

*Dr. Cary Israel, President of Collin College District
photo by Chris Fritchie*



The Gift of an Education

By Debbie Vallejo

COLLIN COLLEGE serves more than 40,000 credit and continuing education students annually, offers more than 100 degrees and is the sixth largest employer in the county. The Collin College District obviously has a huge economic impact on the community. Changes in the economic landscape, along with a rise in demand for critical jobs in health-care and in technical fields, have made the role of the Collin College Education Foundation more essential to the continual success of the school.

CREATING A STRONG FOUNDATION

The Foundation was established in 1987 and its mission is to support the col-

lege by providing an avenue for creating scholarships and addressing the financial needs of students. The organization is a tax exempt corporation that is governed by a board of directors and is fiscally independent from the college.

Dr. Cary Israel is the President of Collin College District and believes strongly in the role of the Foundation. "The Foundation is critical to the success of the college," explains Dr. Israel. "There is an increase in the financial need of our students that it is imperative we continue to meet." Each year the number of students receiving financial assistance through state grants, scholarships or student loans is rising. "In 2000 our students were receiving approximately

\$2.3 million in student financial aid of some sort," explains Dr. Israel. "In 2008 more than \$19 million was awarded and we ran out of money."

FILLING THE GAP

A predominant reason behind the existence of any education foundation is the fact that state institutions are prohibited from using state monies on scholarships, and existing grants and loans do not adequately meet the financial needs of students. The money an institution receives from the state is earmarked for specific purposes, so colleges are forced to come up with their own methods of raising money.

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Dr. Toni Jenkins is the Vice President/Provost for the Preston Ridge Campus on Wade Blvd. in Frisco. "We are statutorily limited in the ways that we can utilize revenue generated from local ad valorem taxes (a tax based on the value of real estate), state funds and tuition dollars," explains Dr. Jenkins. "We cannot use these funding sources for student scholarships. That is why all of our Foundation's fundraising initiatives are designated for student scholarships.

That is our greatest need.”

There are a couple of different ways to send money to the Collin Education Foundation. Individuals can provide money to scholarship funds with a minimum donation of \$1250 annually to create a “Named” annual scholarship, or with a donation of less than \$1250 deposited in the general scholarship fund. Smaller donations are also gladly accepted, and the Collin Cabaret fundraiser allows donors to have a little fun while contributing to a worthy organization. General scholarships are awarded in the form of Presidential Scholarships, Recognition Scholarships and other awards.

Another avenue for donations to the Foundation is to create an endowment. Endowments are usually created in honor of a particular person and bear the name of the individual on the scholarship. The money donated to an endowment is deposited and the interest earned is used to provide money for

students. A contribution of \$20,000 will create a named endowment at the Collin College Education Foundation. An endowed department chair is created for a donation of \$30,000 and the donation is matched by the college. The total amount of the endowed chair is then invested for scholarships. Collin College will name a campus building after any individual providing a donation of a million dollars or more. The district is also constructing a higher education center at 121 and Central Expressway and will name the building after anyone willing to make a considerable donation to the Foundation.

Currently the total amount of the Foundation endowment is \$5 million, but this will need to increase substan-

tially if the organization is to keep up with the financial needs of Collin students. “In the next two to four years we are going to try to raise the endowment to 15 million,” explains Dr. Israel. “We were not able to assist 50 percent of the students who applied for aid last year, and that need is only going to in-

state that has frozen tuition costs for the previous three years, but there is still a gap between how much money is available and how much students actually need.

Joselin Joseph and Shelly Kinson are both students at Collin College and have received the benefit of financial assistance from the endowment. “I’m from India and my family couldn’t pay for my college,” says Ms. Joseph. “Without the help from the education foundation I would not have been able to attend school.” Ms. Joseph will complete her Associate of Science degree in May and plans to transfer to UNT in the fall. Ms. Kinson is in her freshman year at Collin and is appreciative of the additional funds. “I am so grateful that Collin College showed confidence in my ability to get through school by allowing the foundation to help pay for tuition and books,” she says. “Because of the help I was able to pay other bills. It took a lot of stress off of me.”



Foundation fans Dr. Toni Jenkins, Shelly Kinson and Joselin Joseph

photo by Chris Fritchie

crease over time.” Donors also have the opportunity to meet the individuals who are recipients of their donated dollars, so they can see first hand how the money has touched the life of a Collin student.

Students receive \$750 in scholarship money when they qualify for aid. The amount is almost enough to cover the \$1000 price tag of tuition and books for a full course load. However, students now need larger scholarships due to cost of living increases and higher textbook prices. “I would like for the Foundation to have a large enough endowment to allow us to provide scholarships of more than \$750 a semester,” says Dr. Jenkins. Collin College is the only higher education institution in the

days, college endowment programs are struggling to meet the needs of their students in a time when it is difficult to earn adequate interest on any kind of investment. When an individual donates money to an endowment fund, it is with the understanding that the principal, or original value of the gift, will be deposited and never spent. Portions of the investment earnings are utilized to create scholarships for students, while the rest is reinvested with the goal of increasing the endowment for future use. The larger the principle is, the higher the amount of interest available for scholarships.

The difficulty for endowments during hard economic times is obvious. The less money people have to give, the less

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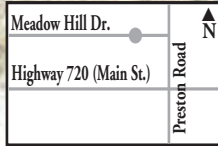
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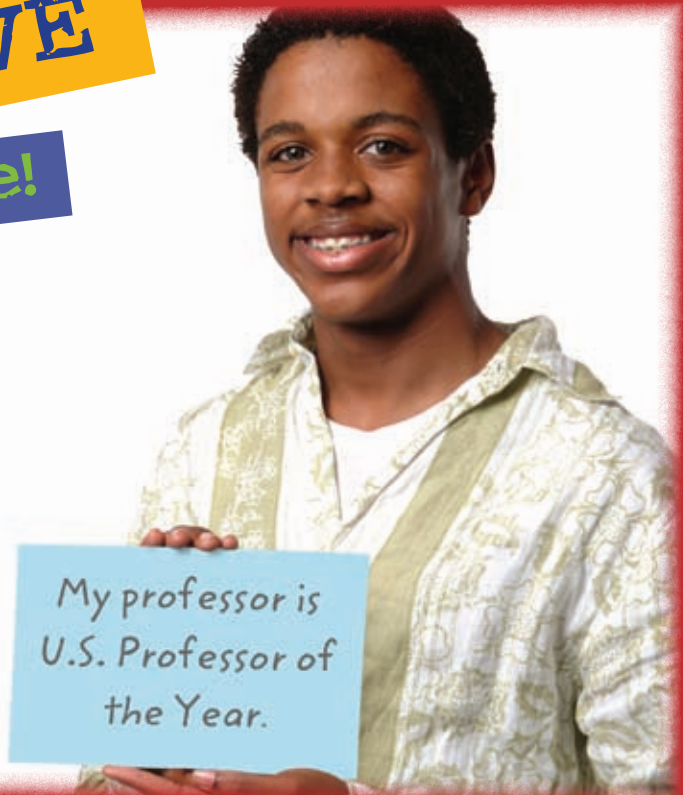
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is added to principle each year. The less that is added to principle translates into less earned in interest, therefore less money available to students. Combine a less than stellar increase in donations with a decrease in interest earned per dollar (because endowment investments are tied to the market like everything else), add in the inevitable rise in student need, and the result is that Collin College would be forced to turn hundreds, if not thousands of students away because of lack of financial assistance.

CONVEYING THE MESSAGE

The most important job for board members and foundation staff is raising funds. Fundraising can be a tough sell to a public constituency who may not understand the positive payback for giving to an institution that is not their own alma mater. There are no season tickets or prime seats available for football games. Both Sam Roach and Frisco Mayor Maher Maso sit on the Board of Trustees for the Foundation. They are continually approaching members of

the community and surrounding businesses about supporting the organization. "This year we had a 60 percent increase in the number of applications for scholarships," explains Mr. Roach. "A lot of our kids become the first emergency responders and our health care providers for our community. Somewhere down the line we're getting positive payback by helping students at the school. You don't get that same kind of payback from other worthwhile charities." Board members and city leaders feel it is important to provide education for as much of the local community as possible. "It is not always young kids out of high school," says Mayor Maso. "We also provide scholarships to adults trying to make a second career and single parents. It is community wide."

An indirect consequence of living in an affluent area such as Collin County is that many people do not understand the extent of the need of Collin students. "I think that residents of Collin County understand that the college provides a quality education at an affordable

price," explains Dr. Jenkins. "But I think that many people underestimate the need our students are experiencing. I try to tell donors that sponsoring a table at the Collin Cabaret for \$2,500 or \$5,000 can really make a difference."

There are plenty of positions that require associates that are in demand and are high paying jobs.

Another issue found in affluent suburbs is the ongoing bias against community colleges in favor of four-year institutions. The Texas Comptrollers office report, "Texas Works: Training and Education for all Texans," published in December of 2008, demonstrates the "imbalance emerging between the demand for skilled workers and the state's

Trustee Sam Roach of Frisco has seen the difference the Foundation has made first hand.
 photo by Chris Fritchie

ability to supply them.” The majority of these high need areas have certification programs that do not require a four-year degree but that are actually high paying positions in the healthcare and technical fields. RJ DeSilva is spokesperson for the Texas Comptroller’s Office. “The report points out that the state had done a good job of pushing students to four-year degrees, but is also critical of the fact they are not assisting students eyeing different pathways,” explains Mr. DeSilva. “Taking technical courses should not be a bad thing, and there is definitely a need for us to pull from our own Texas students to meet the needs of a diverse economy here in Texas.”

The contradiction of policies that pressure young people to attend four-year colleges, while at the same time highlighting an increase in demand for jobs that require associates degrees is not lost on Dr. Israel. “It is much harder for us to raise philanthropic money than a Rice, Texas A&M or Texas Tech,” says Israel. “This is a nationally acclaimed college. We tell all our students that they should get advanced degrees, but what we are saying is that there are plenty of positions that require associates that are in demand and are high paying jobs.” Collin College has partnerships with several state universities such as Texas A&M, Texas Tech and UNT. Students are encouraged to go for any degree they want, whether associates, bachelors or beyond.

Dr. Israel feels that we will face a crisis in healthcare and technical professions if students are not provided with financial assistance to meet these high-need areas. He feels strongly that if a student has a desire for higher education, a lack of finances should not stand in the way. That is especially true if they are pursuing a career serving the local community. “If we keep turning away students

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*Collin College Foundation Executive Director,
Mary Frazier helps Collin College
students pursue their dreams of an education.
photo by Chris Fritchie*

I don't know who is going to meet the ongoing needs of Collin County," explains Israel. "The number of jobs requiring technical training, certifications and associate degrees is outpacing the number of people available to fill them." The Texas Works report notes that the "funding to public two-year institutions has not kept pace with the high demand for vocational, technical and associate degree training." The need for organizations such as the Collin County Education Foundation becomes apparent when examining the stark reality of the economic and employment situation in Texas.

The trustees and administrators at the college have the unique opportunity to get to know different students and how the scholarships impact them.

MEASURING THE IMMEASURABLE

Shelly Kinson feels strongly that without the assistance of the foundation she would have had either a very difficult or nonexistent first semester. What would she tell anyone trying to decide whether or not to apply for a scholarship? "Just have confidence in yourself," she says. "Don't let the scholarship forms scare you off. Some of the applications have essay questions, don't be scared, just sit down and take the time to fill them out. It will be well worth it in the end."

Roach feels that the value of any education foundation is difficult to measure. The trustees and administrators at the college have the unique opportunity to get to know different students and how the scholarships impact them, something not everyone gets to see. A few



years ago Mr. Roach had the opportunity to meet a man on the receiving end of one of his scholarships. The older man was a grandfather. Life was difficult as he struggled to make enough money to provide for his family, while working on an advanced degree after being out of school for most of his life. "As chairman of the board of trustees, I was attending a graduation ceremony at the college and handing out diplomas," explains Mr. Roach. "I hadn't seen this gentleman in a couple of years but then I heard his name called and looked over as he walked across the stage. We didn't say anything but we made eye contact and you could tell how proud he was. You could see the appreciation in his eyes. I'll never forget that moment."

Dr. Jenkins finds personal satisfaction knowing she has played a role in helping another person receive an education. "I really believe that we can make a positive impact," she says. "I believe that

the Foundation and the community can change the course of the future—one student at a time."

Debbie Vallejo is a freelance writer living in Frisco.

COLLIN COLLEGE FOUNDATION SCHOLARSHIPS

Scholarship applications will be accepted through May 15, 2009.

Applicants are encouraged to apply for financial aid through the Collin College Financial Aid Office www.ccccd.edu/aid. For additional information or questions call 972.599.3145.

To be considered for a 2009 - 2010 academic year Collin College Foundation scholarship, complete the online application at <http://foundation.ccccd.org/application.asp>