

WE NEED TO BAND TOGETHER TO SAVE VVC

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Someone asked me the other day why I was dedicating time and effort to a group of citizens trying to bring transparency to the leadership and governing board of Victor Valley College. I explained it's because I realize the economic impact that the loss of VVC would have on our beloved High Desert.

In 1988, I received my master of public administration degree from Cal State San Bernardino. My first job was as an intern for the Hesperia city manager. When discussions about closing George Air Force Base surfaced, he, along with others, said repeatedly that the closure would be huge for this valley. I thought it was no big deal, thought it would never happen. I was wrong.

Then the base closed in 1992. And the door to most job prospects in the High Desert closed as well. It was 2010 before I found a public sector position in this community. When elected officials and public administrators were fighting to make sure that George did not close or that the Victor Valley receive some federal funding to mitigate the economic impact of the closure, their missives often fell on deaf ears.

Now, once again, a group of concerned citizens is collectively shouting from the rooftops to anyone who will listen that if VVC closes, the impact on the Victor Valley will be huge.

Maybe VVC is fine, but that's not what the Accrediting Commission for Community and Junior Colleges said when it placed VVC on probation. The ACCJC found several areas of concern regarding VVC, made recommendations regarding them, and gave VVC time to fix them. When VVC couldn't, it was given more time.

Now that time is almost up. In October, VVC must file a report with the ACCJC about its progress. The VVC administration and faculty say that they have some of the recommendations resolved. But they don't say they have solved the issue of long-term financial planning and deficit spending on which this recommendation focuses. They can't, not without the cooperation of the California Teachers Association and the possibility of contract negotiations to which the teachers must agree. And they aren't.

In the ACCJC Follow-Up Report Fall of 2012, the commission noted in Recommendation 4 that VVC has "made substantial progress" toward "a campus environment of ... institutional excellence by creating a culture of respect, civility, dialogue and trust." But the current goings-on in the Board of Trustees and leadership of VVC are subject to continuing review from the ACCJC and could cause additional accreditation issues for the college. If the ACCJC sees what I've witnessed lately, its review will show current board members yelled at in public by prospective board members, one member refusing to accept an offer to work together from another member as recommended during a team building workshop, and the college board refusing to post a video of its workshop meeting and refusing to let the public speak at a meeting.

In 2006, the Victor Valley College Foundation commissioned a study with UCLA Anderson School of Management to determine the economic impact of VVC has on our local economy. The report estimated the annual gross impact to be nearly \$900 million. As our local economy continues to recover; that number will only increase.

According to the NY Times, Congressman Jerry Lewis said in 1988 that George AFB contributed \$500 million annually to the High Desert's economy. A California Institute Special Report (April 2005) indicates that only one-fifth of the 7,500 jobs lost with the closing of George have returned to our area. That's only 1,500 jobs, more than 20 years later. The High Desert is still reeling from the effects of the loss.

Can we afford to lose Victor Valley College? I say no. And I am not alone. A group of concerned citizens is telling us that VVC is sick. Please listen and act.

Holly Noel lives in Apple Valley.