

Cook eager to serve as trustee

Dr. Jerry Cook, president, Overland Park Convention and Visitors Bureau, has one principle that has guided his career in education, business and community service: Teaching and learning are about maximizing people’s abilities.

“I am one who believes you need to dream and imagine in order to become the person you are meant to be. I think teaching and learning institutions have a great capacity to help people believe they can become greater than they are today,” Cook said.

He applies his maxim to the college. “How can we set a culture where we maximize teaching and learning and change people’s behavior? We want students to say, ‘I am different today because of a class I took at JCCC.’”

According to the new trustee, it is an understatement to say JCCC is an asset to the county, state and region.

“In my opinion, this college is one of the finest community colleges in the nation. It has a number of exemplary programs that make a significant contribution to the students who take the programs and to industry and business. I am really interested in what the college, as good as it is today, can become in the future.”

Cook consistently combines “teaching and learning” in a sentence, believing that students and educators learn from each other. Cook started his career as an elementary school teacher in Grand Forks, N.D., next becoming an elementary principal, then director of elementary education for the Bemidji, Minn., public schools. He later became superintendent of schools for Harrisonville Public Schools, Mo., 1980-1988.

He earned his bachelor’s and master’s degrees in education from Moorhead State University, Minn., and University of North Dakota, respectively, and his doctor of education degree from the University of Wyoming.

Moving into vice president and then executive vice president roles at the transportation business, Mayflower Contract Services, Overland Park, Cook became active in the Overland Park Chamber of Commerce, serving as chair of the board. After Mayflower was sold, Cook worked for Hosts Corporation, an educational consultant business, until he was contacted about the opening at the OPCVB, where he has been president since 1996.

Asked about the short-term and long-term challenges to the college, Cook gave a single answer – finances. This year the



Dr. Jerry Cook joined the board of trustees July 1.

state has experienced budget cuts, but the state also has received stimulus money for 2010 and 2011.

“To me stimulus money is nonrecurring revenue, and if we make the mistake of using those dollars for recurring expenditures then we are going to end up with a significant shortfall,” Cook said.

Under the umbrella of the financial challenge, Cook foresees four subchallenges: balancing financial support for successful existing programs with support of new initiatives, keeping classes affordable, retaining and recruiting outstanding staff, and ensuring that curriculum is relevant to student and community needs.

Cook says there are similarities between the OPCVB and JCCC. At both, according to Cook, the idea is to match a person’s needs with the best program and services possible so that person says, “Wow, I want to come back here in the future.”

While Cook has significant teaching, school administration, human relations and public relations experience, he says, “My focus is to be the best trustee I can be.” **lm**