is nonverbal,” he adds, “so not being able to see facial expressions and body language, and all the small cues when working with someone, has made it more difficult for both the provider and the client.”

Still, through videoconferencing and phone calls—essentially taking the front lines online—Hodges and his colleagues offer strength in an ominous time. “What I find most meaningful,” he says, “is seeing people who have at times lost control of their lives, regain hope and discover that they not only can stay sober, but achieve much, much more.” ■

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A SCHOOLHOUSE STORY

How a growing Bend preschool has faced the pandemic era, with training and guidance from COCC's Small Business Development Center

Katie Brandow is in the business of nurturing discovery, little step by little step. As the founder of a Bend school for early learners—which enrolls more than 75 preschoolers and kindergartners at its eastside location—she incorporates topics like music and Spanish into everyday learning.

After years of leasing space for her School of Enrichment, Brandow decided to take a step of her own—more like a leap, actually. She purchased a five-acre, tree-ringed east Bend campus with two schoolhouses that would serve as a more permanent place of discovery for little learners. The timing couldn't have been tougher: Almost immediately, the coronavirus arrived in Oregon.

Suddenly juggling safety concerns, state-ordered shutdowns and loan applications, plus a staff of nine and the futures of many little ones and their families, Brandow found herself reaching for every tool in the business owner's box. But as a recent alumna

of the Small Business Management Program at COCC's Small Business Development Center (SBDC), she was solidly positioned for the moment.

"I was originally drawn to the SBDC so I could learn how to work toward the vision I hold for the school, rather than the day-to-day operations," Brandow says. Prior to COVID-19, that training helped steer her through the Small Business Administration's 504 loan process, gaining funding for her expansion through community-based nonprofit corporations.

When Congress responded to the pandemic by rolling out the Paycheck Protection Program—and with it, many unknowns—Brandow received help with application calculations and potential forgiveness interpretations. "The SBDC also shared COVID-related grant opportunities with me, which I was successfully awarded," she says.

As part of the SBDC's two-year management program, students have

a direct connection with program manager Jim Wilcox, a relationship that has proven essential. "I never felt like the program or the support ended," says Brandow, now operating with an emergency license during the pandemic. "Jim has continued to be a reliable resource for rules, grants and the most important considerations during this challenging time."

"I was originally drawn to the SBDC so I could learn how to work toward the vision I hold for the school, rather than the day-to-day operations."

Each year, the Small Business Management Program launches a two-year cohort; the next one begins February 2022. The program covers an entrepreneur's full playbook, including marketing, sales, operations, employee management, accounting and finance. It runs nine months of the year, with three hours of class time and two hours of advising each month (held virtually for now).

From specialty classes, such as "Digital Marketing" and "Preparing for Launch," to free consultation, find out how the Small Business Development Center can bolster your business. Contact: 541.383.7290 or sbdc@cocc.edu. No-cost advising sessions are currently being offered via phone and Zoom. ■

2020 COCC SMALL BUSINESS DEVELOPMENT CENTER

Helped **479** Central Oregon businesses

Assisted in securing nearly **\$12M** in loans

CLIMBING LADDERS

Students reach for new levels with support from COCC Foundation scholarships



Jaycelene
Brisbois
Sociology

"Climbing ladders" is a common catchphrase for Jaycelene Brisbois, who uses the metaphor as a way to summarize moving forward in life—reaching rungs of understanding, achievement and self-empowerment. For Brisbois, a first-generation college student, she seems to be climbing several ladders simultaneously.

"I have tried college before, and funding has always been my hurdle."

In addition to studying for her Associate of Arts Oregon Transfer degree full-time and being a busy mom to six children, Brisbois also works, full-time, in a challenging environment. "I work as an opioid abuse prevention coordinator for the Confederated Tribes of Warm Springs," she says. Drawn to advocacy and the empowerment of individuals, the Sociology student enjoys interacting with people and hopes

to further her career in substance abuse prevention and community education. "I'm really interested in sharing my knowledge and teaching what I learn to others," she says.

Attending college in normal times, without a pandemic, is challenging enough. But for Brisbois, despite some slight speedbumps, the experience has gone well. "There are some hiccups and moments of awkward Zooming, but other than that it has been smooth sailing," she says. One of her main motivators, she shares, is to inspire her children to work hard and follow their dreams.

"I have tried college before, and funding has always been my hurdle," she says. "This scholarship has taken that out of the equation, and really supported me in paying for school and making ends meet in the home."



Zachary
Dehnert
Computer Information Systems

Knowing what you're good at is a small part of shaping a career—finding the right path to get you there is the real crux. With a natural aptitude for computers, Zach Dehnert was building websites by the age of 12. He could take hardware apart and easily reassemble it. "I fell in love with the field of computers when it felt like I was performing magic by helping friends and family," says the Redmond resident.

After starting at a four-year university and quickly realizing it wasn't a good fit, Dehnert left school and fell back on his largely self-taught knowledge as a freelancer. But while he had the mind and passion for what he wanted to do, he realized he needed the requisite, fast-evolving training.

Now at COCC, Dehnert recently completed his Associate of Arts Oregon Transfer degree with a focus on Computer Information Systems and

is currently earning a certificate in the growing field of cybersecurity. "IT is much like martial arts, where you get 'belts' and progress off previous knowledge," he describes. "I'm hoping to be a black belt." That training, coupled with his professors' "great experience and access to businesses around this area," is helping to position him for a new trajectory.

"I am so grateful... this has truly helped me..."

Having worked in the College's computer labs, helping students with tech support and IT needs, Dehnert has been able to perform that "magic" again, with all the right tools. "I try not to think too far ahead," he says, contemplating his future, "but I know that I would fit into most IT jobs." Thanks to Foundation scholarship support, he's ready. "I am so grateful... this has truly helped me focus on my education."



TO THE FULLEST DEGREE

An academic collaboration between COCC and Oregon State University - Cascades optimizes the path for those on the bachelor's degree track

Bobcats and Beavers share a lot in common. Well, perhaps not in the animal kingdom, but for students of COCC and OSU-Cascades—Bobcats and Beavers, respectively—there's long been a connection, dating to 2001, when OSU-Cascades sited its original presence in a building at COCC. The students took classes together, they shared a campus, forged a common experience.

When OSU-Cascades officially opened its own campus in 2016, two miles (and five roundabouts) south of COCC, the class commute may have extended a bit, but the entities are now more linked than ever. That's largely due to the Degree Partnership Program (DPP), an academic path for bachelor's degree seekers who want to optimize access, affordability and opportunities. Built upon an existing partnership, the more inclusive program—to encompass all of OSU, from Bend to Corvallis—launched in the summer of 2019.

In a recent evening Zoom session, a group of prospective students (and a few parents) logged on to learn more. "The Degree Partnership Program allows students to attain their bachelor's degree while attending both institutions," Sofia Stranieri, an admissions coordinator at COCC, tells the group. "You experience the best of both worlds." That pertains to all aspects of the college world, she describes, from course offerings and class schedules to campus life and connections with faculty.

Carmen Martinez, OSU-Cascades' transfer advisor, co-leading the Zoom session, outlines two of the greatest assets of the program: saving money and financial aid. With tuition costing less at COCC, and both institutions offering avenues of financial aid, she explains, the overall investment for students becomes more achievable. "You have access to financial aid at both institutions," says Martinez. "It opens up a door to all possibilities."

Students apply through OSU-Cascades and simply opt-in for the program. They can register for classes at both places—with COCC having a larger range of classes and class times—or start at COCC and shift to OSU-Cascades for their final two years, which means they pay lower tuition rates early on. The design is perfect for many, including those already in the workforce who need class times to sync with their existing schedule. This past fall term, 245 students signed up for the DPP. "This is my first term at OSU-Cascades,

"The Degree Partnership Program allows students to attain their bachelor's degree while attending both institutions."

and filling out my credit schedule to reach full-time status—to be eligible for full GI Bill benefits—was only possible with the classes provided by COCC," says Daniel Leifer, a disabled veteran and parent who's finding the fit just right. With a declared major of Energy Systems Engineering at OSU-Cascades, Leifer is already seeing hints of his future. "I love the engineering involved in sustainability and energy efficiency, but the challenges involved in all fields

of engineering are so diverse and consistently novel that I'm sure I'll feel fulfilled wherever I end up."

Offering a broad catalog of bachelor's degree programs, such as Computer Science, Business and Psychology—more than 20 in all—OSU-Cascades has added to the incredible depth of higher education on the High Desert. And the list grows: This past fall, the school debuted an Outdoor Products degree, a program that mixes design, engineering and outdoor recreation. Seven of its 19 major-declared students, including Oskar "Oz" Zehren, are on the DPP track.

"I've been working in the outdoor industry for years and love researching and learning about all the new gear," says Zehren, an avid snowboarder. "So when I heard about the major, it was kind of like a dream come true." Gravitating toward the field of product development, with sustainability as a special focus, Zehren is keeping

a full-time academic schedule and currently taking classes at both schools, including statistics and technical writing at COCC. "It helps me save money on classes," he says of the DPP track—and keeps the emphasis on the outdoors and the education.

COCC/OSU-Cascades Degree Partnership Program Zoom sessions are held monthly. To learn more, visit cocc.edu or call 541.383.7500. ■



Students from COCC comprise some **40%** of enrolled transfer students at OSU-Cascades.

WHEN CONNECTION MATTERS MOST

How COCC is helping students overcome technological barriers to succeed with remote studies

By Jenn Kovitz

In the canyonlands of Jefferson County's Crooked River Ranch, the only internet that Brandi Sneed had access to was through her cellular network. "We are living in our RV," says the COCC student and mother of two. "So we are not connected to any broadband." When the coronavirus pandemic forced Sneed to take her courses online, she tried to attend Zoom classes via her smartphone. But the connection was unreliable, and she could not see all her fellow classmates at once, nor could she watch the screen and participate in the chat function at the same time.

For the winter term, Sneed contacted COCC's Barber Library and checked out one of the College's Chromebooks, as well as a mobile hotspot. The latter are small, portable devices which provide wireless internet access through a cellular network. "My old computer was so out-of-date it would not run Office 365," Sneed shares. "Now I am using the loaned laptop and hotspot for all of my academics. I can see the chat and other students all at once. It has really helped my learning experience." She plans to complete her associate degree this spring and return to COCC in the fall to attend the new Community Health Worker program.

In the early weeks of the pandemic, it was apparent that COCC students' non-academic struggles were both real and varied. "We serve such a large district," notes Yasuko Jackson, COCC's eLearning instructional coordinator, "so we couldn't assume just one solution will meet our students' many challenges." Like Sneed, some degree-seekers live in areas where they cannot access reliable internet, while others have children at home whose own virtual education takes priority on their limited bandwidth. Many students lack the hardware necessary to log in to the College's Zoom-based virtual classrooms, while others have no prior experience with remote learning technologies.



"Back in March of 2020," adds Jackson, "there was more state and federal assistance available to struggling students. Companies also offered special sales on computers or hotspots. Utility companies allowed people to delay their internet bill payments. But this kind of private sector assistance is disappearing. So COCC needs to help our students now more than ever."

Barber Library, together with the COCC Foundation and the College's eLearning and Information Technology Services (ITS) departments, quickly collaborated to help solve these issues. "We got creative about how to fund broad student access to Wi-Fi

and hardware," says Tina Hovekamp, director of Library Services. "We worked with TechSoup, a nonprofit technology partner whose pricing enabled us to launch COCC's mobile hotspot lending program." COCC's Presidential Innovation Fund and existing departmental budgets purchased 33 hotspot devices for students, which Barber Library loans free of charge for a full term.

"The hotspot has been so helpful for me," reports Nursing Transfer Prep student Daniel Aguirre. "With it, I am able to stay on top of my homework and other assignments." The library also offers tablets, web cameras, graphing calculators and more, and will even deliver hardware to a student's home if they are unable to pick it up from the Bend campus.

Hovekamp witnessed how the pandemic was disproportionately impacting the rural communities in the College's district. "A hotspot only works if it can access a signal," she observes. "We have students who live in remote areas

"The hotspot has been so helpful for me. With it, I am able to stay on top of my homework and other assignments."

of Jefferson and Crook counties for whom Wi-Fi access is a near impossibility." COCC's ITS and Administration teams worked within current COVID-19 health and safety guidelines to ensure the College's four campuses remained partially open to those students who lacked necessary technologies at home. Computer labs and expanded Wi-Fi signals in campus parking lots ensure students can continue their studies.

Student Darcy Webb, who is training to be a pharmacy technician, lives in Culver and works in Madras. "The staff at the COCC Madras campus

are fantastic," Webb says. "They have always gone out of their way to help me. I mainly use the computer lab to study and print out assignments, quizzes, midterms and finals."

Yet even with access to the library's loaner hardware and campus computer labs, some students struggle with how to use remote learning technologies for the first time. "We needed to support our students with a flash course in online learning basics," says Kristine Roshau, COCC's director of eLearning. "So with the help of Sara Henson, our chair of Social Science, we were able to launch a free, one-credit technology skills class." Supported by federal funding, the new technology skills class introduces students to Zoom and Blackboard (the College's learning management system), as well as pandemic-era time management and study skills. Class size is capped at 15 students, and COCC offered a pilot of this three-week, tuition- and fee-free course this past winter and spring. "Everything we do is in service of student success," adds Roshau.

"We need to ensure that technology enables learning opportunities rather than creates barriers for our students to overcome."

Webb knows firsthand how the College's supportive approach to remote learning technologies has impacted her education. "Because of my access to the Madras campus computer lab," she reports proudly, "I was able to continue my studies—and I made the winter dean's list!" ■

Jenn Kovitz is the director of Marketing and Public Relations.

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NOTEBOOK

A quick glance at some of the latest initiatives and offerings at the College

Engineering Curiosity

Crafted with paper straws, dabs of glue and upside-down cups, the tall, tippy tower, unveiled last fall during an Early Childhood Education class, seemed like a showcase of a college student's freeform creativity. In fact, it stood for something loftier: **a new direction in early age STEM (Science-Technology-Engineering-Mathematics) instruction for the region.** As an assignment for a brand-new class at COCC, the project focused on how engineering can be part of teaching prior to third grade, embracing and inspiring STEM principles. "This is a chance to bring STEM learning into the early learning classroom," says Tracy Willson-Scott, coordinator for the Central Oregon STEM Hub, who secured an Oregon Department of Education "Innovation Grant" and co-created the training partnership with COCC. The funding, with a special focus on equity, is paying for supplies and covering the costs of the one-credit class for 15 students. These up-and-coming teachers will study new ways of connecting with children at a critical age. "We encourage our early learning educators to keep in mind that early STEM experiences begin with hands-on exploration, curiosity and wonder," says Amy Howell, Ph.D., program director for Early Childhood Education at COCC. "This is the essence of tinkering, and it's a foundation for STEM understandings."



A Thriving Mission

Housing issues and food insecurity are major challenges affecting many in Central Oregon. At COCC, a national college survey conducted in 2019 found that 22% of polled students were coping with housing challenges, including homelessness, while 41% contended with ongoing food concerns—issues only exacerbated by the ongoing pandemic. Responding to these identified needs, COCC has taken a number of steps, such as redoubling efforts to increase a donor-driven Student Emergency Fund and partnering with Thrive Central Oregon, a community resource nonprofit that serves those in need. The one-year pilot project with Thrive brings a part-time specialist to COCC who serves all four campuses and **connects students with housing assistance, health care resources and local food pantries.** "We helped 88 students during fall term," shares Emily Beck, Thrive's community outreach advocate, "connecting individuals with affordable housing, COVID-19-related rent and mortgage relief, and support of basic needs, such as food, gas money, clothing and eyeglasses."

Nursing Assistance

Even before COVID-19 stretched national health care resources thin, the field of certified nursing assistants (CNA) was on the rise. The U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics predicts an 8% growth rate for the job category between 2019 and 2029, which reflects the increasing health needs of an aging Baby Boomer generation. For years, Nursing Assistant training has been in-demand at COCC, and now a new—and already growing—**partnership with St. Charles Health System** is bringing more CNAs into the health sector. Since last fall, the College and St. Charles have been offering noncredit, college-level lectures and labs to both existing hospital workers (offered free) and community members, taught by COCC faculty at the hospital with clinical instruction by St. Charles staff. The arrangement provides a set number of state-approved classes, staged in sequence. "It's going so well that St. Charles has already asked us for a second class, offered simultaneously," says Julie Downing, instructional dean at COCC. "This is what we've strived for throughout several years of planning," says Janice Pendroy, clinical practice and professional development specialist at St. Charles. "The student response has been amazing."



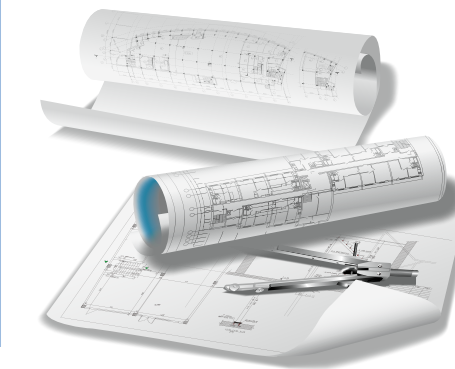
A Universe of Thought

The list has included politicians and activists, scientists and journalists, authors and historians—some coming from as far away as Morocco and South Africa—with even a special visit one year from Pulitzer Prize-nominated poet Maya Angelou. That's a sample of the voices who have taken the stage over the years for the **Nancy R. Chandler Visiting Scholar Program**, an engaging lecture series offered by the COCC Foundation since 1985. Inspired by Robert W. Chandler Sr., former owner and editor of *The Bulletin*, who founded the program to honor his late wife, this ongoing series is offered at low or no cost to the community, with student tickets always provided free. This year's spring lineup is still being finalized as of this writing; learn more and see the schedule at cocc.edu/foundation/vsp.



New to the Neighborhood

When work begins this summer on a 9.4-acre housing project on the lower part of COCC's Bend campus, the College will prepare to welcome a new neighbor—in the form of a **multifamily housing development**—and begin the process of generating a new revenue stream from the land. Located adjacent to the Cascade Culinary Institute and Elevation Restaurant, the housing development is a cornerstone in COCC's larger Campus Village project, intended to bring the College closer to the community and create a vibrant new mini-neighborhood. By partnering with Bend-based William Smith Properties as master developer, and leasing the land to developer Neighborly Ventures, COCC is actively planning for the College's future: generating added annual income to support its educational priorities. Funds from the development are intended to support COCC in a variety of ways, such as keeping tuition rates down or supporting growing academic programs. "We're excited to be partnering with the College on a project that ensures COCC is an affordable higher education option for generations of future Central Oregonians," says Peter McCaffrey, William Smith Properties' director of leasing and development. "It not only provides revenue for the College, but it will also add a host of new amenities to campus, such as coffee shops, restaurants, fitness studios and retail shops, that will all be part of the future COCC student experience."



Raising the Grade

Scholarships can activate academic success. Last year, for instance, recipients of COCC Foundation Scholarships—in programs as diverse as Biology, Fire Science and Aviation—**led the College in average GPA (3.35) and credits taken per term (2.15 more than average).** When students feel that support and personal endorsement, achievement follows. This year, with the backing of its donors, the Foundation offered \$1.72 million in scholarships—a record-setting figure for the organization—that will assist some 380 students as they pursue their educational goals. Awarded to students based on financial need and a demonstrated commitment to academic success, a single full scholarship totals \$4,500, enough to cover tuition and fees for three 12-credit terms. The other scholarship path at COCC is designed solely for local high school students and helps provide academic traction for brand-new Bobcats. Every year, the College, with allocations from its general fund, awards 50 \$2,100 Merit Scholarships to in-district seniors who have maintained a GPA of 3.0 or higher. These Merit Scholarships, like those from the Foundation, are renewable to eligible students for a second year at COCC.



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