Thank you for the kind introduction and thank you Dr. Kelli Pugh, for the gracious invitation to be a part of this your 29th annual conference as your keynote luncheon speaker today. This is quite an honor and I am humbled by the kind works that you had to say about the words that we have accomplished at Wayne County Community College District, for what will be a decade this September.

In the letter of invitation you asked that I share with this assembly my observations regarding the opportunities and demands facing the future of adult and continuing education.

For the next few minutes I will give you my views regarding the context in which we provide adult and continuing education opportunities for those that we serve; provide some perspectives regarding the demands facing those of us who provide such opportunities; and finally to share some personal reflections that I consider critical in the establishment of an institutional culture that supports providing adult and continuing education opportunities and options.

The Context for Adult & Continuing Education

In the 20th century, mass production was the core of U.S. business. It worked well in a world where products and services, systems and technologies changed little – standardizing production and cutting costs. Workers needed little training and were not expected to be involved in the decision-making process.

In the 21st century, technology in the marketplace requires higher-skilled workers whose skills are both innovative and flexible. Anyone, recent high school graduate, young adult, or returning adult, unprepared for this new marketplace may find himself or herself stuck in a series of entry-level jobs with inadequate salaries and little or no benefits.

Organizations – whether corporate, non-profit and especially academic – need to rethink the ways they meet their goals and demands.

Employers tell us that they place workplace skills and knowledge in two general classes – foundation or tool skills, and generic workplace competencies.

Foundation skills include the so-called “basic” skills, such as reading, writing, arithmetic, listening and speaking; “thinking skills” such as creative thinking, decision-making, problem solving, visualizing, knowing how to learn and reasoning; and “personal qualities,” such as responsibility, self-esteem, sociability, self-management, integrity and honesty.
We are told, as I believe you are also, that workers should be able to identify, organize, plan and allocate resources and develop interpersonal skills, such as working as a team member; teaching others, serving clients and customers.

They need to know how to find and use information and then to evaluate, organize, interpret, and communicate that information with and without computers.

A worker's knowledge of various technologies is just as important as the ability to understand complex social and organizational relationships.

At the Wayne County Community College District, we listen intently to employers and we have infused those imperatives into the culture supporting adult and continuing education.

**Dispelling Preconceived Notions**

Too many of us have preconceived notions about what it means to be a college student these days. We picture the wet-behind-the-ears freshman right out of high school. The truth is one of the biggest growth areas in the college and university world today is adult and continuing education.

We also have preconceived notions about adult retraining. Isn't that something that happens to coal miners and rust-bowl steelworkers? Isn't that when a cowpuncher or a pig-iron slinger learns how to be a keypuncher? Not anymore. Today, it might be a jet-engine designer learning how to craft a new-age ICD pacemaker.

David K. Shipler in his book *The Working Poor*, makes a strong case for adult and continuing education. In his book he says that we have a growing condition of the “working poor.” Working poverty is a constellation of difficulties that magnify one another; not just low wages, but also low education, not just dead-end jobs but also limited abilities.

This is the current environment that we face as it relates to adult and continuing education. Moreover this is the context that we have addressed as we have made strides in this area in the Wayne County Community College District. But there's more.

**Learning for Life**

The drive for retraining isn’t just reactive. It’s proactive preparation. At least for the smart and savvy ones. And it doesn’t stop when you reach age thirty, or sixty, or even eighty. Management guru Peter Drucker is in his mid-90s. In a way, Drucker’s own career prophesies things to come. He’s been a securities analyst, a journalist, a professor, a consultant, and administrator and a best-selling author. Six careers and he is still going strong!

Drucker keeps tabs on his students. Do you know what he found? Practically all of them start working for big companies, then they go to work for another big company. Four years later, they go to work for a medium-sized company. He found that they started out at the large company to get job security. But after three years, they find that there is no such thing. In fact, they find that there is no such thing as job security these days.

Things are changing these days. Bullets are flying in the world of work today. Nothing will help employees, and students, prepare for the changes of this era except smart planning. The survivors will be on the survivors with preparations. The survivors will stay with preparation. You don’t go to school once in a lifetime. You go to school for a lifetime!

You are never too old to learn. But to be ready for the future, you have to prepare. It is said that you learn as long as you live. **WRONG!** You learn as long as you try. At WCCCD we preach this sermon – old people, young people, if you want a job today, you have to prepare.
Personal Reflections

I frequently tell audiences that I became the first person in my family to receive a university degree. And today, this son of loving parents from West Texas, with little education, but lots of hope and ambition – this unlikely individual, is now the head of one of the largest community college systems in the country. Why do I tell this anecdote from my life? Not to dramatize my own life, but to provide an example of how education has transformed my life, and how it can transform their lives as well.

I also tell those audiences that I have successfully made my way through three major universities and hold degrees from each of them. But I also tell them that there are things that I learned outside of those university experiences: things over which you have some control, things that you can polish and perfect, things that will go with you throughout your life, and things that can make a major difference in your success or your failure in life.

I will not elaborate, but will just cite six lessons learned. What I learned first was control. I learned that I control my life, my circumstances, my successes and failures.

What I learned second was expectations. That you are likely to get from your educational experiences just about what you expect.

What I learned third was self-discipline. I learned that I did not have to rely on my instructors for the systematic training I needed to become an informed, knowledgeable person. I had to learn to regulate my life.

What I learned fourth was responsibility. I learned the power and ability to make decisions and act by myself and for myself. This is also an aspect of control. For me, this wasn’t simply being responsible. It was a matter of coming to the conclusion that even though others cared about me and my life like my parents – in the final analysis I was the one who had to take action.

What I learned fifth was transference. I learned to apply what I was in textbooks and in the classroom to life beyond the ivy walls.

What I learned sixth was commitment. I learned the value of sustained commitment, or what I sometimes like to call constancy. The willingness to stay at the task until it is completed. In our quick fix society, I learned that success at anything takes practice and work. It is easy to be mediocre; that is why so many people are achieving it. Failures, disappointments will occur. After all, we’re human. But with sustained commitment to a task, achievement, success, and, finally, victory will occur and will suppress any problems or barriers encountered along the way.

Pablo Picasso said, “I am always doing that which I can not do, in order that I may learn how to do it.” Do you realize how hard it is to do that which you cannot do? That’s commitment.

Conclusion

I have faith in the future of because I have faith in each of you.

An investment in human potential, through education is priceless.

Brinda Albert dropped out of high school 37 years ago when she was 16. School did not seem important to her at the time. After all, she was married, with a baby on the way. She eventually passed the GED and began a long career as a secretary and administrative assistant. But in the middle 1990’s, the growing American obsession with higher education caught up with her. She enrolled as a psychology student at the nearby college. After earning the associate degree, she got a promotion to a managerial post, proving once again how far that embossed piece of paper can take you.

This past May, Brinda Albert earned a bachelor’s degree in administration and is now working on her master’s degree. This comment of Brinda is instructive. My community college degree “turned me on.”
“While my bachelor’s degree is useful in my current job, even to work as a receptionist now they are asking for a college degree, so I must move on.”

Wayne County Community College District is endeavoring to impact the lives of hundreds and thousands of Brinda Albert in Wayne County.

I would like to close with this comment: It is said that every age needs its prophets, those who call us to greatness, who give us a compelling vision, and who dream of a better tomorrow. Every age also needs its carpenters and builders, those who give shape and substance to the vision and who implement the dream. We in this room are not prophets. Our prophets are our forefathers who dreamed of a nation based on the democratic ideals of freedom, opportunity, equal justice and equal dignity without discrimination. We in this room are the carpenters and builders of the American dream; it is our calling to give shape and substance to the vision. And, my friends, that is our calling at Wayne County Community College District.

Thank you very much.