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New PSC campus president optimistic for college's future

by Liz Beavers News & Tribune Editor

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Dr. Jerry Wallace

KEYSER, W.Va. (WV News) - The new campus president of WVU Potomac State College has hit the ground running and says his first main focus is to get everyone - students, faculty and community - working in the same direction.

Realizing the need to repair some rifts that occurred within the faculty and staff and also between the college and community under some previous administrations, Wallace has already begun meeting with various groups to not only introduce himself but also to engage in discussions about the various issues that have arisen.

Prior to starting his job as campus president on Dec. 1, a letter raising some of those issues - including a declining enrollment - was sent to him from a group of concerned community members, alumni and former college employees, asking him to address the issues for a more stable future for the college and for the betterment of the college/community relationship.

One of the first things he therefore did once he arrived on campus was to arrange an informal gathering with those concerned citizens.

"We had an excellent meeting; we were able to address some of their concerns," he told the News & Tribune recently.

"I was able to share my vision, and some of the enrollment strategies we have already implemented and what is coming for the future."

Wallace says he plans to keep communication open between the college and the community, and among the faculty and staff as well. Those communications will often come in the form of a column he plans to contribute monthly to the News & Tribune, as well as sharing his planned communications with WVU.

“I will be producing a presidential report to WVU each month,” he said, adding that the report will be made available to the public.

He also plans to hold monthly “all college” meetings with faculty and staff to share updates, discuss concerns, and strive to get everyone on the same page with the unified mission of the college.

Wallace also hopes to improve college/community relations, planning to implement an employee volunteer hour program, a monthly breakfast for PSC retirees, and regular participation of college students and employees in various community-sponsored events.

With declining enrollment currently being a concern not just at Potomac State but with most college-level institutions, Wallace says one thing he tries to do is start early when it comes to helping students realize the importance of attending college.

He plans to reach out to area K-12 schools to begin introducing the idea of working toward college at as young an age as possible, and has already had multiple meetings with superintendent of Schools Troy Ravenscroft.

In addition, he has already hosted students from nearby Westernport Elementary School, where they were able to see some of the things PSC has to offer and - the highlight of their trip - to meet his four-legged companion and college spokesdog, "Ace the Prez Pup."

Starting at a young age is an idea that worked well at his former college, Danville Community College in Danville, Virginia, where he even co-wrote and published a children's book featuring Ace on his quest to work hard and get into Knight School and make his puppy career dreams come true.

Once youngsters have chosen to pursue a higher education and become PSC students, he hopes to have some programs in place to help them get their feet wet in the work world to assist with the next big transition in their lives.

“I would love opportunities where our students could get introduced into the workforce while here,” he said.

As for on-campus issues, Wallace is encouraged by the meetings he’s had so far with the faculty and staff at PSC.

“We’re coming up with things we all can believe in, we all can buy into; it’s just a matter of having the time to get with people individually,” he says.

So what's first on his list?

"Initially, the first 90 days, would be the rebranding and getting our culture back," he says, adding, "The pride is still here, there's just no strategic vision of where we're going.

"We were in survival mode, but now I think there will be more stability," he adds.

And he counts the time WVU interim provost Paul Kreider put in doing double-duty as interim PSC campus president as a definite plus for the Keyser campus.

“Paul’s biggest contribution was... being able to go advocate for Potomac State at WVU, because he’s been here and he’s seen it,” Wallace says.

He says he is looking forward to building a positive future for Potomac State.

“I think we have the right people; we just need the right culture. We’ve got to build the culture that we want,” he says.

“I’m very optimistic.”