

COCONINO COMMUNITY COLLEGE HISTORY

As told by:

Dr. Patricia (Odgers) Gibson – Steering Committee Secretary, one of CCC’s first instructors, now Associate Professor in the College of Education: Educational Leadership at NAU.

Mr. Paul Neuman – One of CCC’s founding board members and a former employee of NAU, now Vice President of Information Technology Services at Arizona Western College in Yuma, AZ.

In 1990, Dr. Gibson noticed a newspaper ad that invited anyone interested in forming a community college to attend a meeting at the County Board of Supervisors office on Cherry. Dr. Gibson’s husband asked her this question, “How involved do you think you might get?” She didn’t tell us what her answer to the question was; however, she did say that she had wondered for a long time why Coconino County didn’t have a community college.

Dr. Gibson attended the meeting on a Monday evening. Mr. Jim Anderson, Coconino County Supervisor, spearheaded this effort. He had put the ad in the newspaper. There were about 13 people in attendance at this meeting. Mr. Anderson said that they were going to “try again” to establish a community college. This implied that it had been tried before; in fact, it had been tried four or five times previously. The biggest deterrent was NAU and the President, Dr. Walkup, as he viewed a community college as competition. Dr. Walkup was a very strong personality for a long time in the Flagstaff community. In 1979, Dr. Eugene Hughes was selected as President of NAU and had a different view of a community college. He considered it to be a feeder source to NAU.

At this meeting, Mr. Anderson said that he wanted this effort to be a grass roots group. So Mr. John Cavanaugh, who was in attendance, became president of the Steering Committee. Ms. Sue Curd, a manager at the Arizona Bank, became the vice president of the Steering Committee. Dr. Gibson was the secretary, and at that time, she was working at Flagstaff High School as a computer instructor and also for Yavapai College Flagstaff extension as a part-time computer instructor. W.L. Gore contributed about \$500.00 toward the effort and they were the only financial contributor. This contribution was used for postage expenses. Citizen’s Gas Company provided the use of their meeting room for the weekly meetings. All the legal information was gathered and Ms. Mary Nackard, County Superintendent of Schools, also provided advice on the process. Weekly meetings started taking place and in attendance were representatives from Page, Mr. & Mrs. Dan Baertlein from Williams, occasionally a few people from the Grand Canyon, and a few from Sedona. The grass roots committee consisted of about 10-15 people. Whenever something was needed, usually one of the committee members knew someone who would supply what was needed.

Mr. Roger Esplin provided a lot of the supplies for making signs. The committee members spread the word about establishing this new community college. Presentations were given to the various civic organizations, Dr. Gibson did radio advertisements, and she and Mr. Cavanaugh

also collected signatures for petitions. While Dr. Gibson was collecting signatures, Mr. Terry Hance, County Attorney, approached her and told her that he spoke for the “big people” in the City and a community college was not needed because they had NAU.

Enough signatures were gathered to put the community college initiative on the ballot. The wording on the ballot read: “Will you allow Coconino County to create a community college district,” yes or no? The answer was yes (67percent) and there was no commitment to funding. This election was held in November of 1990.

Mr. Neuman provided this additional information: Before CCC was created, the last community college district to be established was Mohave Community College in 1971. They managed to circumvent some of the rules and regulations as they didn’t have the necessary population or the tax base, but they still were able to form their community college. The legislature was furious about this, so a multi-step process was created to make it as difficult as possible to create any more community colleges.

Dr. Gibson said it was very clear from the time she and Mr. Cavanaugh met with the various community groups that they wanted the community college to focus on an occupational/technical emphasis. They specifically didn’t want any sports or dorms. They wanted the college to use the classrooms in the high schools devoted to technical training during evening hours. The voters were saying they didn’t want a big budget operation.

So, the 67 percent yes vote described above was only the first step. Some costs had been developed by the Steering Committee for a very minimal operation: A college without walls – would be leasing space, a few full-time faculty members, some part-time faculty members, and no buildings or capital.

After the election took place, the County School Superintendent, Ms. Mary Nackard, put an ad in the newspaper soliciting interested board members. Five board members were needed and the districts were co-terminus with the members of the Board of Supervisors. The majority of the Board of Supervisors was against the formation of the community college. One of the opposing members was Mr. Paul Babbitt. Ms. Mary Babbitt, Paul’s wife, was the state representative from Coconino County to the State Community College Board. The reason for the opposition was a fear of the community college being successful in a second election for a budget which would impose additional taxes onto the citizens of Coconino County at a time when the County was considering an increase as well. So, the community college was viewed as a competitor for the tax dollars. The Babbitts ran full-page ads in the newspaper against the formation of the community college. This was done on their own.

Mr. Paul Neuman began working for NAU in 1989 and was in charge of the distance education. He saw Ms. Nackard’s ad in the newspaper for community college board members and decided to apply. He had 12 years of experience in community colleges as a faculty member and an administrator, working at Mohave and Yavapai community colleges. He felt it was very important to develop a community college and wanted to offer his experience and expertise. Ms. Nackard had a committee of individuals from the school district, the university, and from the private sector of the community who reviewed the applications and made recommendations to

her for the five individuals. Mr. Neuman received a phone call from Ms. Nackard telling him that she had decided to appoint him to the community college board if he was still interested. Also appointed was Mr. Dan Baertlein from Williams, Mr. Charlie Brumback from Page, who had been the state representative to the State Community College Board before Ms. Babbitt; Mr. Andrew Tah, Superintendent of Greyhills High School in Tuba City, and Ms. Stella Malis, NAU employee who worked in the grants area. The Formational Meeting was held on February 20, 1991. All the board members were sworn in and Mr. Neuman was nominated as the chair due to his previous experience on an elementary school board. Mr. Dan Bartlein was nominated for the secretary position. There was initial concern that NAU was going to run this school, and ironically, the chair, Mr. Neuman, was an employee of NAU.

The first thing the board discussed was that they wanted the services being provided by Yavapai College to continue until CCC could actually begin operations. Yavapai College was being paid approximately \$100,000 a year to have classes in Flagstaff, some in Page, and a couple in Tuba City. Yavapai agreed to continue providing services for one year while CCC concentrated on getting the infrastructure in place. Next issue was to develop a budget. Mr. Neuman began the work of drafting the budget, which would have to be approved by the citizens of Coconino County at a special election in May. This didn't provide much time as the board had to approve the special election at their March meeting. May was the only time a special election could occur.

At the end of the February meeting, County Attorney Terry Hance walked up to Mr. Neuman and said that the College owed the County \$600,000 for out-of-county tuition that was paid for Coconino students to attend colleges around Arizona. Paul said that the fees were two years in the rears and the only debt they could incur was when they were created by a vote of the citizens of Coconino County, so anything prior to that was the County's problem. Mr. Neuman also said that according to the law, Mr. Hance had to provide the College with legal counsel, so he should get them a good attorney. Mr. Hance then told Mr. Neuman that he would take him to court. The County had been paying for this out-of-county tuition with fees that were collected for harvesting trees in the forest, which was being done illegally. A few years later, it was declared that this was an illegal process and the Board of Supervisors was held accountable.

Mr. Neuman drafted the budget, and as a precautionary measure, he included \$600,000 just in case of a lawsuit. The budget was only one-page and covered personnel, utilities, rental fees for 350 classrooms, and office furniture. The board members reviewed the budget and got their input back to Mr. Neuman. To complicate matters, Yavapai withdrew from their agreement to provide services for the year and said that Coconino was on its own. The reason given was that it was no longer in Yavapai's best interest to continue providing services in Coconino County. Mr. Neuman felt that the \$100,000 was probably not enough money and they would rather put that money to use in Yavapai County.

The draft budget was sent to the president of Mohave Community College who thought that it was adequate along with the state funding it would be receiving. The budget totaled \$2.2 million and estimated the first year FTSE to be approximately 1,000. The \$2.2 million in combination with the state funding would make a total of approximately \$4 - 4.5 million. Adding another community college district to the already existing community colleges in Arizona meant that the

funding for the new college would be carved out of the existing colleges' budgets, so there was some resentment toward Coconino. Before the budget was approved, Mr. Neuman asked the State Board of Community Colleges if the property tax rate set at this point was found to be too low in the future, could the College go back to the people and ask for it to be increased, and the Board said yes that could be done. This advice was wrong. The budget and the tax rate were set with an eye on getting it established and therefore it needed to be done in a manner that would be acceptable. If this initial amount that was set was not adequate in the future, hopefully future taxpayers would approve an adjustment. Now nineteen years later, Paul said, "I never ever would have believed that the state of Arizona was getting out of the education business and that's where they're headed."

So, Mr. Neuman firmly believed what he was told by the State Board about being able to go back to the people and ask for an adjustment in the base if it proved to be too low in the future. The board approved the budget at the March meeting and immediately started providing information to the public. Meetings were held in Sedona, where only two people showed up. Five people showed up at the meeting held in Williams. About eight people showed up at the Page meeting. A donation of land was offered if the first facility to be constructed was in Page.

The election was called for and the Elections Director told Mr. Neuman that the cost for the election would be \$80,000 and County Attorney Hance told the Board that they could be held personally liable for this amount. Mr. Neuman told Mr. Hance that since the legislature made this a two-step process, and with the first step being successful in creating the community college, it automatically meant that they had the authority and the budget to go forward with an election to determine if they would have an official budget, and by Mr. Hance saying that there was no budget for this, he was negating the will of the people in creating the college. Mr. Hance told Mr. Neuman to divide \$80,000 by 5 to which Mr. Neuman replied, "Its \$16,000 per person, we're going forward." The elections director asked how he should bill the cost and Mr. Neuman told him to bill the College after they successfully passed the election and it would be paid at that time.

Two or three meetings took place in Flagstaff and a very limited amount of people attended. One meeting was held in Tuba City. The conclusion was that the election would either fail miserably or the voters who had previously supported the concept of a community college would also vote to approve the levy. Mr. Neuman did not recall any obvious support from NAU during this time; however, they did support the concept of a community college. The only people who campaigned against the community college were the Babbitts. The main reason that Ms. Babbitt didn't want this local community college was that the State Community College Board was of the belief that all community colleges should be controlled by the State Board and not by local district governing boards. Neither Mr. Neuman nor Ms. Gibson recalled any conversations with any of the larger tax payers about college support.

The tax levy election on May 21, 1991 was successful. The levy passed by almost the same percentage as the concept vote, 67% in favor, 33% opposed. The next day Mr. Hance called Mr. Neuman and told him he was in violation of State law because he had not published the budget in the newspaper for a certain number of consecutive times. Mr. Hance told Mr. Neuman if he didn't have the budget published in the newspaper by the next morning, he would

recommend to the Board of Supervisors that they provide the same amount of funding next year that they had provided the current year. Mr. Neuman said, "Which would be 0 dollars, correct?" Mr. Hance said, "Yes sir." So, Mr. Neuman explained the situation to the newspaper manager and he ran the budget on a special insert in the newspaper the next morning. Mr. Neuman paid for the ad with a personal check.

He now went to NAU President Gene Hughes and asked for his support by loaning an executive employee to the community college. President Hughes agreed to loan Dr. John Glenn, Dean of Continuing Education, to Coconino Community College as its first president. Dr. Hughes said that NAU would continue to pay Dr. Glenn's salary and CCC could provide reimbursement of his costs and a 10-15% stipend was provided by CCC also.

Now the search for a suitable space began. The site where the current Fourth Street campus is located today was a shopping center at the time and had been foreclosed on during the savings and loan debacle in the late 1980's. The asking price was \$600,000 for 60,000 square feet; however, the College could not purchase a building, but they could lease. So Mr. Neuman negotiated a lease agreement with the new owner for 6,000 square feet and it was to be remodeled to fit the College's need. He then told Dr. Glenn that he could use up to \$10,000 to furnish his office and classrooms and could make the purchases only in Coconino County. Since the College didn't have an HR department yet, they contracted two Yavapai College employees for one year. Remodeling began on the building in July.

A Wang computer was donated to the College and Mr. Neuman stored it in his garage. It had 12 six foot cabinets and took up the entire garage. Eventually it was moved to the old Gold Bond store that was part of the College building. Never did get the computer operational.

SBDC gave the College a \$10,000 grant check which was restricted funds. Originally the College was told that they had to have a sophisticated computerized accounting system for payroll. Mr. Neuman asked the County Treasurer if the College could open a checking account with them and get some checks made. He asked if the checks could be written by hand and the Treasurer said they could do anything they wanted to by hand. When it was time for the first payroll checks and no funds had been received from the State, Dr. Glenn wrote checks out of his own account to cover the payroll. This was about the middle of July, and shortly thereafter, some money was received from the State. The College was now ready to open the doors and the first semester saw 600 - 800 new students. Everyone was so happy to see this long awaited College become a reality.

Shortly before classes were to begin, Dr. Glenn realized that the College didn't have any curriculum. Mr. Neuman contacted Yavapai College and asked if CCC could get a computer printout of their entire curriculum and they agreed to send it to him. He did a global search and replace and wherever it said Yavapai College he inserted Coconino Community College and the curriculum was ready to go. Mr. Neuman went to a local small book store and asked the owners if he gave them a list of books the students would be needing could they order them, and they agreed to do it. So, now CCC had a bookstore. Permission was obtained from President Hughes for the CCC students to use NAU's Cline Library.

Due to all the obstacles that the City and the County kept creating at every next step of the process, the Board took the approach that with every “no” they encountered, they were also given official permission to go around them – and they did. Limited operations began for the College on July 1, 1991. When the doors opened for the fall semester in 1991, CCC took off and continued to grow even though there were still some people who didn’t want this College to exist. Shortly after the College opened for business, it was apparent that more space was needed, so more and more of the Pine Grove shopping center became occupied by CCC.

Mr. Neuman served two years as the Board Chair and had been appointed by the County School Superintendent; now he was facing his first election in 1992. The County Supervisors were doing redistricting based on the 2000 census. The Native American population was going to challenge the redistricting, so the County redrew the district boundaries during the night and they drew a line around Mr. Neuman’s house and down the middle of his street, moving him from his existing district into another district. This made all the petitions he already had gathered null and void. He decided to write a letter to the United States Justice Department telling them that the Coconino County Supervisors had done gerrymandering at the highest level by simply redrawing the boundaries without input from the community. The Department of Justice did not tell the County who had complained but they did tell them they were in a lot of “hot water.” There came a point where had Mr. Neuman continued to press the issue, the election wouldn’t have happened, so he decided to withdraw his complaint. He was voted out but was determined to stay involved with the College.

He regrouped and decided to start the CCC Foundation. So, as the first president, he got the Foundation operational and eventually its goal was to purchase the facility on Fourth Street since the College couldn’t own it. After a few years, the Foundation was able to purchase the facility with the College as the anchor tenant.

On November 4, 1997 there was a bond election to build a new permanent campus for CCC. The Lone Tree campus was constructed on a 40 acre parcel of land owned by NAU and leased to CCC on a 100 year lease. The night of the election it appeared that the bond was going to be defeated. But the next morning it was determined that it had passed by 55 votes after the Native Americans’ votes were counted. Many people were angry because they said that the Native Americans shouldn’t have been able to vote because they didn’t own property. In three of the districts, the bond election was defeated and those three districts wanted their Board members to withhold ratification of the election, which the Board members refused to do.

The Board ratified the bond election and then in 1998 the entire Board was recalled. Two Board members, Gaye Luna and Carol Mandino, elected not to fight and left the Board. Three Board members, Paul Neuman, Val Gleave, and Dan Baertlein decided to fight. They felt that they were only trying to do the will of the voters and they were all successful in the recall election. The two people appointed to replace the two departing Board members were Dr. Nat White and Mr. Tom Atwood. The people who were instrumental in the recall election told the Board that they would recall them again in six months. Mr. Newman told them that they would have to post a bond of \$80,000 for the election and if they lost, they would lose their money. These people then backed down.

This group of people who instigated the recall election is the same group of people who had always been opposed to the creation of the community college.

Now that Mr. Neuman is no longer an elected official in Coconino County or a Foundation Board member, he feels he has more freedom to fully express himself and says he will do whatever he has to do to see Coconino Community College succeed, including testifying before the legislature.

He believes that as the State declines in its support of the colleges, Coconino probably isn't the only college who could benefit from a change in the legislation. He thinks that now might be a good time to get the other community colleges on board with the same kind of concept that CCC is proposing.

Regarding the "college without walls" concept, Mr. Neuman explained that when the College was going to be 500 or 1,000 students, this concept would work, but when the numbers increased way beyond, there wasn't enough space available to rent. So, this made it apparent that CCC needed its own space.

Dr. Gibson said that Yavapai College decided that CCC could only use their curriculum for one semester, so curriculum had to be developed for the spring semester of 1992. Dr. Gibson became the full-time curriculum coordinator and interim Dean of Instruction in addition to teaching a few courses. The task of creating the curriculum began in August of 1991 and by December, 300 courses had been written and 10-12 degrees were created. This was just another one of the many challenges encountered by CCC in the long process of establishing this community college and it was met successfully. Dr. Gibson said that CCC has earned the right to ask for more support.

There were other roadblocks along the way including the Board's attorney accusing the Board of accepting kickbacks on the award of bids for architectural services on the Lone Tree campus project, which was absolutely not true.

In November of 1991 a newspaper survey was done asking the citizens of Coconino County if they liked the services being provided by the College. Very positive responses were received. In 1994 the survey was repeated and in 1998 an environmental scan was conducted. Again the response was very positive. The childcare center was a result of the feedback gathered from the environmental scan.

Considering CCC's history composed of roadblock after roadblock, it most certainly has "earned the right" to go back to the people and ask for their support.

September 24, 2010