

Dr. Maria Sheehan, TMCC President
Inauguration Speech
Sept. 19, 2008

Thank you, members of the Board of Regents and Chancellor Rogers, members of the selection committee, for this tremendous honor. It is with great humility that I accept this extraordinary privilege: to lead this great college into its fourth decade of service to our community.

To the dedicated faculty who built programs from scratch and worked under less than desirable circumstances to create the college we have today, thank you. To the former Presidents who came before me: TMCC's first President, Dr. Jim Eardley, President John Gwaltney, Interim President Rita Huneycutt and President Phil Ringle who are here with us today. Interim President Delores Sanford I heard from yesterday and she sends her best to us on this day. She is enjoying some greatly needed time away. Thank you for your dedicated service to our college and our community.

Over 100 years ago, America began a new era of higher education and junior colleges were created to address the first two years of a university experience. We grew out of the K-12 school districts and quickly gained independence as separate entities of higher education. Over the decades, the mission of the junior college expanded beyond the focus on university preparation to include critical workforce training, short-term certificates and associate degree programs that met the specific needs of the community in which the college was located. This focus on the community it serves became the genesis of modern community colleges. And today, all but a few colleges have dropped the title of "Junior" and embraced the comprehensive mission of the community college; and still others have dropped "Community" as part of their title while keeping the mission intact and expanded to offer baccalaureate degrees in specific majors.

Our role of providing the first two years of a baccalaureate degree experience is still foremost and serving community workforce development needs remains a critical function, but the role of lifelong learning emerged as a strong part of the mission over 30 years ago. And, community colleges provide critical basic skills and developmental education.

Often, the mission of community colleges is misunderstood because we are the bridge that connects the school districts' K through 12 programs to higher education, and we have a paramount role in developmental education. Sometimes, even now, community colleges are not thought of as higher education. This celebration signifies our place in the Academy.

Today, by the authority of the Board of Regents of the Nevada System of Higher Education, we collectively reaffirm Truckee Meadows Community College's role in the Academy of higher education as a force to be reckoned with: Because TMCC contributes more than \$678 million dollars each year to our local economy; Because 95% of our graduates stay in Nevada and become leaders in their fields; Because our transfer students graduate from universities all across this great land; Because many of our allied health programs have emerged as number one in the state; Because we train 82% of first responders in Northern Nevada who protect and serve Washoe County; Because our graduates get good paying jobs and earn promotions; and because we change students' lives...forever.

Today, we celebrate the awe-inspiring work that we do at Truckee Meadows Community College, which is made possible through the wonderful partnerships that we have with community leaders and business owners.

Business owners and community leaders have a central role in advising us on our curriculum, and we design our technical programs to assure that workforce needs are met. A wonderful example of our ability to meet business' needs quickly is our current collaboration with Sierra Pacific Power Company to address renewable energy training needs. Sierra Pacific's generous gift of \$100,000 will help our faculty to prepare students for the projected 40 million "green collar" jobs that will be in place nationwide by the year 2030.

TMCC has a rich history of developing programs based on community need. Starting in our early days when the college was located in Stead, Nevada, TMCC developed a first-class nursing program. We owe much to our early faculty pioneers, including one of our first nursing faculty members, State Senator Bernice Martin Mathews. More recently, International Game Technology helped the college start the state-of-the-art manufacturing program at our IGT Applied Technology Center. The excellent working relationship that TMCC has with the University of Nevada, Reno at our beautiful Redfield Campus is a role model for joint campuses. All of our college programs have a clear focus on student achievement and academic excellence.

Let me return to our relationship with K through 12 education. Our missions are linked today more intrinsically than ever before. We know that the earlier we can connect with students—as early as the sixth grade—the greater the opportunity we have to make those dreams of higher education a reality. We are able to track student success by high school and let each high school know how well their students are performing; we provide early testing so that high school students know what to expect when they enroll in college classes. TMCC High School gives motivated and high achieving students a head start with college while posting impressive graduation rates.

Looking ahead, my vision for the college includes a tomorrow that is filled with new levels of achievement for our students; new opportunities for faculty and staff; and an increased community awareness of the academic excellence of TMCC's programs.

This semester, faculty and staff will be addressing the development of a seamless planning and budgeting process that places our attention on student learning improvements. We are focusing on strategies to improve overall persistence, as well as retention and success in remedial/developmental courses, because our research clearly points out that if a student drops out, we lose the vast majority of them—not just for that single semester but possibly forever. Further, if students are successful in remedial/developmental courses, we know their graduation rates are dramatic.

Our own community survey research determined that while our local community recognizes the college's academic excellence, most people do not know what programs the college offers. To address this challenge, the college will highlight flagship programs, including allied health, public safety, and university transfer.

As an open access institution, TMCC has and will continue to place greater attention on the recruitment and success of under-represented students. Several programs throughout the college support this effort, including the successful C2 program that teaches career and college leadership courses at two local high schools to at-risk students.

One of the wonderful things about being president is that the position affords a bird's eye view of the college. I am significantly impressed with the quality of our teaching faculty supported by dedicated staff and administration. I am especially proud of the more than 100 faculty and staff who serve our community's charitable and community volunteer programs. This large number of committed faculty and staff give back to our community in countless ways that improve the quality of life in Northern Nevada.

Let there be no mistake, we face daunting challenges. The decline in State of Nevada revenues has forced devastating cuts on higher education. If the proposed budget cuts for the next biennium are not avoided, TMCC and the ability for the college to positively impact the economy will be permanently damaged. The stature and condition of higher education will be set back irreparably.

Despite knowing that the college faced a budget crisis when I applied for the position, I saw the potential of this college and the framework of success that had been built by the college's faculty leadership and staff. I knew I wanted to be here – here where terms like “Student Success” and “Student Achievement” did not just represent words on a page. I wanted to be a part of an institution that was already successful. During my interview, I said that TMCC was a college ready to go the next level, ready to achieve more for our students and our community than ever before. I said and meant those words despite knowing the budget issues we face now were going to happen.

As many of you know, in my two previous presidential positions, those colleges also faced tough budget situations that are very similar to the challenges we face today at TMCC. I want to reassure the college community today: although budget crunch times are daunting, I truly believe that our best days are ahead. We have the opportunity to look at everything we do, to re-evaluate, to truly dig down to the core of this great institution. By looking that closely at ourselves and making our plans together, we can and will determine our own destiny.

The college has so many processes in place already to lead us: the Planning Council has been charged with taking a fresh look at our mission and goals and then using those standards to drive our open budgeting process. The student benchmarks that so many of you have worked on this fall will help to lead our decision making process. I also want to challenge all of us to participate in our plans for the future through active membership in our shared governance groups, including Planning Council, Faculty Senate, Classified Council, and ASTM. I have also instituted a series of monthly brownbag lunches for faculty to meet with me so that I can obtain a broader view of issues. The power of our collective ideas will take us to the next level. I know, beyond question, that this is our moment to step forward, take our place in higher education and help the community to rebound from this economic downturn.

Before I conclude I would like to thank members of my family for attending. Thank you to friends and community members who took time from their busy schedules and thank you terrific faculty and staff of TMCC. Thank you to my former administrators who made the trip.

I am honored to serve as President of Truckee Meadows Community College and, with the help of the business community, and the help of the wonderful community of Northern Nevada, and especially the entire college community, we will reach a new level of excellence at Truckee Meadows Community College.

Thank you.