

Central Oregon Community College

COCC magazine

2025



75 YEARS OF OPPORTUNITY

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education, inspiration and connection

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- And many more!



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Central Oregon Community College
COCC
magazine
2025 Volume 7

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Letter from the Presidents

Greetings Central Oregon,

It's a landmark year for Central Oregon Community College: our 75th anniversary! The College started as a humble night school — without even a name, in fact — tucked in the basement of Bend High School, with just 109 students in attendance in 1949. Today, COCC has grown throughout Central Oregon, bringing education, services and four unique campuses to our extensive 10,000-square-mile district. This last academic year, 12,675 individuals engaged in one of our many credit or noncredit programs.

In celebrating this important milestone, we want to extend our thanks to you, whether you're a student or past student, a workforce or educational partner, maybe a scholarship contributor or event attendee, or someone who's worked for, collaborated with, or supported us in myriad ways over the decades. The word "community" is front and center in our name — and that's what sustains and drives our mission, bringing high-quality, equitable and accessible lifelong education to Central Oregon.

As your current and past three COCC presidents, we're all grateful to have been part of the College's storied journey that started long ago — and whose immediate future includes a campus expansion in Madras, a full-scale facility remodel in Redmond and new educational pathways that will transform how students connect with their chosen major. Come July, COCC will proudly welcome its newest president — our seventh in 75 years — to guide this great College forward.

Like the wide horizon of the High Desert, it's a future that feels full of potential. We hope to see you at the anniversary celebration event on May 2 (details on the back cover) as we commemorate 75 years of education, inspiration and connection!

With great thanks,

Laurie Chesley

Laurie Chesley
(2019-25)

Shirley I. Metcalf

Shirley I. Metcalf
(2014-19)

James Middleton

Jim Middleton
(2004-14)

Robert L. Barber

Bob Barber
(1990-04)



Bob Barber, Shirley I. Metcalf, Laurie Chesley and Jim Middleton.

📷 Rosie Day.

Chapters of Learning

A crash course in how academics evolved at COCC



Studies in poultry management and meat cutting. Classes in fender work. When the College first began in 1949 — operating without a name and held strictly as a night school in the basement of Bend High School — the educational options went slightly beyond basics like math, business and chemistry. On Wednesday evenings, the basement pulsed with flashes from an electric arc and gas welding class. But "special interest" classes, like those of a poultry sort, soon helped boost a small enrollment.



(That would soon change, and by 1977, with shifting views on equality, women students would outnumber men for the first time, 52% to 48%.)

June 4, 1955, was an historic day for the College: the first commencement. Five students received Certificates of Completion in liberal arts and 32 earned certificates in vocational education. Another milestone took the form of an impromptu parade, when, in 1961, the State Legislature approved increased support for junior colleges. Students marched triumphantly through downtown, some holding hands in a long chain, others banging drums, chanting "Hey, hey, what do you say, COC is on the way!"

New doors continued to open, including classes in languages and the arts. The Nov. 22, 1960, edition of the student-run *Broadside* revealed that "COC is one of the few colleges in the state to offer Russian." When the Bend campus first opened on Awbrey Butte in 1964, trailers were hauled onto the site for added classroom space. But that posed a unique problem for the Music department: How to fit a piano through an undersized door? The show (or song)

must go on, even if walls have to come down, and workers sawed away a section to safely lodge the instrument.

A year after the College's name officially became Central Oregon Community College, another behemoth arrived on campus. A cutting-edge IBM 1130 computer, weighing 660 pounds and boasting a one-megabyte disk drive, allowed COCC in 1968 to offer a degree in the new study of "data processing." Degrees and certificates would come and go — and evolve — in response to technology, the economy and the needs of the community. For those considering a four-year degree, the state's development of the Associate of Arts Oregon Transfer degree, first established in the late 1980s and then fully standardized in 2008, smoothed the bachelor's degree track.

Today's catalog features 103 majors, including newer additions like Community Health, Illustration, Geospatial Science and Hybrid-Electric Vehicles. Beginning next year, a new learning model called Guided Pathways will help students connect more quickly with their ideal academic interests. It's a whole new chapter.

By 1954, the course listings at the newly named Central Oregon College — Oregon's first community college — numbered 28. That same year, the Nursing program started. Sixteen students, all female, comprised the original cohort, donning starched white uniforms and training to secure a job on "Hospital Hill" (St. Charles' original Bend location, downtown at the corner of Lava and Franklin).

Upon completing studies at Central Oregon College, many female students were constrained by the times. "Planning a summer wedding" was a common yearbook refrain. Even those transferring to a four-year school were commonly bound for degrees in "home economics" or "secretarial science."

📷 Middle bottom, Right: Rosie Day.

75 YEARS OF OPPORTUNITY

A decade-by-decade rollcall of some impactful graduates who found a great start at COCC

1940s

LES SCHWAB (1917-2007)
 Founder of Les Schwab Tire Centers
 Student in 1949

Across the West, it's a name synonymous with traction and the open road: Les Schwab. The tire magnate, who launched a household brand name and employed thousands at his Prineville-founded company, was born in Bend in 1917 and received his first school lessons in a railroad boxcar at a Brooks-Scanlon logging camp. He became one of COCC's original 109 students in the fall of 1949, studying English composition and accounting in the basement of Bend High School (the College's first "campus"). "I thought this new college at the high school was a good idea," he told *The Bulletin* in a 1999 interview.

Having worked as the circulation manager at *The Bulletin*, Schwab already had a budding business acumen. He bought a small tire store in Prineville in 1952, expanded quickly to serve a growing Central Oregon, and, with a knack for marketing, a belief in empowering employees as stakeholders, and an entrepreneurial nature, built his business into a Fortune 500 Company that opened hundreds of locations and recorded more than a billion in annual sales.

With a rakishly worn high-crown cowboy hat and a free-beef sales promo that endured for decades, Schwab represented a hard-working Western spirit. His ingrained impact on the region and mentorship to Old Mill District-developer Bill Smith led Smith to name his outside music venue the Les Schwab Amphitheater, a name that stuck for 20 years.

Schwab died in 2007, and his wife, Dorothy, passed in 2016. The Dorothy Schwab Educational Foundation brought support for COCC scholarships, and today, a philanthropic foundation started by one of Schwab's granddaughters, The Echo Fund, continues to play a part in the Schwab legacy — contributing to Central Oregon communities and causes.



1950s

JOHN OVERBAY (1934-2023)
 Grocery Store Developer
 Class of 1952

The population of Bend was 11,409 in 1950 — and times were changing. Timber was no longer viewed as the future. That year, due to depleting forests, one of the two main mills, Shevlin-Hixon Lumber Co., sold its holdings to its rival, Brooks-Scanlon. A Bend teenager named John Overbay was lucky to land a job in the industry at the Leonard Lundgren Sawmill Company, and in 1952, would head downtown after his day shifts, attending basement-based classes at Central Oregon's newly founded college.



"I wanted to go into business for myself," Overbay said in a 2020 interview. After earning a bachelor's degree in business from Lewis & Clark College, he worked for United Grocers and went on to run his in-laws' grocery chain, Wagners, beginning in 1980, ultimately purchasing the stores and managing the shopping center properties that he helped develop around them, including Bend's Wagner Mall. Albertsons would acquire the grocery chain in the mid-1990s, and the family company, Overbay Development Inc., sold the Wagner Mall and Bend's Pinebrook Plaza properties.

"I told myself if something goes absolutely great with this, I want to give back," he said. In 2019, he contacted the COCC Foundation to announce a gift of \$1 million to establish an endowed scholarship fund for generations of COCC students.

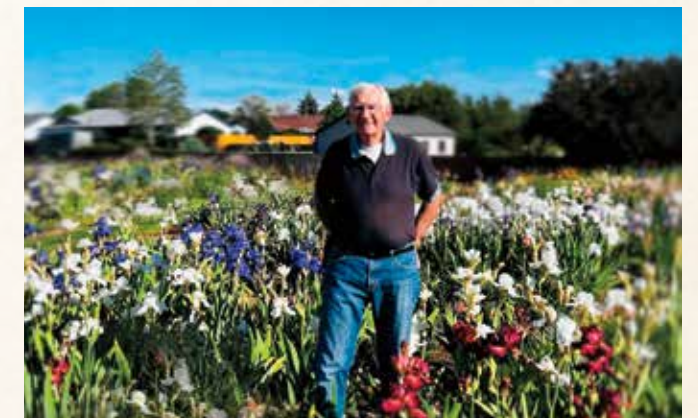
Three generations of Overbays, in fact, have studied at COCC. Overbay would serve on the COCC Foundation board of trustees for 20 years — one of that board's longest tenures, which included co-chairing a \$6 million comprehensive 50th anniversary campaign, together with Ron Bryant (right), which created endowments for the library, professorships and scholarships. He also spent 13 years on COCC's board. Overbay passed away in 2023. In honor of his commitment and contributions, a conference room in the College's Health Careers Center bears his name.

RON BRYANT
 Retired Attorney
 Class of 1956

One of the first students to make the commute to Bend's budding night college from Madras (returning home around midnight after classes) was a youth named Ron Bryant. "I'm not sure I would have gone to law school without that," says Bryant, recently retired after a busy career.

A journalism major beginning in 1955, Bryant made the most of his time at the College, editing *The Broadside* student paper, playing on the basketball team (practice started at 9:30 p.m.), singing in the Night Hawk choir (a suitably named night-school mascot, prior to today's Bobcat) and emerging as a student leader. He went on to a law degree at Portland's Northwestern College of Law, before returning to Central Oregon in 1964; settling in Madras initially, then joining a well-established law firm in Redmond.

Bryant's dedication to his community included serving as mayor of Redmond, where he helped the Redmond Airport establish its original terminal, and as director of the Redmond Chamber of Commerce. He was also a business owner and served or led a number of local nonprofits. In fact, the leadership qualities that the College helped foster would come full circle: Bryant served on the COCC Foundation board in the late '60s, where he was a firm advocate for educational access, and also on the COCC board from 1971 to 1976, including as chair in 1974. For decades, he was COCC's legal counsel — advising the institution that gave him his start. "It's the cornerstone of what makes Central Oregon go," he says of the College.





WILLIAM “BILL” EWING (1941-2012)
City Manager
● **Class of 1962**



A can-do kind of person, William “Bill” Ewing of Prineville was community-focused his entire career, which included serving as Crook County Commissioner for two terms in the 70s and 80s and being deeply involved in the Prineville chapter of the United States Junior Chamber, or Jaycees, the national civic engagement nonprofit — where he went on to become state committee

chairman and state vice president for the Central Oregon area. In 1975, he was inducted into the Oregon chapter of the Jaycees’ International Senate.

Ewing was in a wheelchair most of his life, paralyzed from the waist down in an auto accident when he was 16. It made him more determined. His sister, Peggy, remembers him being carried by COCC classmates up to a spillover classroom (when the night college was located at Bend High School) on the second floor of the St. Francis of Assisi Catholic Church. Friends remember him dancing in his wheelchair at community events and he was a fixture at Crook County sporting contests, cheering on athletes of all ages.

An insurance salesman for many years, Ewing spent the back half of his career as a city manager for three Oregon communities: Drain, Falls City and Nyssa. “He had a big impact on a lot of people,” says his nephew, Yancey Fall, a data reporting specialist for Oregon’s North Central Educational Service District. Prineville held a special place in Ewing’s heart, and he retired there with his wife, Diana, in 2010. “He did everything for Prineville that was in his power,” Peggy shares.



PATRICIA MOSS
Past President/CEO at Bank of the Cascades
● **Class of 1975**

It’s amazing how a single college course can be the catalyst for a career. “There was a class called ‘Business Machines,’ and you learned how to use calculators and computers,” recalls Patricia Moss of her COCC studies in the mid-70s. “I thought, ‘I’ll try banking.’ I had all this machine experience.”

Having moved to Bend from the Seattle area when her husband was relocated for work, Moss had taken some college classes prior to COCC. But up until then, she hadn’t found her true talents.

She was hired at U.S. Bank to provide temporary vacation relief in bookkeeping and as a teller. When a new institution called Bank of the Cascades opened in 1977, she applied and was one of just nine original employees — and stayed for 35 years. Moss rose steadily in her responsibilities, and ultimately became CEO, serving in that role from 1998 to 2012. She helped the bank establish as a community pillar and guided it through the Great Recession, and, three times, was named one of the top CEOs in the nation by U.S. Banker magazine.

Her education at COCC would lead to a bachelor’s degree from Linfield College — using videotapes, in part, to earn a remote education — and later she began a master’s degree at Portland State University. Higher education in Central Oregon gave her a start, and she later gave back. She served on the COCC board of directors from 1985 to 1987 and was part of the Central Oregon Regional Advisory Board — “It was a passion of my life” — that helped bring Oregon State University-Cascades to Bend.

Now a corporate board member for both First Interstate Bank and Knife River Corp., Moss recalls how COCC educated her in other important ways: “COCC really got me to see how important it is to be part of a community.”



Left: Submitted photo. Right: Rosie Day.

1980s

PEGGY CAREY
*Director of Strategic Initiatives,
J Bar J Youth Services*
● **Class of 1981**



Cancer care entered a new era in Central Oregon in the late ‘80s when a registered nurse at St. Charles was asked to serve as director for the hospital’s planned cancer program. Peggy Carey, originally from Lake Oswego, was familiar with taking on challenges in the interest of others. As an aspiring artist in the late 70s, enrolled at COCC with the notion of becoming a graphic

designer, she stepped away from her studies to care for a friend in Portland who had awakened from an accident-caused coma. Carey poured herself into nurturing for the next year.

“I thought, maybe I’ll do something in health care,” she shares of the life-altering experience. Returning to Bend, she applied to the Nursing program at COCC and was soon heading in a whole new direction. “I loved my instructors,” she says of that formative time.

Carey was initially hired as a float nurse at St. Charles, a diverse assignment that revealed her skills and compassion — and resolve — to many specialties, including in cancer care, which she says is a “great blend of head and heart.” Five or so years later, when oncology physicians were in conversations with administration about the development of a dedicated cancer department, they approached Carey to take the lead. She would spend the next 25 years devoted to this purpose.

Carey established the Sara Fisher Project, which promotes breast cancer screening awareness, and piloted a coalition of health care providers to bring such support and services to underserved women — a model that was soon applied by other communities. Working with community partners, the long-running Heaven Can Wait 5K fundraiser took shape under Carey’s leadership. She would chair the Oregon Breast & Cervical Cancer Coalition and serve on the board of what would become Partners in Care, helming a campaign to create Hospice House, and later, guided a community effort that opened the Ronald McDonald House in Bend. Carey’s education continued with a bachelor’s in nursing from Southern Oregon University and a master’s in public administration from Lewis & Clark College.

Later recruited to run the Shaw Cancer Center in Vail, Colorado, Carey returned to Bend in 2016, and now, as the director of strategic initiatives at J Bar J Youth Services, helps bring learning opportunities to at-risk youth. Her encouragement to students includes this advice: “A community college is such a great place to start.”

Rosie Day.

1990s

BREANA SYLWESTER
Director of Financial Aid at COCC
● **Class of 1999**

Making a good impression can sometimes prompt a job offer — very rarely, it can lead to a job without even applying for one. That was Breana Sylwester’s introduction to the world of financial aid. Having stepped into an air-conditioned financial aid office on a scorching July afternoon in Klamath Falls while attending the Oregon Institute of Technology, she was seeking respite from the heat and her tuition costs. She quickly found herself recruited for a federal work-study assignment, helping others do the same.

“It was the fit I didn’t realize I needed,” says Sylwester, born and raised in Bend, who went to Mountain View High School and earned a general studies degree at COCC. Dabbling in medical imaging studies in southern Oregon at the time, the new job tapped into her true calling: “tearing down walls” for others.

That unlikely start would ultimately take her back to COCC — after earning a bachelor’s degree at the University of Oregon — where she’d move up the financial aid ranks from aid advisor to assistant director to director, a role she’s held since 2019. While working full time, she earned an MBA from Concordia University. Sylwester currently serves as a committee co-chair for the Oregon Association of Student Financial Aid Administrators board.

As a once-shy student, and somebody who took some career twists and turns, she now helps others find their own strengths and direction. She routinely takes a shift at the office’s front counter to engage directly with students. And the work of Sylwester and her team is paramount. Current data reveals that 50% of credit-seeking students at COCC — more than 3,600 individuals — are receiving support for their educational expenses due to financial need. “It’s very fulfilling... to help students form their future,” she says, grateful to be at COCC. “It’s where I belong. COCC helped me become who I am today.”



2000s

TRISH CONNOLLY

Deputy Chief at Bend Fire & Rescue
 Class of 2000 (EMT) and 2002 (Fire Science)

Rappelling from helicopters into wildfire zones around the West, Trish Connolly began to wonder if her summer job was becoming something more. Meant to support her sociology studies at the University of Montana, fighting fire was starting to feel like her destiny.

“I got the fire bug,” says Connolly, smiling. “I loved the physical demands of the job, the team focus and the fact I didn’t know what I would be doing from day to day.” Upon relocating to Bend after graduating college, Connolly walked into the brick Bend Fire station downtown and offered herself as a volunteer. Initially denied, she persisted — and they took her on. She immediately enrolled at COCC to become a paramedic.

“The instructors in those classes had practical experience that gave fantastic insight into what it would be like to treat patients in the field,” says Connolly, who soon embarked on her Fire Science degree. Learning how to apply physics rather than brute force for heavy tasks (which wasn’t standard procedure back then), forced her to adapt. And guided by professors who were “incredibly engaging and personable,” she thrived. “I loved my schooling experience at COCC.”

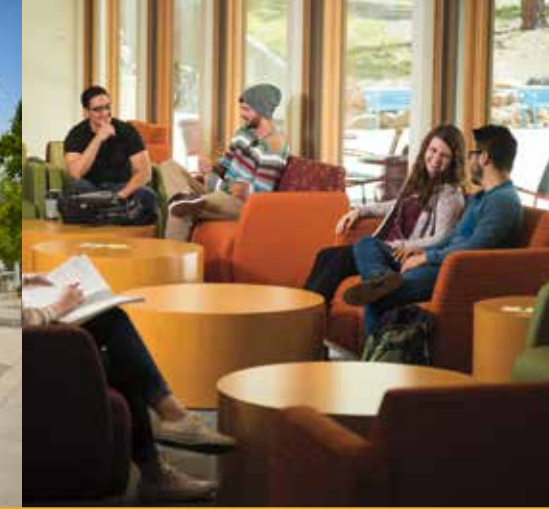
When she finished her Fire Science degree, Connolly tested highest of all applicants for a single position at Bend Fire & Rescue — and became the first female firefighter in the

organization’s history. Being a pioneer wasn’t her aim, she just felt drawn to the work. “Having the responsibility of caring for someone at their worst moments is intense, but also fulfilling beyond description,” she shares.

After 18 years of front-line duty, Connolly was promoted to the rank of battalion chief, and then later, deputy chief, positions never held by a woman in the department. Today, as one of five deputy chiefs for the busy city-and-rural force of 125-plus firefighters, she directs operations of hiring, policies and communications. When she started in 2000, the annual call volume was 5,304. In 2023, it was 13,488.

Connolly’s commitment to the position and fellow firefighters includes serving as president of Bend Firefighters Local 227, the state’s second-oldest firefighting union, and earning a master’s degree in public administration at Columbia Southern University in 2021. In doing so, she received another first: Chosen by faculty as the Outstanding Fire Service Professional of the Year, the first woman ever selected for that honor.

“I had many challenges as I advanced in my field,” Connolly reflects. “They helped me grow personally and professionally. I have loved serving my community, working in a dynamic team and truly making a difference in someone’s life.”



2010s

AUSTIN SMITH JR.

Natural Resources General Manager,
 Confederated Tribes of Warm Springs
 Class of 2012



Bringing bighorn sheep “home” was what started it all. As a young wildlife technician in the summer of 2002, a reintroduction effort — moving a herd of 20 bighorns — to the 644,000-acre Warm Springs Reservation opened Austin Smith Jr.’s eyes, and heart, to what he wanted to do. Bighorns had died off across Oregon by 1915, for reasons of overhunting and disease, and what started with

a state reintroduction in 1971, relocating animals from Canada to Oregon’s Hart Mountains, allowed the species to get a foothold.

Smith graduated from Madras High School in 2004, enlisted in the military — as many in his family have done — and spent the next five years as a rifleman, and then scout sniper, with multiple deployments during Operation Iraqi Freedom with the Marines.

He would then circle back to wildlife, becoming a full-time tech for the Confederated Tribes — tracking and tagging animals, conducting helicopter surveys, restoring natural areas — and return to school. He earned an associate degree in Biology at COCC, backed by a Foundation scholarship, and then a bachelor’s degree in natural resource and conservation technology from Oregon State University-Cascades. He was selected in 2018 to represent Warm Springs in the American Leadership Forum of Oregon.

Smith’s dedication to his work with the Tribes saw him later promoted from wildlife biologist to wildlife manager, and in 2022, he was named general manager of natural resources.

A board member for the Deschutes Land Trust, Smith is a frequent speaker on wildlife conservation. His knowledge includes species like the gray wolf — “a culturally significant native species” for the Tribes, but not seen since the mid-1940s, until recently. They’re making a comeback on the reservation.

2020s

OSCAR TOVAR

Psychology student at the University of Oregon
 Class of 2023

Connecting with others was always a central part of Oscar Tovar’s time at COCC, from serving in student government to chairing the diversity committee to volunteering at the Bethlehem Inn. He forged lasting connections in his Psychology studies, too — such as reaching out to a noted professor from the Stanford School of Medicine to suggest a Zoom-based guest visit for the undergraduate research lab.

His COCC professor, Andria Woodell, Ph.D., was floored. “This was a great connection for us because it is challenging to build connections between community college students interested in research and researchers at universities. Dr. (Jill) Helms was very excited to hear about our work, and is excited to stay connected with our lab.”

Presently a Wayne Morse Scholar at the University of Oregon and finishing his bachelor’s degree in psychology, Tovar found a well-defined career path at COCC — just not the one he’d planned.

“I’d always had an interest in psychology, so I went into COCC with the intention of pursuing a psychology degree on a pre-med track, as I intended to do psychiatry,” he says. But Tovar was quickly fascinated with research and advocacy surrounding mental health. “I would love to focus specifically on the research portion of the field with a specialization in OCD.”

An All-Oregon Academic Team member and a Coca-Cola Academic Team Silver Scholar — one of just 50 in the country — while at COCC, Tovar was class speaker at COCC’s 2023 commencement.

“I came to COCC without much of an idea of how my time here would shape me,” he shares. “I am truly proud of my accomplishments.”



A Place for Connection

The Veterans program is building upon its peer-and-support mission with a newly improved resource center — named for an American hero who helped launch COCC’s Automotive program



When an enemy grenade came over the stonewall that surrounded his battalion’s command post in Besancon, France, in the early hours of Sept. 7, 1944, a young U.S. Army communications technician named Robert “Bob” Maxwell flung himself upon it with only his wool blanket as a buffer. It saved the lives of the others in his squad but left Maxwell badly wounded. Upon recovery, he would receive the Medal of Honor for his courageous act.

Following the war, Maxwell settled in Oregon and used the GI Bill to study automotive maintenance in Eugene. He became an instructor, first teaching at Bend High School in downtown Bend before helping COCC launch its Automotive program in 1958, where he served as a formative faculty member for eight years. He spent the remainder of his career with Lane Community College, later retiring to Bend.

Maxwell was a talented educator and a tireless supporter of veterans, and COCC’s board of directors officially named the College’s veterans center in his honor. He passed away in 2019, at the age of 98, the oldest Medal of Honor recipient at the time.



The Robert D. Maxwell Veterans Center is a busy place at COCC, with many students looking for peer connection and educational advice. This past academic year, 7.4% of credit-seeking students at the College were veterans; the compact lounge-like space in the Coats Campus Center saw 423 veteran visits in just one recent term.

“This program has value because veterans bring in unique experiences and skills,” says Bonnie Jordan, program coordinator, whose appointments can touch on everything from counseling to housing options to facilitating peer support. And, of course, central to it all, helping newly enrolled students identify their next career.

“We bridge past experiences and educational goals,” she adds. It might be helping a U.S. Coast Guard guardsman envision a culinary career. Or assisting a retired Navy aircraft mechanic to realize a flight school dream. Jordan recalls a Marine veteran who wanted to pursue studies in business or computer science, mostly for job security. “But after connecting with various veteran services in the community in his first term,” she recalls, “he had clarity that he wanted to work directly supporting veterans, and he is now pursuing a degree in Human Development.”

Even with the aid of an outreach coordinator and several work-study students, the program — split between two buildings — is overstretched. It could use better infrastructure and more space. When U.S. Senator Ron Wyden visited COCC in the spring of 2023, he was inspired by the work happening for vets.



Right: Karen Cammack.



“COCC attracts some of the greatest numbers of student veterans among Oregon’s colleges and universities, so setting up lasting support structures is crucial to ensuring that these Oregonian veterans succeed in higher education and beyond,” he said at the time.

Soon, a federal grant was announced: \$600,000 from the U.S. Department of Education for a new-and-improved campus resource center. Then the Oregon Department of Veterans’ Affairs provided over \$81,000 for the Veterans program, funds that will support tuitions and emergency assistance, along with training faculty and staff in how to better serve vets.

The Center, at the time of this writing, is beginning to shift from blueprint to reality. It’s located in an underutilized area in the lower level of the Coats Campus Center, now serving mostly as storage. The name will be updated, too: the Robert D. Maxwell Veterans Resource Center.

There will be three soundproof offices and adjacent spaces for studying and relaxing, with a multiuse room that can pivot into a virtual classroom — serving a number of active-duty and rural students. In addition to students and staff, the space will accommodate certifying officials, Deschutes County

Veterans’ Services officers and community volunteers, plus partners such as the College’s Small Business Development Center. Veterans with an entrepreneurial spirit can use GI Bill assistance for noncredit workshops and a management program.

While the Center offers veterans a place that is specific to them, it’s also about inviting the broader community in. For instance, the space will be used in partnership with journalism students for a new COCC class that’s centered on the national Veterans History Project. Student veterans will help the journalism class find and facilitate interviews with community vets, recording oral histories for the Library of Congress. COCC librarians are looking into cataloging the same stories for a Central Oregon audience.

It all amounts to “students having a central location for services and community,” Jordan says appreciatively.

The location has an ADA-parking spot just outside the entrance, she notes, with the Mazama Gym steps away, and the popular Student Veterans Club — now a Student Veterans of America chapter — will have a roomier spot to gather. Doors are expected to open as early as the end of this year, with a new campus flagpole planned to be raised nearby.

For Adam O’Neill, a former U.S. Army infantryman who came to COCC from Portland, the Veterans program has been extremely helpful — and led him to a degree path he wasn’t even aware of, in Unmanned Aerial Systems. “I had no idea of how I would begin my journey to a degree,” shares O’Neill, a Foundation scholarship recipient, who hopes to pilot drones for search and rescue missions and wildfire surveillance. “Bonnie and the Veterans department made it as smooth and simple as possible. I doubt I’d be doing as well as I am now without their help.”

**JOIN US FOR THE CENTER’S DEDICATION EVENT:
May 28 at 4 p.m.,
with an open house starting at 3 p.m.
COCC Bend Campus, Coats Campus Center**

Right: Rosie Day.

YEARBOOK

A glance back and look forward at some far-reaching programs and places



New Era for Nursing

1954: The College was still in its infancy and piggybacking on Bend High School's downtown campus when it first introduced the Nursing program. Sixteen students, all women, comprised the original cohort. A teaching partnership was formed with area hospitals, including St. Charles — then a stout brick structure rising above downtown on the basalt outcropping of "Hospital Hill."

Today: Having just passed its 70-year milestone, the Nursing program (which this year is 33% male) is adding some incredible new impact to individual careers and the well-being of Central Oregon. This winter, the program will expand its annual cohort size from 56 to 64 individuals — thanks to the campus expansion in Madras — ushering in more opportunity for an in-demand occupation. In 2026, the College will begin offering a Bachelor of Science in Nursing, the first bachelor's degree ever available at COCC, to further advance nursing careers.



Fresh-start Degree

2008: The year after the minimum-security Deer Ridge Correctional Institution first opened in Madras, COCC became the facility's education partner. Through a contract with the Oregon Department of Corrections, the College began providing a range of services, anchored by a state-mandated General Educational Development (GED) prep program, including Adult Basic Skills, a college-credit welding program and career-aligned training.

Today: This past summer, the program received Pell Grant certification from the U.S. Department of Education for its newly designed associate degree prison education program — one of just several such programs in the country, and the first in Oregon, to earn that distinction. The first cohort of associate degree-focused students at Deer Ridge, 18 in all, began their first term of classes last April. More than 40 individuals applied.

A Grand (Re)Opening

2011: The construction of the COCC campus in Madras was supported by a voter-backed bond and a generous land donation. Jefferson County residents were able to more easily access College classes and even work toward the foundation of a two-year degree.



Today: The campus's 24,000-square-foot expansion, currently under construction and set to be completed by winter of 2026, will allow students to be able to take complete degree and certificate programs in the Nursing, Nursing Assistant, Medical Assistant and Early Childhood Education programs (with learning options for the latter in both English and Spanish). For students with young families, and for other community families too, an on-site child care center — comprised of five classrooms and outdoor play spaces — will accommodate up to 100 children and provide Early Childhood Education students with a connected learning opportunity.

COCC'S EDUCATIONAL IMPACT STUDENT SUCCESS

THEN & NOW

FALL TERM, 1949:

COCC's first-ever term saw

109 students enrolled

FALL TERM, 2024:

6,305

students enrolled, including both credit and noncredit

FIRST ACADEMIC YEAR:

8 courses offered, algebra and typing among them

2024-25 ACADEMIC YEAR:

103 majors available,

from Psychology and Helicopter Pilot to Engineering and Dental Assistant

FIRST COMMENCEMENT, 1955:

5 students received Certificates of Completion in liberal arts and 32 earned certificates

2024 COMMENCEMENT:

760 degrees and certificates awarded



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community college

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Inspiration | Connection | Opportunity



cocc.edu/about/75

COCC's 75th Anniversary Party

Friday, May 2, 2025 | 4-7 p.m.

COCC Bend Campus, Coats Campus Center

Free and open to the public

We're marking this milestone with an afternoon of history, memorabilia, tours, academic program samplers and, of course, cake. Please join us!

