

Centralia College Celebrates 90th Anniversary

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Centralia College's 90th Anniversary
The 1942 photo shows students participating in women's archery.

For 90 years, Centralia College has been a staple of Lewis County, surviving the Great Depression, low enrollment numbers in the '40s and countless changes to the structure of the school.

First founded in 1925 by Centralia superintendent of schools C.L. Littel, the junior college opened its doors with six teachers and was free for the 15 students enrolled.

From there, enrollment increased to 133 students in 1929, later dropping to only 29 students in 1945. Adding additional programs, and constructing more buildings, the college continued to increase its viability in the community, later dropping the junior college title in 1959, officially becoming Centralia College.

Through a number of different administrators and many

teachers, the college recently expanded into four-year degrees and started building the TransAlta Student Commons this year. The building will serve as a student center for the campus and will include a bookstore, food services, and student government offices, among other things.

The changes that have taken place during the college's history are even more apparent when speaking to those involved in some of the earlier years of Centralia College. Loualta Vogel, a longtime resident of Centralia, served as a librarian and teacher at the college during the 1960s and 70s.

In an interview with Centralia College for its 90th anniversary, she said she arrived on campus during the Vietnam War when young men were being drafted to serve their country. She was certified as a librarian with teaching experience and was hired at the college.

"The world was very different then," Vogel told Centralia College during the interview. "The draft was by lot. They chose a date every day and that's when you got notice. In the student center, the current draft number was a big deal and was usually posted."

Differences could also be spotted in the makeup of her classes. In her first western civilization class, there were only 10 to 12 women, out of 90 students. In an effort to help the young women think critically and build their confidence, Vogel placed the women in front of the auditorium.

“Many women were not trained to be independent,” she said. “When the women’s movement finally came along in the ‘60s, a woman could be herself, not just a helper.”

To help ensure student success, Vogel organized and began a remedial program in the library called the Phoenix Center. Many of the students had a great impact on her life, and she remains in contact with several of them to this day.

She retired from Centralia College in 1981, the same year former president Nels Hanson retired. The Phoenix Center remains in operation.

As for Ross Galvin, the college provided the 1938 alumnus opportunity, opening up the chance for him to later obtain his medical degree from the University of Louisville in Kentucky.

Galvin is one of Centralia College’s oldest living alumni. He attended Centralia Junior College between the Great Depression and World War II. Now 96, he resides in Olympia with his wife Patricia, and the couple continually supports the college by donating annually to the nursing program.

“They got me going,” he told Centralia College officials. “I appreciated all the things Centralia College did for me, so I donate to the nursing program.”

Galvin said he chose to attend the school because it was close, financially affordable and convenient.

He graduated from Centralia High School and thought the junior college would be a good transition before enrolling in a university.

After obtaining his degree and completing his internship at Swedish Hospital in Seattle, he later opened a general practice in his hometown and served some of his former teachers as his patients.

Now 96, Galvin still remembers the good times he had at the college.

“I certainly enjoyed my couple of years at the college,” he said. “I think I learned a great deal of humility and acquired a lot of good friends.”

Through many trials and tribulations, it's apparent the college is here to stay. As the oldest continuously operating college in the state of Washington, it has given thousands of students their start.