Three Rivers ranked among fastest growing for second year

Three Rivers has again been named one of the fastest growing community colleges in the nation among institutions our size.

For the second year in a row, Three Rivers has made the fastest growing list compiled by Community College Week, the nation’s leading periodical for community, technical, and junior colleges and an official publication of the American Association of Community Colleges. Last year, we were ranked seventh. This year we took the No. 5 spot for colleges with 2,500-4,999 students.

During the time period for the rankings, Fall 2011 to Fall 2012, enrollment at Three Rivers rose by 417 students, with an overall 10% jump in enrollment.

The college’s explosive growth has been the result of an institutional focus on finding and meeting the needs of the college’s 15-county service region.

We’ve put intense effort into working within the communities we serve and forming partnerships with local employers and leaders. We’ve customized our career/technical programs and job skills training to meet the needs of residents who want to build a better future for themselves. That focus is clearly paying off.

Students can now take courses at the Three Rivers Poplar Bluff campus; at centers in Sikeston, Dexter, Kennett, Malden, Willow Springs, and Cape Girardeau; at satellite sites throughout Southeast Missouri; and also online.

Another key to our success has been a focus on retention efforts. Through the use of intensive advising, enhanced academic and student support services, and early identification of at-risk students, Three Rivers is working to help more students succeed and progress toward their education goals. We are committed to helping students develop the skills and earn the degrees that will improve their careers and lives.

At Three Rivers we strive to be the best higher education institution in Southeast Missouri and stay clearly focused on our mission. To see our hard work recognized on the national stage is the best kind of reward.
Testimony promotes community colleges, equity funding to legislators

The fight for funding equity in state appropriations is one of the highest priorities in Three Rivers’ legislative agenda. Thanks to the Missouri Community College Association, I had the honor and opportunity of taking the fight for equity to Jefferson City in January.

Speaking not only as President of Three Rivers but also as Chair-Elect of MCCA’s Presidents/Chancellors Council, I partnered with Dr. Craig Larson, Board chair at St. Louis Community College and Chair-Elect of MCCA’s Board of Directors, to testify before the Missouri House Education Appropriations Committee. We explained the vital role that community colleges across Missouri play in developing a strong economy for our state and asked for fair and adequate funding.

We started by reminding the representatives of the massive role that community colleges play in higher education in Missouri by serving over 100,000 students, over 40 percent of the higher education enrollment statewide. Another 125,000 people take non-credit classes.

Thanks to the community-oriented, highly flexible nature of two-year institutions, enrollment at Missouri’s community colleges has exploded, growing 50 percent since 2000, and 25 percent in the past five years alone.

The reason for this growth is plain: community colleges are the most economically effective form of higher education. Unlike the general education or liberal arts degrees churned out by four-year institutions, our workforce programs are based on economic projections of the number of jobs available in those fields. In other words, students who enter workforce programs at a two-year institution know going in that there will be a job on the other side if they complete their certificate or degree. As I told the committee, no one has ever asked a student who’s training to be an electrician or a welder what he’s going to do with that degree.

The training leads to jobs that change the lives of our students. A firefighter trained in Three Rivers’ Fire Science programs can expect to start out making $40,000, right here in Southeast Missouri. This is a dramatic jump from the $15,000 per year that minimum-wage workers can expect to make, if they’re allowed to work full-time. Spread across a lifetime, it represents hundreds of thousands of dollars in extra income.

In addition to benefitting students, community colleges, and the training we provide are vital to the Missouri economy. The workforce that we train helps attract and retain employers such as Boeing, Briggs and Stratton, and Unilever. MCCA’s member institutions have delivered over a billion dollars in workforce training across the state and have trained over 30,000 workers through our Customized, New Jobs, and Job Retention Training programs.

The pipeline of highly skilled, highly trained workers that community colleges create is key to keeping Missouri attractive to the manufacturers that fuel our economy. It is a role that only community colleges can fill.

This vital and irreplaceable role of two-year institutions is why we asked the committee to correct the crippling oversight that Governor Nixon made when he announced his latest education budget proposal. Community colleges enroll close to 40 percent of higher education students in the state, yet receive only 14 percent of the state higher education appropriations. The Governor’s proposal to allocate only $7.9 million in new funding for community colleges, while four-year institutions receive over 10 times that amount, isn’t just unfair, it also threatens to negate the progress we have made in recovering Missouri’s economy.

In the face of the overwhelming facts about the benefits of community colleges, we call on Missouri’s legislators to make the right choice - the choice for equity in funding, the choice to drive funding and opportunity of taking the fight for equity to Jefferson City in January.

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State officials recognize Three Rivers as an influencer

State officials continue to recognize Three Rivers as an influencer. In January, Missouri House Speaker Tim Jones chose Three Rivers as a stop on his 4G Agenda Tour of the state. In addition, Three Rivers’ efforts were recognized at an event to announce that Butler and Ripley counties were among the first in the nation to be designed Certified Work Ready Communities.

A large crowd filled the Tinnin Center lobby to hear Jones explain his 4G Agenda, which includes growth, guaranteed access to an education, generating energy, and guarding values.

At Three Rivers, we were particularly interested in Jones’ support of guaranteeing access to a great education for all Missouri students. He said education should be one of the areas that benefit from Missouri’s budget surplus.

Allen Brooks, a member of the Three Rivers Endowment Trust, asked Jones about the disparity in funding between two-year and four-year colleges. Jones said the state needs to do more so that community colleges like Three Rivers are treated fairly.

Jones also said he hopes the legislature will pass a capital improvement bill to provide funds for colleges for construction and repair of buildings and infrastructure. With such funds Three Rivers could address deferred maintenance issues on our older facilities.

At the Work Ready event at the Greater Poplar Bluff Area Chamber of Commerce, Gov. Jay Nixon announced that Butler and Ripley were among just five counties in the nation to earn the Certified Work Ready designation.

The designation is earned by achieving goals in the number of businesses that make a commitment to the program and the number of residents who earn a National Career Readiness Certificate, which uses a WorkKeys assessment to gauge a worker’s abilities in math, reading, and locating information.

Three Rivers is proud that one of our students, Whitney Welker of Patton, scored platinum on the WorkKeys exam, confirming her proficiency in the skills necessary for 99 percent of the jobs in the WorkKeys database. Whitney is in an elite class of 150 students out of 38,000 nationwide to score at this level. She is a dedicated Three Rivers student athlete and member of our Lady Raiders Basketball Team.

Several Three Rivers faculty members played an important role in the Work Ready project. Julie Becker and Dr. Martha Kirkman, members of the College Business Department, worked diligently to identify and facilitate the testing of a large number of students who acquired their National Career Readiness Certificate.

Missouri’s economy is rebounding and the future looks bright. Much of this is due to organizations such as the chambers of commerce of Poplar Bluff and Ripley County, which both realize the importance of focusing on workforce development initiatives that create opportunity and promise for our region and our state.

Three Rivers meets all five performance funding indicators

Many months of hard work and development have paid off with the announcement by the Missouri Department of Higher Education that Three Rivers has met all five of its Key Performance Indicators (KPI).

The standards, which are based on national benchmarks, not only prove the quality of education that Three Rivers delivers, they also impact the amount of state appropriations that our college receives.

The MDHE standards cover five performance areas: three-year graduation and transfer rate, math developmental success, English developmental success, licensure/certification exam pass rates, and credit hours completed per state appropriations and local tax revenues. This year’s results are based upon a reporting period of 2008-2010.

Our success in meeting these performance goals is the result of our continued institutional focus on data-informed decision making and our recent redesign of the developmental math and English courses using Title III grant funding. The new Transitional Math and English courses, through their modular, computer-based system, significantly reduce the time students spend in developmental classes and provide learning experiences tailored to a student’s skill level.

As always, we remain focused on providing a quality education at affordable costs. These benchmarks prove our success in upholding those ideals. Our thanks go to every member of our faculty and staff whose hard work has made these results possible.

Three Rivers student Whitney Welker of Patton was recognized for scoring platinum on the WorkKeys exam at the announcement of Butler and Ripley counties being designed Certified Work Ready Communities.

New Transitional Math and English courses, designed to reduce the time students spend in developmental classes, helped Three Rivers meet all 5 Key Performance Indicators.
Three Rivers President to head Chamber Board

As President of Three Rivers, I encourage our faculty and staff members to be involved in their communities. To lead by example, I have been involved with many community organizations since I was hired as the College president 4½ years ago.

One of those is the Greater Poplar Bluff Area Chamber of Commerce for which I will serve as chairman of the board of directors for 2014.

In my first speech as board chairman, given at the chamber’s annual banquet in January, I urged area residents, businesses, and officials to think positive and work together.

Poplar Bluff is an area leader in economic growth, and this is due to citizens pulling together for the common good of our community.

Poplar Bluff and all of Southeast Missouri have great potential. Now is the time to use that potential to push growth, expand economic development, and experience greatness.

Also at the Chamber banquet, Three Rivers Director of Enrollment Services Chris Adams was honored as one of the graduates of the Chamber’s Gateway to Leadership program.

State Sen. Doug Libla, a Three Rivers’ alum, presented Chamber President Steve Halter with a Senate resolution praising him for winning the 2013 Glenn Shepard Excellence in Leadership Award, a national award that honors those who have a strong work ethic and contribute to economic growth in their communities.

I nominated Halter for this award. He is known for his drive to improve the quality of life of the citizens of this area, and he is a catalyst that influences change and brings about positive community growth and development.

Confluence literary journal wins national awards

Confluence, Three Rivers’ journal of student-and staff-submitted poetry, essays, and short fiction, has won first place in the American Scholastic Press Association’s Scholastic Yearbook and Journal Awards for 2013. The 2013 issue also won a “Best Theme” award for its Indian-art-influenced visual design.

The journal is overseen by English instructor Gregory Snell and published by Three Rivers’ English department every year. Confluence contains essays, short fiction, and poetry submitted by students, faculty, and staff and judged by a panel of student readers. Each year it has a different visual theme, which is illustrated by English Department Chair Mark Sanders.

It’s exciting to see the English Department’s hard work and the talent of our students and staff given the national recognition they deserve.

Interested readers can obtain a free copy of the 2014 issue of Confluence by attending Three Rivers’ annual Open-Mic Poetry Night in the Academic Resource Commons on April 15.

Three Rivers celebrates Homecoming Week

Three Rivers invites students, alumni and community members to the college’s Homecoming Game and Block Party on February 15.

The activities at the Bess Activity Center will include a basketball game featuring the Raiders against MSU-West Plains at 7 p.m., the crowning of the Homecoming King and Queen at halftime, and a Block Party featuring music and food immediately after the game.

Please join us in celebrating our school spirit on February 15. Homecoming is a time of great excitement and energy at Three Rivers, and we welcome everyone from our service area who wants to share in fun and fellowship with us.

Patrons to bring Eagles Tribute Concert

The Three Rivers Patrons of the Arts will present Take It to the Limit, a concert tribute to the famous ’70s/’80s band The Eagles, at 7 p.m. Thursday, March 27, at the Tinnin Fine Arts Center on the Poplar Bluff Campus.

Take It To The Limit - Tribute to the Eagles is one of the hottest shows in Branson, where the tribute band is headquartered. Jon Sousan, a Poplar Bluff native who performs as Don Henley, and his bandmates are bringing the show to the Tinnin Center for this special performance.

The concert will take the audience on a musical journey through more than 30 years of Eagles classic hits, including “Hotel California,” “Witchy Woman,” “Life in the Fast Lane,” and “Take It to the Limit.” Don’t miss this evening of incredible entertainment at the Tinnin Center!

Tickets are just $10 each. Buy tickets online now at trcc.edu/tinnin.

Now is also the time to buy tickets online for the Moscow Ballet, which will perform The Sleeping Beauty at the Tinnin Center at 7 p.m. Monday, April 28. Tickets are $10 and are expected to sell out quickly.