

Political launchpad

LCC is a place where people go to find themselves.

Cottage Grove resident Cindy Weeldreyer attended LCC beginning in fall of 1982. Computers were invading the workplace, and she took a course in office automation — but she got much more than that. "You go there and everybody sees your potential when you don't," Weeldreyer said.

She became involved in student government, leading up to her election as student body president in the 1984-85 school year.

In governance she found her niche.

"When it was time to meet with the president, I'd have my coffee cup and I'd trot across campus. I just felt so at home there."

Weeldreyer met a lot of politicians who came to campus to speak.

Later, she won election to the LCC Board of Education and spent a half-dozen years there.

Board members must learn to run a campaign, participate in public meetings and balance a budget, Weeldreyer said. "All of those are skills you're going to need at the county or state level in politics," she said.

LCC has long served as a proving ground for up-and-coming politicians.

On the very first slate of contenders in 1964 for the seven LCC board seats was Jim Weaver. He lost that time, but he eventually won a seat in Congress.

Other local pols serving a term or two at LCC include current Lane County commissioners Jay Bozievich and Pete Sorenson.

In 1995, Weeldreyer was appointed to finish out the term of a departing member of the Lane County Board of Commissioners. The next election, she won her own four-year term.

"LCC well prepared me," she said.

"Lane County would not be Lane County today if LCC did not exist," Weeldreyer said.

Economics

With 1,100 faculty and staff on the payroll, LCC is one of the top four employers in Lane County. The college eases the friction in the local economy by training students to match local enterprises.

Today, about one-third of the student body, 6,300 students, pursue one of Lane's 43 career-centered degrees and 47 certificates, college statistics show.

All along, the college has fit its pro-

gram to the times. Mill closures in the 1980s prompted LCC to form programs for dislocated workers.

"When the RV industry was exploding in the area, they created an RV maintenance and manufacturing training program," Beyer said. "They've been very, very good at that."

When specific employers needed tailor-made training, LCC helped, offering classes for Symantec in 1993, Sony Corp. in 1994 and Hyundai — later Hynix — in 1996.

And as the RV and tech industries collapsed, LCC was there.

In spring 2009, LCC set up a call center for laid-off workers, including 2,200 from Monaco Coach Corp. and 1,400 from Hynix.

In 2009, when the leading edge of the baby boom generation was two years away from retirement age, LCC launched the Successful Aging Institute to provide tailored education and job training services.

Changing with the times

Today, the college is working in the realms of energy and big data management.

Students can pursue energy management, watershed science, water conservation and hybrid electric vehicle technology.

LCC plans a year from now to launch a health records management course on how to design and manage systems to store mass quantities of medical information.

Without LCC in Lane County, keeping up with the times and the evolving demands, "You would have had more of an exodus of young people," Beyer said. "Many would not get into the University of Oregon, so

they would have had to go someplace else. Where people get their education tends to be where they stay."

Rethinking education

"It used to be a joke," Beyer said. "You go to the university to get an education, then you go back to LCC to get training for a job."

Since the recession, which hit recent college graduates hard, the joke is not so funny.

Students and their parents are now putting a premium on education that leads to work.

"Higher education is really important," said Address, who holds a UO vocal music degree.

"But a lot of kids come out of college with four-year degrees, and they can't quite do anything with that bachelor's degree until they get a master's.

"They have big student loans to pay off and they find themselves in a pickle.

"I encouraged my own kids to go through LCC first," she said. Address's daughter earned an LCC dental assisting certificate, and "she had a job two weeks later."

Her son graduated from the LCC culinary program and another daughter is looking to attend the LCC nursing program. Address' mother attended the nursing program at LCC.

"I'm glad to see my kids out in the job force working — right away — right out of college. That's helpful for them and it's helpful for me," she said. Attending Lane has been "a rich experience for my entire family.



Students mingle at a Valentine's Day dance at Lane Community College in 1967.