

**Southwest Virginia Higher Education Center  
Board of Trustees  
Minutes  
December 18, 2003**

**Board Members Present:** Senator Phillip Puckett, Delegate Joe Johnson, David Wilkin (VHCC), Carole Seyfrit (Radford), Steve Greiner (VA Intermont), Nancy Cooley (SCHEV), Sondra Stallard (UVA), Rebecca Scott, Debbie Icenhour, Ron Jessee, Jackson Barker, Lorraine Turner, Marcia Gilliam, Mark Haulsey (ODU), Ralph Byers (VT), Sim Ewing (UVA-Wise), Delegate David Nutter, Senator William Wampler

**Others Present:** Rachel Fowlkes, Deborah Bourne, Jeff Webb, Christine Fields, Eddie Sproles, Mike Overstreet, Cindy Reed, Elizabeth Lowe, Michele Viers, Deborah Sproles, Susan Jackson, Penny McCallum, Brenda Wilson, Sonia Craig, Doug Viers, Barry Logan, Mitch Williams, Doug Strickland, John Dooley, Blue Gotham, Bethany Fullen, Kris Peter, Mike Cline, William Mallory

**Welcome and Introductions**

Delegate Joe Johnson, Vice-Chairman, called the meeting to order.

Members in attendance introduced themselves, including new Board Members Rebecca Scott, Debbie Icenhour, and Jackson Barker.

**Approval of Minutes**

Minutes for the June 12, 2003, meeting were approved as written.

**Executive Director's Report**

Dr. Rachel Fowlkes began her report by asking Sim Ewing from UVA's College at Wise to speak about proposed legislation to reduce tuition for out-of-state students living within 50 miles of campus to a rate similar to that for in-state students. The proposal was made that the Southwest Virginia Higher Education Center and its partner institutions join in the proposed legislation. This would be beneficial in making classes more affordable for those students, as well as aid in the recruitment of students, since it would allow more flexibility in tuition. A lengthy discussion ensued, after which it was concluded that the matter would be placed on the agenda for the next Program Committee meeting in order to allow the partner institutions time to review and discuss the matter with other representatives on campus. The Board approved supporting the legislation, with the exception of Carol Seyfrit, who offered neither support nor opposition due to having had no prior opportunity to review and discuss the matter with other representatives on campus.

Dr. Fowlkes continued with her report, directing the Board to the YTD budget figures and stating that the Center is on target in that regard. She reported that Nancy Breeding had been hired during the summer as the Tobacco Scholarship Administrator. The Center is currently administering approximately \$3.8 million in scholarship funds for Southwest burley tobacco growers and their families, and Southside Virginia residents under a four-year

program with over 1,600 applicants. Rachel was pleased to report that Governor Warner's proposed 2004-2006 Biennium Budget included an increase for the Center; she expressed the Center's appreciation to Delegates Johnson and Nutter and Senators Wampler and Puckett.

Dr. Fowlkes also mentioned the other Tobacco Commission projects—Farm2Market, an e-commerce project for agribusiness; the Export Initiative; and a new project which is currently in development involving a partnership with VCU to offer a nurse anesthesia program at the Southwest Virginia Higher Education Center. She related that the Center has applied, through VCU, to the Tobacco Commission for a grant, and has been working with VCU-MCV for three years on bringing this program to southwest Virginia. Rachel informed the Board about other grant applications in process—with Radford, Longwood and UVA to the Tobacco Commission for a grant to bring the off-campus Speech Communications Disorders program to the Center; for a Title 6B grant, the funds from which would be used for international business education at the Center, in partnership with Virginia Intermont College's International Business program; a proposal to create an Entrepreneur Capstone program at the request of the Kegley Foundation in Bristol, which would assist four-year colleges' business majors in attaining practical experience in developing their own business, in anticipation of graduating out of the program and into the new business incubator which is being constructed adjacent to the Center.

Rachel was happy to report that the Center's collaboration with Virginia Intermont on the new Culinary Arts Kitchen was progressing on schedule, with the bid process having been completed, and J. A. Street having been the low bidder. She expressed appreciation to Steve Smith and Don Smith of KVAT (Food City) for their work in providing the equipment for the kitchen.

She noted that the Center's technology had been upgraded by Jeff Webb, the Chief Information Officer, and his staff, Doug Viers, Barry Logan, and several part-time staffers. This included upgrading the network and all the computers in the computer labs, the addition of a state of the art sound system in the Grand Hall (with a \$25,000 grant from the Town of Abingdon). The Center received a telecommunications grant through the Appalachian Regional Commission which will be used to implement a web-casting initiative; she noted that the ARC had invited the Center to make this proposal because they recognized that Jeff and his team would do a superior job. With the additional assistance of the Bristol Virginia Utility Board, this enabled the Center to put into operation a high-quality connection between Johnston Memorial Hospital and UVA's Department of Telemedicine, which will greatly enhance their Cardiac Care Unit.

The Center, along with Washington and Smyth Counties, have expended a great deal of effort in the area of economic development over the last year. Dr. Fowlkes noted that the Center is used weekly for economic development meetings. She

complimented Bob Martin, the Center's MerchantPoint Director, on a phenomenal job in creating websites for businesses across the region, highlighting the crookedroad.org site, another project which the ARC asked the Center to carry out. Rachel explained that this website is for country music fans who visit the region, and will take them from the Fiddlers' Convention in Galax, to Ralph Stanley's museum in Dickenson County, with stops along the way at the Barter Theatre, the Carter Family Fold, and the Bristol Country Music Association, among others.

Following Dr. Fowlkes' report, discussion was held and a motion made, seconded and passed that the Board go into Executive Session to discuss a personnel issue involving a salary matter. Another motion was made to allow one SVHEC staff members, Christine Fields, Budget Manager, to be included in the Executive Session. The motion was seconded and passed by the Board.

When the Board returned from Executive Session, a motion was made by Senator Wampler, seconded by Delegate Johnson, and passed, that the members certified that only matters lawfully exempted from the open meeting requirements of the Virginia FOIA were discussed, and that only such matters as were identified in the motion by which the closed meeting was convened were heard, discussed and considered.

Senator Wampler made a motion that a salary of increase for the position of Executive Director of the Southwest Virginia Higher Education Center be adopted; seconded by Delegate Johnson, and passed without objection.

### **Special Presentation**

George Hiller, the Center's International Business Director, reported on the Export Initiative program. His presentation included interesting statistics about international business activity in this region. Bristol Compressors and Eastman Chemical are two of the region's major employers who have significant international business interests. George explained, however, that the Export Initiative is directed toward smaller and midsize companies, with the primary goal of helping them to be more successful, more productive, more competitive internationally, and to develop new markets which, in turn, would create job growth in Southwest Virginia. He spoke about videoconferences the Export Initiative has facilitated at the Higher Ed Center—"Doing Business with China," and "Doing Business with Chile'," as well as "matchmaker" conferences between southwest Virginia companies and prospective agents and distributors in overseas markets—pointing out the cost-effectiveness of this method of linking domestic and international companies.

Dr. Hiller mentioned the Export Initiative's partnerships with the U. S. Department of Commerce, the Virginia Department of Agriculture (VDAX?), ARC and its Export Trade Advisory Council; with the U. S. Trade and Development Agency, arranging a visit by a Chinese coal bed methane delegation from Petro China to this

area; a Christmas tree buying mission in conjunction with the U. S. Department of Agriculture. He reported the award of a grant from the U. S. Department of Commerce which will be used to hold an e-commerce seminar at the Center next spring in conjunction with Virginia Tech, with the purpose of helping companies develop efficient strategies for using the web and the Internet for e-commerce. An inward forest products buying mission in October coincided with Governor Warner's visit to the Center, where he met with two of the representatives from Mexico who were part of the mission. Governor Warner later met with the representatives again in November on his trade mission to Mexico.

George reported that the United States realized exports of \$279 billion and a trade surplus of \$79 billion in 2002 in the category of professional services, which includes telecommunications software, finance, entertainment and four that have particular significance for our region: engineering design, tourism, higher education and medical services. He discussed the Export Initiative's efforts in those areas, through its work with Marshall Miller and Thompson and Litton, the Heritage Music Trail, the UVA Rural Telemedicine program, as well as their attendance at the American School in Mexico City College Recruitment Fair. The Export Initiative and three of the Center's partner institutions have applied to the U. S. Department of Education for a major grant to develop international business education programs at these four schools.

Dr. Hiller concluded his presentation by reiterating that the purpose and mission of the Export Initiative is to assist existing businesses to expand and be more successful, both nationally and internationally, to grow the area and create more jobs.

#### **Conference Services & Marketing Report**

Deborah Bourne's presentation included an overview of her department's accomplishments during the past six months in supporting the partner institutions and the Center's conference services department. Their support is achieved through press releases, newspaper and magazine advertisements, participation in eight community calendars, an active website, and direct mail pieces. She demonstrated a direct mail piece which would be sent to over 2,500 Chamber of Commerce Business and Industry members. She noted that the marquee shared with Virginia Highlands Community College is seen by in excess of 18,000 individuals who travel past it on a daily basis, according to VDOT statistics. Business and industry visits, and four information sessions hosted annually for the Center's partner institutions are other marketing and support activities. She informed the Board about a media luncheon, a new event to be held at the Center next month.

Deborah shared the latest information from the Abingdon Convention and Visitors Bureau. According to their information, the gross meals and lodging receivables for FYE '02-'03 was over \$41 million, which generated a local tax revenue for the FYE of over \$1,642,000. She noted that six years ago, no caterers were

listed in the Abingdon phone directory, while fourteen are presently listed. One of those caterers reported an 800% increase in business since the opening of this building, with 75% directly attributable to the HEC.

Reporting on building usage, Deborah stated that, during an average week, her department schedules 150 classes, 75% of which require technical support from the Center's IT department. In the area of events (which does not include classes), FY2003 ended at just under 1,300 events. For the current fiscal year, events are on target at 691 to date. Deborah's information included the number of people actually coming into the building for an event or activity (not for classes); for FY2000, that number was just under 56,000. A comparison of income revealed that revenues generated in June 2003, were over \$174,000, and that revenues for this fiscal year are \$83,300 to date.

She mentioned several events which have been held in the building: Virginia Highlands Festival's gospel music concert, featuring Doyle Lawson and Quicksilver; the United Way Kickoff Fundraiser, featuring Nascar driver Kyle Petty; the Tobacco Conference, hosted by Congressman Boucher; Farm Bureau Women's Committee Conference, featuring the Blues Brothers Band; Symphony of the Mountains' Orchestra 101, narrated by John Palmer; the March of Dimes Chefs' Auction; the TriCities Cooking School for the first time, with plans to return next year; Governor Warner's Education for a Lifetime Press Conference; the Appalachian Regional Commission Conference with representatives from 13 states in attendance (over 300 people); the Virginia Department of Health Bioterrorism Drill; Mistletoe Market, which had a banner year with its highest attendance ever; holiday celebrations for Berry's Home Center's employees, and the Army Reserves.

Deborah reported that new carpet has been installed in the Grand Hall, as well as a new sound system and dance floor; chairs in the room the Board is meeting in have been replaced with more comfortable seating; videoconferencing systems and security cameras have been added.

She concluded her presentation by commending the Center staff for their continuing superb performance.

#### **Board Member Comments**

Dr. David Wilkin commented about the new intersection between VHCC Drive and Jonesboro Road which was completed by the Town of Abingdon, and that a resolution of thanks from this Board and the community college Board had been sent to the Town.

Senator Wampler spoke briefly about the possibility of the Center's future as it relates to research, the possibilities in that area, and the role, if any, that the Center might play in the many different fields of research.

#### **Recognition of Site Directors**

Dr. Rachel Fowlkes recognized the site directors, commended them for their hard work, and asked that they introduce themselves. Blue Gotham, Director of the College for Older Adults; Penny McCallum, Site Director for Old Dominion University; Mitch Williams, the new Site Director for the University of Virginia and the University of Virginia's College at Wise; Bethany Fullen, the new Site Director for Radford University; Kris Peter, also new, Interim Site Director for Virginia Tech, introduced themselves and provided information about their institutions programs at the Center.

Meeting was adjourned.