Three Rivers continued the expansion and improvement of its Poplar Bluff Campus as we broke ground on our new Grand Entrance in a ceremony held on March 10. The new entrance will connect the Poplar Bluff Campus to Shelby Road and will dramatically increase the safety and ease of access for students, staff, and visitors coming onto campus.

This project would not be possible without the outpouring of support we’ve received from the Poplar Bluff community, the donation of land by Dr. Richard Camp, and the funding provided by the Poplar Bluff Regional Transportation Development District Board. Poplar Bluff Mayor Ed DeGaris noted the exemplary nature of this project during his remarks at the ceremony.

“This is a great day for Three Rivers and a great day for Poplar Bluff. We appreciate not only the vision of the college in putting forward this project, but the Transportation Development District and the business owners who voted for it. They made this project possible,” said DeGaris. “We are showing Southeast Missouri what’s possible when members of the community work together toward a common goal.”

Other speakers at the ceremony included Wilbur Thornton, Trustee; Riley Bock, Chair of the Three Rivers Endowment Trust; Allen Brooks, past chair of the Three Rivers Endowment Trust; Steve Halter, President of the Greater Poplar Bluff Area Chamber of Commerce, and state Sen. Doug Lilby.

When completed in the summer of 2014, the Grand Entrance will provide a broad, two-lane entrance onto the Poplar Bluff Campus from Shelby Road, as well as a paved path for cyclists and pedestrians. The Transportation Development District will fund the $1.3 million required for construction, and Three Rivers will be responsible for landscaping and signage.

The Grand Entrance will continue the transformation of our campus into one of the most advanced and accessible community college sites in Missouri. Our students, staff, and visitors will finally have the beautiful, safe, and easy route onto campus that they deserve.

We anticipate the development of our Poplar Bluff Campus will only increase as Three Rivers continues to expand within the region.

Consider donating to the Three Rivers Endowment Trust, a 501(c)(3) not-for-profit organization that receives and manages gifts on behalf of the college. To make a donation, contact Director of Development Emily Parks at 573-840-9077.
President’s contract renewal based on growth, accomplishments

By Steve Halter, President, Greater Poplar Bluff Area Chamber of Commerce

Three Rivers College has made many good decisions over the past four years, leading the charge to transform Poplar Bluff and Southeast Missouri into a prosperous community that we can all be proud of.

We’ve come to rely on Three Rivers making good decisions, which is why I am glad that the Board of Trustees chose to continue Dr. Devin Stephenson’s tenure as College President for another four years.

Dr. Stephenson and his team have accomplished amazing things since arriving in 2009. They’ve grown college enrollment by 50 percent and doubled their presence in the Three Rivers service region. They’ve brought more than $25 million dollars in grant funding into our area. They’re building new classrooms and a new campus and adding program after program to increase the quality of our workforce in Southeast Missouri by training thousands of workers who help keep our economy strong. They’ve garnered national attention through their innovation and expansion of opportunities for students.

It’s no surprise then that Dr. Devin Stephenson and his team at Three Rivers have been getting the attention of leaders across our region. I’d like to share just a few of the many words of praise I’ve heard given to Three Rivers over the past month:

“The Higher Learning Commission, our independent auditors, and record enrollment indicate we are doing something right at Three Rivers. I think Dr. Stephenson has us going in the right direction.” - Darren Garrison, Chair of the Three Rivers College Board of Trustees.

“Dr. Stephenson has developed a vision for Three Rivers College that includes the real-life needs of our communities and meaningful career opportunities for our citizens.” - Keith Holloway, Board Member of the Three Rivers Endowment Trust.

“Dr. Stephenson has built relationships with community leaders, legislative advocates, and higher education colleagues both in Missouri and nationwide. Three Rivers really cares for our communities and our students.” - Duane Michie, CEO, First State Bank and Trust.

I’m proud to have an institution as transformative and strong as Three Rivers in our region, and I’m grateful to have Dr. Devin Stephenson among our community leaders. Here’s to four more years of great work at Three Rivers College.

Improved planning, assessment satisfy HLC

Five years of work, learning, and planning have made Three Rivers College one of the strongest higher education institutions in the state.

The culmination of those efforts came in March when the Higher Learning Commission informed the College that we have successfully eliminated all of our weaknesses in strategic planning and student outcomes assessment. Their letter testifies to the dramatic success of this administration’s efforts to reshape the planning and budgeting processes for this institution.

The Higher Learning Commission first recommended an overhaul to Three Rivers’ strategic planning and assessment systems following an accreditation visit in 1998. The HLC put greater emphasis on the requirements after its next visit in 2008 revealed that Three Rivers had made no change in the college’s assessment, planning, and budgeting processes.

In response, our administration committed to significant change in our organizational structure, and brought college and community leaders together to create a five-year strategic plan for Three Rivers called “Vision 2015.”

The College also merged planning and budgeting processes, moving to a zero-based budgeting model where expenditures are based on data-informed, strategic planning priorities. I employed Dr. Maribeth Payne as Director of Continuous Improvement to oversee the strategic planning process for the college and migrate it to a digital platform.

When HLC’s team returned in November 2013 for a follow-up visit, they came back to what team members described as a changed institution. Where planning had previously happened in a vacuum, with each department making decisions based on its own priorities, now everything must align with institutional goals and strategic themes put forth in “Vision 2015.” In addition, assessment of annual plans helps shape the next year’s plan, creating a cycle of continuous improvement.

The results of our efforts are very clear. According to the HLC team, “Solid leadership, pervasive understanding by faculty and staff of the importance of planning and assessment across the college convinced the team that Three Rivers is clearly on the path of incorporating a true plan of action for the college.”

While the immediate demand for change is finished, we are not content to rest on our laurels. With our first five-year planning cycle drawing to a close, we are already looking ahead to “2020Vision.” It is my pledge to make sure that Three Rivers has the foundation to advance with strong momentum into the future.

Building construction moving forward

Construction on our building projects continues at a breakneck pace, now that the worst of the winter weather is behind us. With each new beam and brick, it gets easier to envision the transformation the new developments bring to the college.

The walls for the FEMA Safe Room that will comprise the core of the Eastern Campus are already going up, with contractors expecting to complete that stage of construction by the end of March. Designed to withstand winds of over 200 mph, the Safe Room will ensure the safety of our students, faculty, and staff in the event of inclement weather.

On the Poplar Bluff Campus, earth work has begun for the Humanities and Social Sciences classroom building. Brush clearing and groundwork are underway for the Grand Entrance, which is on track to be completed and open for traffic by the end of July. Our new Softball Clubhouse is nearly complete, and a ribbon cutting will be held on April 16 at 10:30 a.m.
Instructor, students recognized for excellence

Three Rivers is proud of Instructor Greg Hicks and students Dustin Chaney and Megan Cook who were honored at a Missouri Community College Association ceremony in Jefferson City in March.

Greg Hicks, an Instructor of Business, received the Governor’s Award for Excellence in Teaching, an award presented to the top community college instructors in Missouri each year.

Hicks has taught at Three Rivers for over 25 years, specializing in information systems and technology. Among his achievements during his tenure is the creation of an Information Systems bachelor’s degree completion program in partnership with Hannibal-LaGrange University, and the spreading of technology throughout K-12 classrooms in the region through his Technology for Teachers course.

Dustin Chaney and Megan Cook were named to the All-Missouri Academic Team, an honor bestowed on the state’s top community college students.

Chaney is pursuing an associate of arts degree in elementary education. He plans to complete a bachelor’s degree through Hannibal-LaGrange University and return to his hometown of Sikeston to start a career as a teacher. Chaney is a peer mentor and tutor in Three Rivers’ Achieve Program, student ambassador, and student senator. He was a SkillsUSA national finalist and was elected homecoming king in 2013.

Cook is studying to become an occupational therapy assistant. She was thrilled to discover that she could get the degree she wanted at Three Rivers without leaving home. During her time at Three Rivers, Cook has shadowed a practicing OTA and volunteered with a health educator through the Scott County Health Department.

Board approves faculty, staff pay raises

At the administration’s recommendation, the Three Rivers Board of Trustees approved increases to faculty and employee compensation at its March meeting. The Board approved a 2.5 percent increase in compensation for all college professional and support staff, along with a $1,500 comparative base adjustment to faculty salaries.

When I started at Three Rivers, our research found that faculty salaries were below the state average by approximately $5,000. I promised that we would bring faculty pay up to par, and this most recent comparative increase completes that pledge.

For the professional and support staff, the increase is based on the Consumer Price Index, which measures average cost-of-living prices across the nation. With the CPI rising by 2.3% in December 2013, we chose to recommend a 2.5% increase to stay ahead of the average cost of living.

Also, the administration is taking steps toward creating a performance-based incentive system for all faculty and staff. For faculty, the system will augment the current faculty engagement structure and will involve changes in rank and promotion. Support and professional staff will assist in the development of a process similar to the current faculty engagement system. It will reward work above and beyond baseline expectations.

Our team at Three Rivers does amazing work. I remain committed to keeping Three Rivers competitive as an employer and to making sure our staff and faculty are well compensated for their hard work and dedication.

Leadership Academy is opportunity for growth

The President’s Leadership Academy provides the employees of Three Rivers College with the opportunity to gain the skills needed to become successful leaders, whether in their day-to-day lives or as future movers and shakers at our institution of higher learning.

My desire to join the Academy was born from a desire to never be complacent with my personal and professional development. I always want to push myself outside of my comfort zone and have experiences that make me a stronger, well-rounded person, both professionally and in my personal life.

Within the Academy, we have tackled many areas of personal struggle and triumph. In October, we learned team building and trust through participating in a ropes course at Loco Ropes in Mountain View, Arkansas.

When I say trust, I mean that in the most real way possible. Imagine leading a blindfolded person (I had Dr. Stephenson as my team partner - no pressure!) down a rocky hillside using only your voice as a guide, then being blindfolded yourself and giving all your trust to that person, hoping all the while that neither of you will end up sprawled face down in the dirt.

On the high ropes course, we challenged and overcame fears, learned to work together in unique ways, and left with a new idea of what teamwork really meant. When you are dangling from a cable 50 feet above the ground, you are ecstatic to see someone give you a helping hand!

Through our field trips, exercises and research projects, we have learned how community colleges are improving our communities, how the structure of our institution functions, the challenges and successes of our centers, and what it takes to both gain and utilize state and federal grant funding.

From personalities to planning, money to management, we are learning how the business, community and interpersonal slices of the community college pie work together to serve our students. On March 31, we will be traveling to Jefferson City to meet with legislators who impact our growth and sustainability as an institution of higher learning. Another piece of the pie will be revealed that happens to be a personal favorite - the political piece. I will get to learn how to wow the government powers that be on behalf of education!

I feel I have grown by leaps and bounds as a member of the Three Rivers College team through my participation in the President’s Leadership Academy. I encourage every employee to consider applying for the next round - you will be glad you did!
A ribbon cutting and open house will be held at the Three Rivers Center at Kennett on April 24. The ribbon cutting for this wonderful facility at 1002 Great West Drive will be at 11 a.m. After that the facility will be open for tours until 6 p.m.

Three Rivers remodeled this 17,000-square-foot space into a premiere higher education facility. Moving to this larger building allowed us to consolidate our Practical Nursing programs, which were formerly held in two separate locations in Kennett and Hayti. The nursing classroom and skills lab at our new Center are first rate.

The new location also includes two top-of-the-line science labs, three master classrooms, an Interactive Television (ITV) classroom, two computer labs, and a public access computer center.

Ann Matthews, Director at Three Rivers Center at Kennett, says our students are enjoying this fresh new learning environment.

We are extremely happy that our focus on building partnerships within the community has led to this new opportunity in Kennett and given us the space to continue to expand our higher education offerings in the Kennett area. Our special thanks to Mayor Jake Crafton and the entire City Council for their strong support of Three Rivers College.

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Center Stage to perform Godspell

Center Stage, Three Rivers College’s theater company, will present a production of the award-winning musical Godspell on April 11 & 12 at 7 p.m. and April 13 at 2:30 p.m. at the Tinnin Fine Arts Center.

Godspell is a beloved and long-running musical retelling of the Gospel according to St. Matthew. It has since seen multiple runs both on and off Broadway, including a film version starring Victor Garber and a recent Broadway revival starring Hunter Parrish. Songs include “Day by Day,” “Beautiful City,” and “Save the People.”

“Godspell is a perfect production for a small theater company like Center Stage,” said Bob Cook, Instructor of Theater at Three Rivers and the director of Center Stage’s production of Godspell. “We have an outstanding cast this year, and they’ve been throwing themselves heart-and-soul into the production.”

Center Stage does amazing work blending talented members of the community with aspiring acting students, under the auspices of Tinnin Center Director Bob Cook. Tickets are $10, or $5 with a valid Three Rivers student ID, and are available at the Poplar Bluff Chamber of Commerce, the Financial Services Office at Three Rivers’ Poplar Bluff Campus, or at the door.

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Patrons bring Moscow Ballet to Tinnin Center

The Moscow Festival Ballet returns to the Tinnin Fine Arts Center at 7 p.m. April 28 to perform The Sleeping Beauty.

This is the third year in a row that the Patrons of the Arts has brought this world-famous dance company to the Three Rivers Poplar Bluff Campus. The Moscow Ballet uses the highest elements of Russian classic ballet to stage exciting productions of timeless classics. The Sleeping Beauty sets the movements of classical ballet to the beautiful music of Tchaikovsky.

Tickets are $10 each and can be purchased online at trcc.edu/tinnin. For two weeks prior to each show, tickets will be sold at the Poplar Bluff Chamber of Commerce, the Dexter Chamber of Commerce, and the Three Rivers College Financial Services Office. Tickets are expected to sell out quickly.

For information on joining the Patrons of the Arts Society or sponsoring a performance, call 573-840-9527.