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PRESS RELEASE

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College Welcomes New Superintendent / President

Weed / COS – College of the Siskiyous (COS) is pleased to welcome Stephen Schoonmaker, Ed.D. and his family to Siskiyou County. Dr. Schoonmaker officially began his new position as the 12th Superintendent / President of the Siskiyou Joint Community College District on July 1. He succeeds Scotty Thomason who retired June 30.

Dr. Schoonmaker has more than 30 years of experience as an educator. He earned his doctoral degree in Educational Administration with an emphasis in Community College Leadership from New Mexico State University. Past work experience includes senior level positions at the University of California, Davis; Southwestern Oregon and Clatsop Community Colleges in Oregon; and College of the Ouachitas' in south-central Arkansas. He is also the founder of Cross County Leadership Solutions (CCLS), a consulting firm specializing in leadership coaching, strategic planning, systems thinking, and change management.



1) Why COS? What attracted you most about the College?

Serving as Superintendent / President of College of the Siskiyous is the culmination of a journey begun fifty years ago. In 1967/1968, my father took a sabbatical from the University of Vermont (where he served as a mathematics faculty and chair of the department for over 20 years) to study at UC, Berkeley. Living in Northern California for that year, I had my first introduction to the unique and special sense of place that is Siskiyou County. It was an experience I never forgot. In 1982, I returned to Northern California where I worked at UC, Davis. I was drawn back to the Mt. Shasta area several times – during my time in Davis, and since – when I lived and worked in neighboring Oregon. When I saw that COS was seeking a Superintendent / President earlier this year, I applied without hesitation and with sincere enthusiasm hoping to return to Northern California and to serve the campus and the surrounding communities in ways I could never have dreamed were possible fifty years ago as a young boy.

My greatest attraction to the College beyond its sense of place is my belief that COS is uniquely positioned to fulfill a tremendous vision and mission at a critical juncture for the communities we serve. The College has been coming out of some previous volatility with several years of strong leadership and shoring up of fiscal instability. This has required an inward focus. We are now poised to make great strides forward, turning more of our attention on those we serve – and have the potential to serve. I am excited to have been chosen to lead the College into an even stronger future by continuing working together as one campus community committed to serving our students, ourselves, and our greater community.

2) *What do you feel are the biggest challenges facing students today? How can COS help students to overcome said challenges?*

Students today amaze me. Those straight out of high school represent the first “digital native” generation. Their use of technology – and their desire for us to make better use of technology – is less of a challenge for them and more of a challenge for us as a college in the 21st Century. One of the best ways we can help students today overcome any challenges they present is by utilizing technology in our problem solving strategies.

While I marvel at how connected they are through social media, these students can have trouble relating interpersonally face to face. Many come to us having gotten really good grades, yet some are not yet ready for college-level coursework – and college student learning outcome expectations. This generation is more connected with their parents, and more disconnected on campus.

My generation saw going to college as a guarantee for a successful lifetime career, and essential in formulating our life values and goals. For students today the primary purpose of college for nearly two out of every three college students is to increase earning power. They want job skills and knowledge but they know that a) they will have multiple careers in their lifetime and will need to retool and acquire new skills and knowledge regularly to keep up; and, b) they are suspect of ideologies they connect with establishment values and goals. In a world where they get unfiltered answers to questions timed in milliseconds, the analog world of most college campuses doesn't compute.

While these traditional students wrestle with some issues new to our college campuses, our non-traditional students face more challenges on top of their school work – multiple jobs, parenting / child care logistics, transportation issues, housing insecurity, hunger, frequent work shift changes, computer literacy / internet connectivity / digital anxiety or overload, etc. These students often are at the greatest risk of stopping out – or dropping out – of college before completing a certificate or degree.

Many students today are successful in spite of what we do. How much better can we make the college learning experience by understanding our students' challenges and needs – and then working together as a campus community to present innovative, technologically relevant resources that maximize our students' chance for success? I am excited to engage in conversations on campus and in the community to learn the answers to this question!

3) *Siskiyou County is one of the most northern located counties in California. Many people “think” northern California ends with Sacramento and the Bay Area. How can you help with changing that perception?*

I think the following quote is apropos for the question of changing people’s perceptions: “We don’t see things as they are; we see things as we are.” – Anais Nin

I understand the concern behind this question. When I lived in Davis, CA we spoke about “two Californias” – Northern and Southern. In Oregon, the desires of those in Portland and the Willamette Valley often overshadowed the mood and inclinations of the rest of the state. In New Mexico, there was what Albuquerque thought and the rest of the state was an entirely different thing. In Arkansas, there was the Northwest area of Fayetteville and Bentonville (home of Walmart, JB Trucking, and Tyson Chicken) which behaved economically and politically distinct and separate; and then the rest of the state followed the way of Little Rock and surrounding communities.

Perhaps the reality for California today is that there are actually “three Californias” – Northern, Southern, and Rural. In 2010, 80% of the lands in California were considered rural. However, the U.S. Census indicates that in that same year, about 13% of Californians lived in these rural lands! In Northern California, there aren’t many people once you get outside of Sacramento and the Bay Area. Hence the perception, that is where Northern California “ends.”

There is bad and good news about that perception. The bad news is: I can’t change others perceptions; especially when it comes to something as substantive as the geopolitical boundaries of the 3rd largest state by land mass, and the 1st largest state by population in these United States! The good news is: I can’t change others perceptions; but what people perceive and how much impact College of the Siskiyous has on the lives we encounter and touch in fulfilling our mission are separate and distinct realities. As Bobby Kennedy said, “some see things as they are and ask ‘why;’ I dream things that never were and say, ‘why not?’” I believe the perception will change not because of what we say, but because of what we do.

4) *Are there any similarities you have seen upon your visits to COS and Siskiyou County with your community at College of the Ouachitas? What are they? How do they compare?*

I have spent most of my community college higher education career working in rural areas. I see similarities amongst them all, including the many wonders and opportunities that exist for College of the Siskiyous and Siskiyou County. In small towns and close knit communities, there is a sense that we can know everyone by name. We can be there for one another to soften the blows of life’s hardships, and we can come together to celebrate the joys that bless our days.

Unfortunately, we are in the midst of changing times and turning tides. In today’s economy, many rural communities are at crossroads – they can strive to revive, innovate, and prosper; or resist change,

entrench in failing practices, and slowly decay. As W. Edwards Deming is quoted as saying, “It isn’t necessary to change. Survival is not mandatory.”

Where communities are committed to survival, progress, and sustainability the local community college plays a vital role. First, we are an important employer for the community to attract an engaged and committed citizenry. Next, we provide key leadership in community visioning. We stimulate economic growth by being a catalyst for economic development. Finally, and most importantly, we fulfill our mission in serving the educational needs of students and the community at large.

When I have visited the area, I have enjoyed meeting people and hearing their pride in living in Siskiyou County. I have looked into their eyes and seen genuine appreciation for the “clean air, fresh water, and natural beauty of their surroundings. I have seen hope in the present and anticipation for the future – these are qualities I have not always found in other rural communities where I have lived. My hope for COS and Siskiyou County is that we can take these challenges and opportunities in front of us, and respond positively for the sake of our community – ourselves, our children, and for generations to follow.

5) *What are some of your favorite things to do when not working?*

I love spending time with my family. Tonya, my beautiful bride, and I are fortunate to have three wonderful children – one son and two daughters. Each amazing, talented, and inspirational in their growth as people and the lives they are living to the fullest of their potential. Being their dad and spending time with them is truly one of my favorite things.

Last year I became a grandfather for the first time. My eldest daughter and son-in-law who live in Tacoma, WA had our granddaughter join the clan. Despite the distance from Arkansas, I have had several opportunities to meet, hold, play, and treasure our newest addition and youngest family member. Having my wife, our youngest daughter, and I relocate to the Siskiyou County area brings much excitement in being that much closer to dote on her!

I also enjoy reconnecting with nature, photography, and the arts. Learning is never far from my time and attention. I like to read and usually have several books I am reading. I deeply believe in and am committed to life-long learning, and being a life-long learner.

My faith is a very important part of my private life. I enjoy giving back through serving the people and community around me. Most recently I have served as the administrative pastor for our church, leading parts of weekly service and helping broaden philanthropic support for our homeless ministry in downtown Little Rock.

6) *What community organizations do / did you belong to? What would you like to become involved in as a new member of our community?*

I have been an active member of multiple civic organizations (Lions, Rotary, and Kiwanis); board member for the United Way, Chamber, and Brickfest Festival; vice-chair for a the board of a local credit union, and chair of our hospital's Foundation. I have also been highly active in economic development efforts; serving two different communities' Economic Development Commissions (most recently serving as Vice-Chair), and also representing our community in regional economic development as a board member of the Metro Little Rock Alliance.

As someone new to the community, I am very interested to get to know what civic opportunities exist, and where my talents and skills may be most beneficial. Wherever I have lived I have attempted to utilize these opportunities to serve our local communities, to strengthen the visibility of the College, and to enhance my network with other community leaders.

7) *If you could be any super hero, who would you choose and why?*

I have always had an affinity to Superman. I grew up watching the TV shows for Batman, Spiderman, and Superman; but Superman was my favorite. Faster than a speeding bullet, more powerful than a locomotive, able to leap tall buildings in a single bound – these all revealed his super powers; yet it was that all of these super talents and abilities were “disguised as a mild-mannered reporter for the Daily Planet” that drew me to his character. That was the part about Superman I could most relate to – being more shy, quiet, and reserved than my friends at school, Superman's persona as Clark Kent gave me a relatable role model to feel good about my personality. Plus it always cracked me up when Perry White would get so upset and yell at Jimmy Olson, and say “don't call me Chief!” 😊

8) *What is the biggest strength you bring to COS? As an individual and as the 12th President / Superintendent of the Siskiyou Community College District.*

The biggest strength I believe I bring to COS is the breadth and depth of my 30+ years of higher education experience, and leadership as a former comprehensive community college president (named in 2013 as a Top Ten Community College in the Nation by the Aspen Institute, selected in 2012 as a Leader College by Achieving the Dream (AtD), and awarded in 2015 the Governor's Quality Award based on the Baldrige quality standards).

As the 12th President / Superintendent of the Siskiyou Community College District, I am a seasoned educator and effective leader with an exceptional record of advancing students' educational and career goals on pathways towards success. As an individual entering both the campus and county communities, I am a caring and compassionate person with a love of life, appreciation for the gifts and talents I have been blessed with and have honed through the years, zest for living and making the most of each and every day, humbled by the opportunity to become a part of a community with a unique sense of place which holds precious meaning in my heart and soul, and – perhaps most importantly – a burning desire to serve the students, staff, faculty, and stakeholders of College of the Siskiyous!