

For immediate release
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Illinois community college system marks 50th anniversary

Gubernatorial proclamation declares 2015-2016 as “The Year of the Community College”

SPRINGFIELD – The Illinois community college system is 50 years old! State legislators and higher education leaders celebrated this half-century of achievement on August 12 at Joliet Junior College in Joliet, birthplace of the nation’s community college movement.

“The Illinois community college system is not the education of yesterday, but it's the education of tomorrow,” said Dr. Karen Hunter Anderson, executive director of the Illinois Community College Board. “The system is one of the largest community college system in the country and without question the best system in the world.”

“We don’t offer shop classes or teach key punch anymore. We teach nanotechnology and photon therapy,” she said. “We partner with local business and industry to develop skills that will be necessary for jobs of the future.”

Dr. Anderson also presented a proclamation from Gov. Bruce Rauner declaring July 15, 2015 through July 15, 2016 as “The Year of the Community College” in honor of the Illinois system’s 50 years of student success.

Since July 15, 1965, when the Illinois Public Community College Act was signed into law, the system has expanded across the state into 39 community college districts and 48 campuses. Illinois community colleges now serve approximately one million people each year.

State Sen. Pat McGuire, chair of the Illinois Senate Higher Education Committee, also congratulated the Illinois community college system on its 50th anniversary. He encouraged parents and students to “take our focus off selectiveness and focus on effectiveness” in education.

“So you know what? For my money, those exclusive joints on the East and West coast that send their graduates to Wall Street, let them be as smug and as self-satisfied as they want,” said Sen. McGuire. “I’m sticking with Joliet Junior College and Illinois’s other community colleges.”

State Sen. Michael Hastings noted that he was proud to come from a family of Illinois community college graduates. “The opportunities you get at a community college are unbelievable,” he said. “Not only are student trained for the future, but they graduate without high student-loan debts.”

Illinois Community College Trustees Association president Andrew Bollman commented that “Over the past 50 years, community colleges have strengthened this state and nation by providing workers in all fields of study, from healthcare and law enforcement to alternative forms of energy. “Our community college graduates have contributed billions to the economy and tax roll. But, most importantly, our graduates have bettered this society with their increased knowledge and

responsibility to the community,” said Bollman, a graduate and former student trustee of Sauk Valley Community College in Dixon.

JJC president Dr. Debra Daniels said that as the nation's first public community college, Joliet Junior College was honored to host the launch of the 50th anniversary observance of the Illinois Public Community College Act.

“Together the Illinois community colleges educate and train the workforce for our communities, which is necessary to the economic health of our state,” said Dr. Daniels. “We, at JJC, are proud to be a part of the Illinois community college system.”

JJC student Eric Wilhelmi shared how he grew from an uninterested high school senior to president of the college’s Student Government Association. “This place has just been riddled with opportunities,” said Wilhelmi, who described his experience at JJC as “transformative.”

“I was told this was going to be a springboard to my future but I would not insult my institution like that. To call it a springboard would imply it is something that’s beneath you, that’s something that you put your feet on, but this has been a first class ticket to a future,” he said.

Organizations participating in the 50th anniversary observance include the Illinois Community College Board, the Illinois Community College Trustees Association, the Illinois Council of Community College Presidents, the Illinois Council of Community College Administrators, the Illinois Community College Faculty Association, and the National Council of Public Relations and Marketing.

For more information, contact:

Matt Berry, Illinois Community College Board, (217) 785-7411, matt.berry@illinois.gov
Kim Villanueva, Illinois Community College Trustees Association, (217) 528-2858, kvillanueva@communitycolleges.org

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Suggested Photo Captions

Photo 1: Illinois legislators and community college leaders join together at Joliet Junior College to mark the 50th Anniversary of the Illinois Community College System. Pictured from left to right: State Senator Pat McGuire, 43rd District, Chair of the Senate Higher Education Committee; Dr. Karen Hunter Anderson, Executive Director of the Illinois Community College Board; Eric Wilhelmi, President of Student Government Association, Joliet Junior College; State Senator Michael Hastings, 19th District; Dr. Debra Daniels, President of Joliet Junior College; and Andrew Bollman, President of the Illinois Community College Trustees Association

Photo 2: Dr. Karen Hunter Anderson, Executive Director of the Illinois Community College Board presents a proclamation from Gov. Bruce Rauner declaring July 15, 2015 through July 15,

2016 to a “The Year of the Community College” in honor of the Illinois system’s 50 year of success.