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Dealing With Disaster: How BC Has Handled a Century of Campus Closures
“Associated for a Purpose: Four Major Aims Which Will Affect The Entire Community Grew from a Meeting of Three People” read the headline of the article in the Summer 1946 edition of Alumnus, the first issue of the magazine of the BJC Alumni Association. The article describes how “three energetic members of the BJC class of ’39” met in December of 1945 to discuss forming an association of alumni. They were returning to Bakersfield after the end of WWII and were seeking ways to renew old friendships and create new ones.

When presented to Grace Bird, by Virginia Burris Mosconi, Dave Fanucchi and John Boydstun, “the idea met with her hearty approval and a promise of aid and encouragement.” So an announcement was made at the JC mid-winter formal dance and the first organized social event was a picnic at Kern River Country Club on February 24, 1946. A dance at the Bakersfield Inn on April 5 attracted over 150 couples and the cover girl for the first issue of Alumnus magazine was selected. Thus began the Bakersfield (Junior) College Alumni Association which 75 years later is the oldest continuously operating public community college alumni association in the country.

Drafted and ratified in the spring of 1946, the first constitution’s four purposes clarified the realization of the founders that the new association “could be not only a means of renewing old friendships and creating new ones, but could be a constructive force in both academic and community life.” Membership was open to any person who had completed at least one semester as a member of a graduated class of BJC upon payment of a three dollar initiation fee and two dollars annual dues. Lifetime membership was available for $20.

Officers whose official terms began July 1, 1946, included the three class of ‘39 founders: president Boydstun, secretary Mosconi and treasurer Fanucchi. Roy Hubbard, ’38, was elected vice president and five appointed committee chairs rounded out the first nine person executive committee. The Alumni Association ended the academic year by hosting a tea for 1946 BJC graduates, and with ambitious plans for the months and years ahead.

John Boydstun was a BC cheerleader and track athlete during his student days in the 1930s. In 1946 he cofounded the Alumni Association, was its first president and was active on its board of directors until his death 70 years later. He was one of the first inductees into the BC Alumni Association Hall of Fame in 1987 and received one of the 100 Stars Awards during BC’s centennial year in 2013. Each year John would host the BC cheerleaders and alumni board for lunch at the August meeting of his Kiwanis Club. A week before his passing John was photographed there, decked head-to-toe in red and white, surrounded by BC cheerleaders!

In the 75 years since its inception, the B(J)C Alumni Association has evolved as its membership, programs, publications, organization, etc., have changed. Membership eligibility was extended, first to anyone who had completed at least 6 units of coursework at BC, then to “all persons who have a benevolent interest in assisting or promoting Bakersfield College.” Annual dues gradually increased to $25, and life membership increased to $200.

However, the original purposes have not changed, including providing financial assistance to students at various stages of their higher education. According to the July, 1953 Alumni News (a newsletter that replaced the Alumnus magazine) the association awarded its first...
scholarship in 1947 to a graduating BJC student who transferred to San Jose State. The number and size of scholarship awards would increase through the years. In 1961 three $100 scholarships were awarded: one to an entering freshman, one to a continuing sophomore (me), and one to a transferring graduate. The 1975 scholarship donation appeal letter says that in 1974 the association awarded $150 scholarships to 19 Bakersfield College students who intended to re-enroll in the College program the following school year. In addition, $50 book scholarships were awarded to 30 high school graduates who had enrolled as freshmen.

Through the years the association had various social activities, fundraising events and service projects including dances, picnics, pool parties, bowling and golf tournaments, post-commencement receptions for graduates and families, homecoming receptions, tailgate parties and special section seating for home football games, rooter’s buses to away football and basketball games, and honor award banquets to name a few.

By far the most successful fundraiser became the annual BC Alumni Barbecue. It began in the early 1950s as a male-only preseason steak feed at which each football player was paired with a community sponsor to promote interest in the upcoming football season. Soon women and children began to attend and all sports athletes, band members and cheerleaders participated. It went on for more than 60 years as the major association fundraiser, drawing more than a thousand BC boosters annually. In fact, the fall sports BBQ was so successful that it was later copied by the university across town.

During the 2015-16 academic year, the Alumni Association raised funds through membership dues and contributions, and from the 61st Annual BC Alumni Barbecue ticket sales and sponsorships. The association funded five leadership awards and ten scholarships ($500 each) to BC students, and provided special funding to BC athletic teams, cheerleaders, drumline, jazz ensemble, women’s history month, commencement, and other BC organizations and events.

For much of its early existence, the association operated as an independent off-campus social/service organization of former students, many of whom had been athletes, cheerleaders, and/or active in clubs and student government while BC students. By 1960 the BC Patrons Service Club was formed to work with the financial aid office to actively solicit larger contributions, bequests and endowments.

The Patrons Service Club became the BC Foundation in 1975. In the 1970s the thirteen-member Board of Directors of the Alumni Association worked closely with the Athletics Department, the Student Activities Office and the Patrons/Foundation. BC Athletic Director Herb Loken retired in 1983 and took on a part-time position as Executive Secretary of the Alumni Association. The position was co-funded by the college and the alumni association, and included a desk and secretarial support in the office of the Director of Development and Foundation, Pat Shaffer. This gave the association continuity and visibility both on campus and in the community, and with Herb handling day-to-day operations and organizing events the association grew and prospered.

In 1987 Herb Loken persuaded the association board of directors to start the Bakersfield College Alumni Association Hall of Fame. A banquet was held annually from 1987 to 2003, then semiannually until 2013, to honor people who had made significant contributions to the success of the association and the college. Seventy-four people have been inducted into what became the Herb Loken BC Alumni Association Hall of Fame in 2000, and their photos are on display in the foyer of
the Administration Building. Besides cofounders Boydstun, Fanucchi, and Mosconi, the list of inductees includes 30 of the 48 past presidents of the association. It also includes Grace Bird and three other BC presidents, four mayors of Bakersfield, several football coaches, team doctors and athletes, other college administrators and staff (including Loken and Shaffer), and many community members, all of whom were significant contributors of time and/or money to the association.

In 1998 Herb Loken told me that the nominating committee thought I should become the next president of the Alumni Association Board of Directors. He added that he was planning to retire in 1999 as Alumni Association Executive Secretary and Pat Shaffer was retiring as Director of Development and Foundation. By the time I ended my second one-year term as President in 2000, the Alumni Association had become an affiliate organization of the BC Foundation and its funds moved from an off-campus bank checking account to an on-campus Foundation account. By 2000 there had been 47 presidents in 54 years, but I was the first one who was a current faculty member or college employee. Some board members were not happy with what they perceived as a takeover of the association by the college, so the next nominee for president declined the position.

Fearing that the association might die for lack of leadership, professor of psychology becki Whitson stepped forward to become the 48th president. While a student at BC, becki had been a cheerleader, and as a faculty member she advised the current cheer team and organized an alumni cheerleader group to perform every year at the homecoming football game. Her spirited leadership, with the assistance of the BC Foundation and a small but determined board of directors, kept the association going until becki passed away in December of 2020, after having just been re-elected to another term as association president.

Meanwhile, earlier in 2020 the Bakersfield College website announced the formation of the Renegade Alumni Council (RAC). “At the urging of two energetic young alumni BC RAC was established … to work with the BC Alumni Association to address the engagement needs of the young alumni population.” As proof of the old adage that “the more things change, the more they stay the same,” the four-fold purpose of RAC bears remarkable similarity to the four major aims expressed in the Alumni Association’s original 1946 constitution.

RAC was encouraged by BC President Sonya Christian, and the Alumni Association Board of Directors was re-energized by the efforts of new Foundation Executive Director Cheryl Scott and Alumni Relations Manager Heather Pennella. One of the RAC originators was Alex Dominguez. Alex had served as president of the BC Student Government Association and student trustee on the KCCD board. Having just been elected vice president of the Alumni Association Board of Directors in October 2020, Alex became president upon becki Whitson’s passing. So, the future of the Bakersfield College Alumni Association looks bright and we look forward to celebrating its centennial in 2046!
Remembering becki Whitson
by Jerry Ludeke

Editor's Note: No, the headline is not a typo. becki Whitson "despised the way capital B's looked and decided to forgo them," according to her daughter, Nichole Scanlon, so she began spelling her name with a small "b". We will honor that practice here, although the Renegade Rip article has been reprinted as originally published.

becki Whitson slipped away on December 18, probably still with a smile on her face.

The Renegade Rip, October 21, 2015 front page article by Marcus Castro, Editor in Chief said:

BC HOMECOMING SPIRIT
Becki Whitson is the epitome of enthusiasm at BC

Long-time faculty member of Bakersfield College Becki Whitson got emotional when speaking about her time and experience at BC over the years. "This is where I always wanted to be," said Whitson.

Whitson has been a faculty member at BC for around 25 years, but before that, she attended BC as a student. "I loved my time as a student at BC. I loved the teachers, and I loved the closeness in the community that we had here. So, when they actually asked me to teach, it was kind of like a dream come true," said Whitson.

Her most memorable and proud moment at BC was when her peers nominated her for the Margaret Levinson Faculty Leadership award in 2009. Whitson said, with tears in her eyes, "That was an honor. I don't know why they did that but they did. Being given that award will always be special to me. It's such an honor."

"This professor is actually very helpful. Some students find her difficult because she really enforces reading. But if you read the textbook, you'll be perfectly fine."

"She makes you earn your A, but she gives you everything you need. One of the best teachers I've had."

"She is always in a good mood and always willing to help after. I highly recommend her Intro class."

That's our becki.....and we will miss her.

becki joins the cheer team at the BC Homecoming game
Historic Campus Closures at Bakersfield College
by Jerry Ludeke

The 1918 Spanish Flu epidemic prompted strict mask wearing mandates

While it may seem as if Bakersfield College has been “closed” for over a year under the Covid-19 pandemic, classes have actually continued through the miracle of Zoom and other technological wonders of the twenty first century. The campus itself has been maintained by a skeleton crew and a few classes that needed hands-on experience have continued on-campus with pandemic protocols of masking and social distancing in place. While this has been recognized as a unique experience, it raises the question of whether there have been other closures in BC’s 108-year history.

Historians Ken Hooper and Garth Milam along with The Bakersfield Californian shed light on the most comparable situation, the 1918 Flu epidemic. Bakersfield College was only five years old at that point and was located on the Kern County High School campus (now Bakersfield High School). Although the flu probably originated in the United States and flourished in the European trenches of World War I, it became known as the Spanish Flu because it first entered a neutral country in Spain, which had no need to hide it as the warring countries did. It was also called The Grip. Fifty million people globally had the flu, with twenty to fifty-year olds suffering the greatest mortality rate. Varying reports say 700 to 900 local Kern County people died (in March, 2021, Kern deaths from Covid 19 numbered just over 1000.) Gauze masks were required by city ordinance; there were nay-sayers in those days, too, and several arrests were made for non-compliance.

School closed for five weeks in October-November 1918. (There was no technology available like Zoom to keep classes going.) Dr. Peter J. Cuno, a Bakersfield city health officer, said that children were safer in school instead of on the street and that low attendance, not the flu, caused the schools to be closed. (So what did Cuno think caused the low attendance?)

Schools, bars, restaurants, and theaters were closed, and churches and homeowners were told to keep their windows open. Like today, a second and then a third wave of infections occurred when such businesses reopened. Masks and social distancing were mentioned, but not extra hand-washing. However, people were told to gargle, and there was an abundance of unapproved “treatments” such as quinine, turpentine ointment, coal oil, a violet ray ozone generator, and tincture of iodine mouthwash.

The next big event to cause Bakersfield College class interruptions was the 1952 earthquake. The quake and large aftershock hit in July and August of 1952, two weeks before the fall semester was to begin. The Junior College building north wing stood basically unscathed, but the south wing which held many classrooms needed extensive repair work. The opening of school was delayed by two weeks while administrators scrambled to arrange classroom space. The first intrasquad football game was postponed to September 12. Administration offices were set up in the former office building of Haywood Lumber Company. Tents were set up in Elm Grove for classes in the fall. As the weather grew colder, the tents gave way to mobile units elsewhere on campus. The student lounge in the basement of the JC building was partitioned into classrooms and a mobile unit in the parking lot became the Epi-Center Student Lounge.

Both gyms were “earthquaked” and unusable. Physical education classes were limited to activities which did not require a gym. For the women, there was golf in Elm Grove, bowling at nearby alleys, and tennis. Leadership workshops were held in student and faculty archives.
Students could take a post-quake break at the Epi-Center Lounge homes near campus. The Potato Bowl Reception and Dance were held in the Bus Barn, with the buses parked outside. Dances in warm weather were held on the tennis courts, and later at the East Bakersfield High cafeteria, the Bus Barn, and the Lakeside school gym.

The good news was that the heavily destroyed junior college part of the campus hastened the School Board's sponsorship and the voters' approval of a bond issue to build a new college campus on the China Grade Bluffs. (That location opened in 1956.)

Other closures of the Bakersfield College campus typically lasted no more than a day or two or even just a period of hours and were usually caused by an interruption in electrical or water power, both essential to normal operations. But not always. During the night of January 25, 1999 the “Blizzard of ’99” occurred and Bakersfield awoke to 4 to 6 inches of snow on the ground. Bakersfield College, along with most government agencies and schools, closed for the day. Sleds could be seen on campus and a few brave (or foolhardy) skiers skied down the Panorama Bluffs. The one-day closure turned into two when the snowpack buckled the canopy poles in campus center and the runoff caused a power outage. With the power outage, BC Food Services had to purchase, ironically, 1,250 pounds of dry ice to keep food supplies cold.

Another memorable power outage closure occurred in 1981 when BC joined with the oil industry to offer Roughneck Training, more specifically Floorman Training, to better prepare oil field workers. For hands on training, the college installed an operational derrick (though it did not lead to an actual oil well.) All architectural plans that showed underground lines were consulted before choosing the location for the hole. In spite of that, while drilling the 500-foot hole, at about ten feet they hit a 12,000-volt cable which dramatically cut off all power on campus, including the air conditioning. That cable had appeared 10 feet away on the architectural drawings.

In the 1980s a different cause of shutdowns began to occur... prank bomb calls. A typical call, reported in January of 1985, came from an unidentified male to the Continuing Education Department at 3:50 p.m.: “There’s a bomb in the Administration Building and you have until 4:30 to find it.” David Rosales, Associate Dean of Instruction, was called. He contacted Leon Ragsdale, Head of B.C. Security, who in turn called the Bakersfield Police. The building was evacuated and searched. (When it happened in a classroom building, teachers joined in the search of every classroom.) Staff reentered at 4:45. In this case Ragsdale said, “Nobody was found, and no bomb went off. It could be a joke, or a deliberate vindictive disruption” (possibly a student unprepared for a test). After several occurrences of these forced evacuations taking students out of class for an hour or more, even the students grew weary of that form of “entertainment” and the practice died away.

In 2002-2004, the death RATE from SARS (severe acute respiratory syndrome) was higher than the current Covid-19 rate, but the highly contagious Covid-19 has claimed more lives and triggered closures of schools. Neither the 2009 H1N1 flu epidemic nor the 2014-2016 Ebola outbreak was so contagious that it triggered school closures.

Bakersfield College’s 2020-2021 response to the Covid-19 pandemic has been more a realignment of services rather than a true closure. New ways of providing the classes and services have been developed through staff creativity and utilization of new technology. It will be interesting and exciting to see what new “normal” evolves when social distancing is no longer a mandate. It will still reflect the heart of Bakersfield College.
Remembering Clayton Rippey
by Rob Parsons

Clayton Rippey graduated with an A.B. and an M.A. in Fine Art from Stanford University in 1949. That Fall he began his career in Bakersfield, teaching art classes at the high school and at Bakersfield College. Both institutions were located on the campus of Bakersfield High School at the time.

In 1956 the college finished construction on the Panorama Campus where he transferred, serving as chairman of the art department and retiring from BC in 1980. Clayton is the one who first “embodied” the Renegade Knight, designing and building the mosaic standing knight which has welcomed people to the BC campus at the Panorama and Haley corner since 1956.

A reception and show of his work honored him at the Levan Center in 2011. Annual exhibits displaying his work were shown at the Cezanne Gallery owned by Maris and Todd Madigan. He was a prolific painter, muralist, ceramicist, sculptor, and designer.

In addition to his teaching, Clayton produced a body of art that has been represented in numerous exhibits. The depth of his work is recognized in both public and private collections throughout the nation and in Europe. Although he has been honored with a great many awards over the years, one of his most treasured was the Bakersfield College Foundation’s Distinguished Service Award, presented to him at a banquet on May 4, 1999.

Rob Parsons and his parents, Bob and Pat, were good friends of Clayton’s through the years. Rob reports that Clayton, at the age of 97 and thrice a widower, recently returned to his home in Cedar City after a year’s sojourn in Oregon.

Planning to live to 100 years old, he continued producing paintings from his recent explorations in the abstract genre. Recently, Clayton was invited to exhibit at the Southern Utah Museum of Art (SUMA). This show runs from January 14th until March 13th 2021. In the midst of his activities Clayton suffered a debilitating illness. As the ambulance was preparing to take Clayton to the hospital, the SUMA representative arrived to pick up the collection of paintings for the show. Clayton tossed the representative his house keys and told him to help himself.

Clayton died peacefully at home with family the day before the show opened. Typical of his positive outlook and forward thinking, his new passport arrived on that day.
From Our Readers

Potato Bowl Royalty Had Its Privileges

A coveted BC Life Pass unlocked a flood of Bakersfield memories for the son of 1950 Potato Bowl Queen Estelle Williams, who sent us photos from that event and this note:

I’m the son of Estelle Williams (now Baldwin), who was the “Potato Bowl queen” in 1950. She absolutely loved the years she attended Bakersfield College. She went on to marry my dad, a Marine Corps fighter pilot, and he became a successful real estate developer in San Diego. Dad has passed away, but mom is still alive at 89. She is frail but can carry on a conversation and when I came across her BC “Life Pass,” I googled it to see what it was and your archive newsletter popped up. She still has her crown and her sash.

We still have relatives in Bakersfield, including many cousins and have fond memories of spending summers there. Let me know if you decide to use any of these photos in the next newsletter as I know she will be thrilled to see them published. By the way, I don’t know what the one photo is of Mom walking through a gauntlet of military guys on what looks to be a football field. Mom doesn’t remember what this event is, but I’m guessing that it was the ceremony at the Potato Bowl at which she was crowned the queen. If anyone knows more about this pic, I would love to hear from them.

Steve Baldwin

The Life Pass affords free admission to all home BC athletic events

Fond Memories of BC Faculty

I appreciate the Archives magazine so much! I was a student at BC 1948-50 – followed my high-achieving sister (Gladys Russell) by 6 years. She introduced me to her mentors Grace Bird, Peggy Levinson and Dorothy Albaugh – went onto Cal and medical school.

I was a distracted student but loved Paul Gordon, Adele Schafer, Ysabel Forker, Van Ewart, Pananides – and those exceptional women named above.

I transferred to Stanford – still distracted – and after graduation went home to the Kern River oilfields – taught school for 3 years and married a petroleum engineer. He really wanted to teach, as did his father, and we ended up at Cabrillo College in Aptos, CA.

So I’m handing your magazine over to Cabrillo’s foundation staff because it is so worthwhile and so worth emulating.

Thanks for all you do!

~De Anne Russell Hart BC ’50

De Anne Russell as a 1950 BC grad
JOHN ACKLAND was the legendary anatomy professor with a heart as big as his booming voice and hearty laugh. He worked closely with the Nursing Program. His second love was sharing his tractor.

BILLY BARNES was a nationally ranked swine judge who shared his expertise in both farming and livestock as the Chairman of the Agriculture Department, joining the faculty in 2007.

TIM CARROLL, employed at BC in 2000 as a custodian, was promoted to Site Operations Coordinator and later became M&O Supervisor before leaving BC in 2010. He was a “down-right good person.”

PAT MCGOWAN CONNER, a poet at heart who “traveled her own path”, was the beloved English professor who developed and taught the very popular Children’s Literature class, her unique niche.

BONA DILLON joined the BC faculty in 1975 as a journalism instructor and advisor to The Renegade Rip. A great supporter of BC and youth, she spearheaded a reunion of all previous Rip staff members in 2014.

ROBBIE GONZALES-BONAS was the 1961 Homecoming Queen, head song leader, one of BC’s 100 Stars, and, as a staff member, the support person for several deans. Kindly, patient, and a happy smile!

BOB GUE retired from KCCD in 2014 after working almost 18 years with BC’s Media Services as a control room operator. He moved to Ohio but checked in with Kristin Rabe to say he missed his BC family.

ELOISE HIGGINS was the tall, stylish, gently humorous woman who taught in and developed the Early Childhood Development program. Her special class was Creative Activities for Young Children.

GLORIA JULIAN was an alum who for 31 years was an assistant in the BC Child Development Centers. A hard working, fun-loving person, she loved caring for the babies in Grace House Center on Baker.

NANCY MAGNER was a passionate art historian and world traveler who enhanced her Art History and Appreciation classes with slides and tales from her travels. She also curated the Jones Art Gallery.

CLAYTON RIPPEY, a world recognized artist, is best known on campus for the mosaic Renegade Knight which stands at the NW campus corner. He was with the BC Art Department from 1949 to 1980.

WALLY SIMMONS started at BC in the 80s to oversee the construction program. In about five years he joined the Math Department and the fledgling Computer Studies teaching computer repair classes.

JB TEASLEY, who died at age 94, spent many years as a teacher, counselor, and administrator at the Delano College Center after having served for five years in the Navy during World War II.

JANICE TOYOSHIMA was a smiling anatomy and biology teacher in the 80s and 90s. She also served on the Academic Senate and the curriculum committee. In 1981 she left for Evergreen Valley College.

BECKI WHITSON was The Spirit of BC from her student days through her entire teaching career as a BC psychology professor, director of the cheer team, president of the alumni association, and on and on...

MILT WOKEN joined the BC Business Department in the 1960s when it was headed by Wiley Jones in the pre-computer days. Milt’s specialty was accounting which was a paper and pencil skill then.
A GARDEN OF PEACE

BY DR. JACK HERNANDEZ

There is a garden where we might gather to walk and talk as one to find the innocence of peace with ourselves and others in love’s tranquility and forgiveness, a garden where all voices are heard all lives are embraced in joyful grace.

From the Archives Director

by Mindy Wilmot

March 20, 2020. That was the last day that the Bakersfield College campus was fully open. When we left campus, we had a few projects in the works including digitizing all past BC catalogs and getting them online (that project is currently on hold). While we may not be in our physical space, the workers of the Archives are still hard at work from the safety of their homes. In the past year, we have continued work on our online catalog, conducted a fundraising campaign, and are continuing to acquire physical donations.

With the safety of our community and staff in mind, our goal is to begin working limited hours in the Archives beginning this summer and continue with limited hours in the fall. We thank you for your patience as we wait for the “all clear” from our county and school officials. If you need assistance, the quickest method is to email or call/text me directly, which you can do at: melinda.wilmot@bakersfieldcollege.edu or (661) 319-5639.

As I mentioned previously, we continue to welcome your donations of BC memorabilia and history. Even if you are not sure of the item’s significance, we will be happy to go through the items for you. We thank you for your continued support, and we look forward to seeing you all soon. Stay well.

Mindy Wilmot

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