November 29, 2008

Dear Friends and Neighbors,

“May you live in interesting times,” states a purported Chinese proverb. Interesting times, indeed.

This year we’ve elected a new U.S. president during a historic political season, been rocked by a devastating financial crisis and debated America’s role in an increasingly complex world. Every day and, especially in times like these, College of Marin is here to prepare students to think critically, improve job skills and feed passions for lifelong learning.

In 2008, College of Marin grew to meet Marin’s changing needs. I’ve outlined some of our major achievements to help you understand the myriad changes underway at our local college. Some changes are plain to see; others are taking place behind the scenes in classrooms and labs. Together, teachers, students, administrators, and community members like you are building a stronger institution to help our COMmunity flourish.

Accreditation Reaffirmed

The college stands in good stead heading into 2009. In July, the Accrediting Commission for Community and Junior Colleges, Western Association of Schools and Colleges fully reaffirmed the college’s accreditation. A testament to the hard work of our outstanding faculty, staff and the Board of Trustees, the reaffirmation of accreditation highlights the solid foundation on which the college’s academic programs is based. From here, the institution looks forward to continuing the momentum and aiming higher in achieving excellence.

Of course, College of Marin, with its excellent instructors working in small college classroom settings, has always been known for setting the academic bar high. Underscoring this point, Librarian of Congress James H. Billington announced in July the appointment of Kay Ryan as the 16th U. S. Poet Laureate Consultant in Poetry.

Kay, who has taught basic skills English part-time at College of Marin for more than 30 years, is a community college alumna. She attended Antelope Community College for two years before transferring to UCLA where she earned both her bachelor and masters degrees. She is a wonderful example of what community college students can achieve and joins the ranks of other community college success stories, including such luminaries as Robin Williams, actor and College of Marin alumnus; Arnold Schwarzenegger, California governor; Eileen Collins, National Aeronautics and Space Administration astronaut; George Lucas, film maker; Joyce Luther Kennard, California Supreme Court justice; and Jim Sinegal, Costco Wholesale Corporation CEO.

Additionally, biology professor Joe Mueller received the 2008 Terwilliger Environmental Award, given to an educator who has demonstrated active involvement in teaching the public to appreciate and protect the natural environment and by doing so improve the Bay Area. These are but two examples of the many shining stars making a difference in our students’ lives.
To continue fostering teaching excellence, the college’s Educational Excellence Innovation Fund allows faculty to dream out loud. About 30 campus initiatives have benefited from EEIF, including Business and Economics Learning Communities, Study Abroad, Medical Simulation Methodology for Nursing Education, the Sustainable Community Garden, La Academia, and Project Accuplacer, among others. For the past three years, the College of Marin Foundation President’s Circle has championed EEIF through organized fundraising breakfasts that highlight the many EEIF projects. It is through the continued backing of our generous community that innovative programs like this in support of education excellence are possible.

**Enrollment Gains**

Enrollment increased again this year, solidifying a turnaround two years in the making. Through such efforts as offering new programs, offering additional high demand classes, and reducing the number of low enrolled classes, we grew the student body this fall by 2 percent. In particular, IVC continued to see significant growth, and now serves more than 1,000 credit students. At IVC, new programs we added in response to Marin’s needs include Solar Tech and the Early Bridge to College. Additionally, we approved a memorandum of understanding with the Marin Conservation Corps to develop an organic farm that will support our Environmental Landscape program and an Organic Farm and Garden Program.

Students come to College of Marin for a variety of reasons. Many complete undergraduate requirements to transfer to four-year universities, including the University of California, California State University and private schools. Others seek to retool job skills to take advantage of new workforce opportunities. Many look to improve their lives through basic education, improved English language skills or lifelong learning.

Support services also play an important role in student success. At College of Marin we are fortunate to be able to offer high quality student services in the areas of career and academic counseling, tutorials and financial aid among many others.

In July 2008, College of Marin was certified to implement the Puente Project, a highly acclaimed English and mentoring program that supports underrepresented students’ transfers to four-year universities. The mission of the Puente Project is to increase the number of educationally underrepresented students who enroll in four-year colleges and universities, earn degrees and return to the community as leaders and mentors to future generations.

Student success is the greatest measure of our success and we are extremely proud of all of those who have passed through our doors to realize great success.

One recent alumnus in particular personifies the foundation of success College of Marin provides. Chris Hulls’ startup, Life360, was selected as a first place winner in the Google Android Developer Challenge earlier this year. Out of 1,788 entries, Life360 was one of the top 10 companies to be awarded a $275,000 prize. After studying at COM, Hulls transferred to UC Berkeley, and was accepted to the Harvard Business School. The CEO of Life360, Hulls credits COM Business and Information Systems Professor Robert Kennedy for much of his current success, calling College of Marin, “a desirable option…a springboard to a higher path.”

**Modernization Program on Schedule**

If you’ve visited either of our campuses lately, no doubt you’ve seen the future starting to take shape. Our Measure C bond modernization program reached several major milestones this past year, with the start of construction on the first of seven major building projects, half a dozen major infrastructure projects and two significant relocation projects.
In Kentfield, the Diamond PE Center renovation continues on schedule with completion slated for 2009. Signaling our commitment to sustainability, the modernized facility will include a photovoltaic system designed to produce half of the facility’s electric needs.

At IVC, we’ve broken ground on two building projects – the modernization of the Transportation Technology Complex and the New Main Building — with construction sated to finish in early 2010. Three other building projects are well along in the design process and two should be in construction by next summer. The last (seventh) project will start design after receiving a decision from the state Chancellor’s Office about funding.

In addition to the seven building projects, the district has undertaken nearly two dozen infrastructure projects since the inception of the bond program.

Most recently, heat-exchange “geothermal” fields are completed on each campus and other utility projects are well underway. Ignacio Creek erosion problems have been mitigated on the Indian Valley campus and, by the end of 2008, construction will start on a new bridge across Corte Madera Creek in Kentfield.

Planning, designing, scheduling and constructing these projects have been made possible by the collaborative efforts of five architectural teams, district administrators, Swinerton Management and Consulting managers, several engineering firms and specialty consultants and building users (faculty, staff and students). High participation from user groups, in particular, has enhanced designs for buildings and will result in facilities that better meet the instructional needs of the college.

As important as what the program involves is how we are doing it. Sustainability initiatives include green construction LEED certification for all building projects, a transportation demand management program for both campuses, mitigation measures to address potential environmental impacts of construction, and studies to advance our commitment to reducing greenhouse gas emissions by 2020.

In its most recent report on our modernization progress and finances, Measure C Citizens Oversight Committee members state that they are “pleased with the results of the District’s efforts on the Measure C bond program”. You can view committee reports on the Measure C website at www.marin.edu/MeasureC.

The modernization program also involves updating the technology used within our facilities. This year, we continue implementation of a new Enterprise Resource Planning system, which automates and streamlines core operating processes, including finances, enrollment, human resources and other activities. Through the new system, thousands of students have successfully registered using our new MyCOM portal, which is accessible through the college’s newly upgraded website at www.marin.edu.

Thanks to the generous support of the Marin community, we continue building today for a better and brighter tomorrow.

Managing Finances Wisely

College fiscal health is characterized by a balanced budget and healthy reserves and College of Marin knows that the community trusts us to manage our finances prudently. Funded by local and state government revenue, it is a responsibility that we take very seriously. Our 2007-08 unrestricted operating revenues totaled $43.3 million; unrestricted operating expenditures were $44.1 million. Our $4.6 million ending general fund balance resulted in a 10.5 percent reserve.
College of Marin students received over $6.5 million in state and federally funded financial aid support. More than half of College of Marin students received financial aid last year.

Looking Forward

Without a doubt, 2008 marked a watershed year in the development and growth of College of Marin. Our refortified foundation will serve us well in 2009. Students will continue learning, relying on our teachers and staff to help them shape their futures. Through it all — in these most exciting of times — we continue to serve our COMmunity.

With so many good things happening at College of Marin — your college — I encourage you to stop by and enjoy the fruits of our labor.

Sincerely,

Frances L. White, Ph. D.
Superintendent/President