

Establishing District 540: Illinois' Newest Community College District

Chapter 1: The Community College in Historical Context

The origins for the community college concept go back over a century to the inspirational and farsighted leadership of two men: William Rainey Harper, the first president of the University of Chicago, and J. Stanley Brown, superintendent of the Joliet Schools. Together they formed an alliance that created the "junior college" in Illinois. (1)

In 1899, Brown developed a six-year school at Joliet Township High School. Those last two years evolved into Joliet Junior College in 1901, the nation's oldest continuous public community college. (2) This educational innovation was designed to serve students who wanted to remain within the community and still pursue a college education.

By 1917, the North Central Association of College and Schools accredited the college. The State Examining Board approved selected courses for teacher certification. Enrollment at the time numbered 82 students. (3) These events gave the institution a level of credibility it never had before.

In 1931, Illinois approved its first junior college legislation. The first Junior College Act became law on July 1, 1937. It made the junior college system a part of the public school system. This legislation was followed by a bill passed in 1943 that permitted referenda to establish tax rates for both building and education funds to support junior college operations. (4)

In 1951, new law created standards and procedures for establishing junior colleges. Next in 1959 separate junior college districts were permitted by allowing any compact and contiguous territory to be formed in a junior college district with an elected board of education. State funding for junior college operations was initially appropriated in 1955. Between 1955 and 1962, seven new junior colleges were established bringing the total 18. In 1961, Rock Island, Moline, and East Moline combined to form Black Hawk College, the first junior college created separate from a common school district. (5)

No decade made a greater impact on the community college movement than the 1960's. When the Illinois General Assembly overwhelmingly voted to authorize the formation of the Illinois Board of Higher Education (IBHE) in 1961, legislators set the stage for a dynamic change in higher education. A primary theme in IBHE's first master plan in 1964 encouraged the expansion of public two-year colleges. (6) At this time there was a name change with "junior" removed and "community" inserted in the official title of these unique two-year schools.

Another milestone occurred in 1965 with the passage of the Community College Act. This legislation "developed organizational arrangements to sever the tie between the two-year colleges and the public school system...It created the Illinois Community College Board (ICCB), replacing the office of Superintendent of Public Instruction as the state-level junior college regulatory and planning agency." (7)

Additionally the 1965 Act designed a system of financial incentives that encouraged the creation of community colleges across the state. "A school district not part of a community college district and without its own two-year college had to pay from its high school budget part of the expenses incurred by any two-year college in the state that enrolled a resident of the school district. To get such costs out of the high schools' budget, school districts, state planners expected, would be motivated to work with neighboring school districts to form a community college district. The Act boosted state aid from the 1959 level, but provided higher levels of state aid to community college districts than to junior colleges remaining outside such districts. Only community college districts qualified for state construction aid." (8)

By the 1970's "only the North Shore suburbs remained outside a public community college district. In suburban Cook County, seven community college districts had been formed by cooperative effort among twenty-seven neighboring high school districts. Outside Cook County in the northern and western Chicago metropolitan area, community college district boundaries tended to be based on county boundaries. The procedures for the formation of these community college districts involved a demonstration of local interest and planning, then state level approval, and finally voter approval in a referendum. By 1971, plans were developing to allow the ICCB to force unaffiliated school districts to become part of a community college district (9)

Today there are 40 public community college districts composed of 49 colleges. Thirty-eight of the districts have a single college while two districts are multi-college. Since July 1990, the entire state has been included within community college district boundaries. (10)

Chapter 1

Notes

1. www.encyclopedia.chicagohistory.org/pages/312.html. The Electronic Encyclopedia of Chicago. 2005 Chicago Historical Society. The Encyclopedia of Chicago. 2004, the Newberry Library.
2. Ibid.
3. www.sic.edu/sicfoundation.phys. Southeastern Illinois College. 10/08/2009.
4. Ibid.
5. Ibid.
6. David W. Scott, "The Transformation of Higher Education in the 1960s: Master Plans, Community Colleges, and Emerging Universities," Journal of the Illinois State Historical Society, Vol. 101, No. 2 Summer, 2008, p. 182. Author David W. Scott served as Director of Admissions at Kendall College at Evanston, Illinois from 1963 to 1965. He received his Ph.D. in political science at Northwestern University specializing in educational politics and organization. He taught American Government courses in a number of Illinois colleges and full-time at Northern Illinois University from 1967 to 1973. In 1974 he joined the staff of the newly-formed Illinois State Board of Education as a consultant in educational planning, organization, and policy,

where he remained until 1999. He served as the President of the Illinois State Historical Society from 2003 to 2005.

7. ibid. pp. 182 – 183.
8. ibid. p. 183.
9. ibid. p. 186.
10. www.iccb.org. Illinois Community College Board. This is the official WEB site for the ICCB that oversees the community college system. This site examines the composition of the Board, provides a summary of the system, and looks at the students, faculty, and administration.

Chapter 2: Feasibility Studies

“Lincoln said the way to be famous is champion an unpopular cause, so I should be famous any time now.”(1)

Art Adams, founding board member

Most of the state by the 1970s was included in community college districts. Yet District 540 (now better known as Heartland Community College) was not organized until 1990. The district covers most of McLean County (the Bloomington-Normal metropolitan area) and parts of four other counties. Heartland has the distinction of being the state’s fortieth and last community college district. (2) What took so long to organize this district?

Every feasibility study conducted dating as far back to the late 1960s and early 1970s demonstrated the need for a community college. But no proposal had been initiated since the rejection of a referendum in 1967. While a study focused on Livingston County and sections of McLean County was sponsored under Livingston County guidance and leadership in 1971, no action was taken. (3)

One of the most detailed studies undertaken was conducted in 1973 and updated in 1977. The origin of the 1973 study was the approval of legislation in 1972 that stated, “By January 1, 1974, the State Board (ICCB) shall provide for new districts or for the annexation to an adjacent Class I community college district.” (4)

In reaction to this legislation, “Mr. Ray Caton, Superintendent of the McLean County Educational Service Region, called a meeting of the Boards of Education and superintendents of the county school districts in the early summer of 1972 to discuss the provisions of the law and determine whether or not the districts should pursue some specific course of action.” (5) A committee was created and reported its findings in September under the title: Report of the 1973 Community College Information Steering Committee McLean County Illinois.

Following this study the Board of Education and administrators convened in early December to discuss available options and procedures. This group advised that Mr. Ray Caton activate a Citizens Committee for the purpose of studying the feasibility and desirability of forming a Class I district. The committee organized and started its work on February 1, 1973. (6)

The 1973 study saw the potential in creating a “Common Market” approach in promoting higher educational opportunities for area residents. Co-operative arrangements involved sharing educational resources by using the two universities (Illinois State and Illinois Wesleyan) through entering into contractual and co-enrollment agreements. The report went on to say that there was “considerable interest in assuring that community college programs serve the real needs of students for the area that would enroll in the new institution and in avoiding duplication of expensive educational facilities.” (7)

Furthermore, the study revealed that facilities were available that could be used for community college classes. The study cited space located in the Bloomington Area Vocational Center, at the two universities and space in facilities like churches, businesses and industrial buildings.

The study also concluded that there were many ways to satisfy the physical resource needs of a community college including leasing interim facilities for a two or three year time frame. Additionally, the study recommended that a newly elected Board consider reviewing the possibility of locating a site after the college operated for a couple of years. (8)

The study committee realized that a community college program could meet the needs of people who were: 1. Too old for vocational education in high school or area vocational centers, 2. Scholastically not qualified for a four-year senior institution, 3. In need of retraining or improvement in their current occupations, 4. High school dropouts, 5. Interested in four-year college education but were unable to attend four-year institution because of finances, family, or entrance requirements. (9)

Art Adams, a professor at Illinois State University and who would eventually serve as a member of Heartland's founding Board of Trustees, also assisted in researching and writing a number of feasibility studies. In an oral history interview, Adams gave credit to Jon Astroth, who would be selected as HCC's first president, for his contribution in writing the January 1977 report. Adams also shed light on the harsh reality the committee faced during that time.

"At the time Jon was my graduate assistant and we started out with a great idea and had a dream. Then we found out it was going to be torpedoed and voted down and there was no possibility the college would be created. So it became kind of a perfunctory task..." (10)

It would take another decade before the next feasibility study was researched and written. Once again Art Adams would be in the forefront of yet another study. Commenting on the 1986 feasibility study, Adams had this to say:

"In the last feasibility study, I'm listed as a first author with Bill Piland, but Bill did most of the writing. I want to give him credit for that. This was the final one and it was well done, really well done. The committees were assigned and did their tasks well...the Community College Board and the State Board received it and said great and they were all for it...." (11)

This 1986 study comprised a small booklet of 51 pages that included an introduction and the following chapters: One, that stated the purpose and criteria; two, that focused on a description of the study area; three, that commented on the population and enrollment; four, that examined the colleges curricular and staffing considerations; and five, that studied the finance and facilities questions. The conclusion was wrapped up in the summary and recommendations section: It clearly stated:

The study area included within this proposed community college district encompasses eighteen unit or secondary school districts. All or part of five counties are represented in the study area.

The population of the proposed district is a relatively large one, with approximately 170,000 residents, based on 1980 census figures. This population is rather young, with almost half below the age of 25. A substantial percentage of the population (44%) is between the ages of 19 to 44. This group is typically the population group which most frequently attends community colleges in Illinois. Presently the average age of a community college student in the State is 30.

The school districts of Bloomington-Normal, Lincoln, and Pontiac compose almost three-quarters of the population of the area. Most residents live in incorporated communities. There are slightly more females than males in the population.

This district is a vibrant, growing one. It contains numerous educational institutions, medical facilities, and communication media. Employment opportunities are diverse and expanding. Service industries, farm-related enterprises, manufacturing concerns and small businesses abound. Forecasts of economic growth are extremely positive.

Resources are available for the proposed community college to support a comprehensive educational program. Programs in occupational/technical fields, general education, college transfer, community and public services and remedial and developmental education could be developed and offered by the college. These programs could be offered by the college through cooperative agreements or by contracting with existing educational institutions offering excellent and cost-effective programs.

The proposed district has an equalized assessed valuation of \$1.3 billion. A maximum tax rate of 22.5 cents per \$100 of equalized assessed valuation should be sufficient to operate the college for the foreseeable future.

Finally, all of the necessary ingredients exists with the study are to support an outstanding, comprehensive community college.

The Steering Committee which prepared this Feasibility Study **RECOMMENDS THAT A NEW, SEPARATE COMMUNITY COLLEGE DISTRICT BE ESTABLISHED WITHIN THE DESCRIBED AREA.**" (12)

1. Oral history interview with Art Adams on November 21, 2003. This interview was conducted at the home of the narrator at Lake Bloomington.
2. David W. Scott, "The Transformation of Higher Education in the 1960's: Master Plans, Community Colleges, and Emerging Universities," Journal of the Illinois State Historical Society. Vol. 101, No. 2, Summer, 2008, p. 192.
3. An Updating and Revision of the 1973 Feasibility Study Regarding the Establishment of a Community College District to Include Only School Districts #5 and #87 in McLean County, February 1977. This 1977 study relied heavily on the work completed from researchers and other who completed the 1973 study, p. 1.
4. Ibid.
5. Ibid. pp. 1 & 2.
6. Ibid.
7. Ibid. p. 28.
8. Ibid. p. 31.
9. Ibid. p. 40.
10. Oral history interview with Art Adams conducted on November 21, 2003, p. 2.
11. Ibid.
12. A Feasibility Study for the Proposed New Community College District for the Pontiac/Bloomington-Normal/Lincoln Corridor, pp. 23 & 24.

Chapter 3: State Action – Local Response

“Our task at hand is to convince the ICCB to form the district that we want.” (1)

Donald O’Neill, writer for the McLean County Farm Bureau

Following the feasibility studies and three failed referenda, the State of Illinois mandated the establishment of Community College District 540. (2) This legislation was passed by the General Assembly in 1985 and required community college affiliation for all school districts by July 1, 1990. (3)

At that time 97 percent of the state’s population was included in an existing community college. Those residents not affiliated were in small areas on the fringes of an established district. The largest area outside of an existing community college included land from Pontiac through Bloomington-Normal to Lincoln.

The task force charged with making a compelling case for a new community college recommended a beginning tax rate of 22.5 cents. It also addressed the need for the college because it would serve a different role from other institutions of higher education (ISU, IWU, and Lincoln College) while serving different people. It could create strong vocational-technical training programs, assist adults seeking job retraining or new skills or those needing remediation, and offer transfer credits to four year schools.

Local businesses could use the community college to improve workers’ skills. It singled out new industries like Diamond-Star Motors (now Mitsubishi) as a potential beneficiary. In addition, classes could be designed to meet the needs of a particular employer while offering students a flexible schedule. (4)

The task force pointed out economic benefits that a community college would offer to the area. Local taxpayers would no longer subsidize students who attended nearby community colleges (Parkland and Illinois Central). The local area would tap into the state share of support (over 30 percent); local tax dollars would remain in this area. Furthermore, money spent by the college on supplies, equipment, and services would stay with local businesses and workers. Local people would have employment opportunities while new businesses would be attracted to the district because employment training programs would be available. (5)

If residents rejected the formation of a new district, the task force members reminded residents that “if voters do not voluntarily establish a new district, the Illinois Community College Board will either assign the area to an existing district or establish a new one.” (6) Assignment to a neighboring, existing district could result in a tax rate at 33.48 cents at Parkland in Champaign or 31.69 cents at Illinois Central in Peoria. A new district would carry a tax rate of 22.5 cents. (7)

Letters were sent to area school districts asking local school boards to pass a resolution (8) in support of a new community college. (9) The Steering Committee even offered to send a representative to school board meetings if invited to do so. While many districts approved these resolutions, some opted to associate with nearby districts.

Efforts were made by Illinois Central College to entice districts into its territory. In a letter received by Dr. Richard MacFeely, superintendent of Normal C.U.S.D. #5, the President of Illinois Central College made the case for immediate annexation for the following districts: Bloomington, Normal, Heyworth, Lexington, Octavia (now Ridgeview), Tri-Valley, and Wapella. (10)

To annex or not to annex to nearby community colleges became the key question for area school boards. Arguments could be made in favor of annexation including the ease of the process, the choice for established and successful quality programs, financial advantages, as in a larger tax base, and a positive identity/image with colleges that have established athletic teams and programs.

On the other hand, a solid case could be made for the formation of a separate district. First, a new college could gain complete local control permitting the community to chart its own destiny and be more responsive to local needs. Second, a new district could offer the prospect of lower taxes. Third, a separate district would provide flexibility offering many options for future decisions. (11)

A number of public hearings were held to inform residents of the issues and to answer questions while permitting different groups to debate the issue of establishing a community college district. One such public hearing occurred on June 8, 1987. It began at 7:00 p.m. in the cafeteria of Normal High School and ended at around 9:00 p.m. Fifty people were in attendance. Fifteen individuals testified and/or gave written statements in support of the petition while seven individuals testified and/or gave written statements in opposition. (12)

Before accepting public testimony, Dr. David Pierce made a statement clarifying the role of the Illinois Community Board and described the work of its' staff in analyzing the petition and in reviewing studies and reports as required by the Illinois Public Community College Act. (13) This declaration set the stage of the public testimony that followed.

One leading proponent, Ron Muirhead, president of the Bloomington and Normal Trades and Labor Assembly and chairman of the Steering Committee, endorsed the district at the 22.5 cent tax rate. He believed that a well-funded, stable community college would be a strong asset for job retention and re-training. (14)

Others in support included Stanley R. Ommen, chairman of the Chamber of Commerce and Economic Development of the Bloomington-Normal area, who praised the work of the Steering Committee and stated his conviction that a new district would meet the educational

needs of McLean County. He further stated that he believed the findings of the Steering Committee reflect the needs and wants of the residents of the corridor. (15)

Opponents included Darwin Builta, president of the McLean County Farm Bureau. He spoke on the behalf of the 6,300 members of the local Farm Bureau. He said that while the Farm Bureau strongly supported the formation of a new community college district as the best alternative available, he could not support the proposed tax rate of 22.5 cents. He believed that the proposed rate was greater than necessary. Furthermore, pointing to earlier referenda, there was evidence that the majority of area residents believed that local college students were being adequately educated either through charge-back programs at other Illinois community colleges or through alternative training opportunities. The cost to taxpayers for the charge-backs was just over 7 cents. He recommended a rate of 12 cents. Any amount above that would only be necessary in order to construct an expensive campus. (16)

Other opponents, while supporting the formation of a new community college district, expressed concern that there could be competition between K – 12 districts with the college for limited tax dollars. Other objectors questioned the need for a tax vote above 18 cents as excessive and would produce more revenue than would be needed to offer a basic educational program. (17)

Hearing Officer Scott Helmholz summarized the testimony by stating that proponents saw a need for a proposed tax rate of 22.5 cents as a minimum rate necessary to ensure the fledgling district the financial strength required to offer quality programs. Proponents represented a cross-section of the community with interests including business, labor, and educators. (18)

Opponents consistently “questioned the need for the 22.5 cent rate in light of the high equalized assessed valuation of the proposed district, its possible adverse impact on local governments and local school districts, and a general belief, based on assessed values and demographics, that an 18 cent rate would adequately fund the district. All opponents appeared to represent agriculture and county farm bureau interests. (19)

Soon following the hearing both sides made preparations for the upcoming referendum scheduled for Tuesday, November 3, 1987. A war of printed words ensued in area newspapers as residents wrote letters to the editor stating their positions, both pro and con. Advertisements were also taken out that advocated for one position or the other. (20) After all the letters, articles, and editorials were printed, read, and discussed; voters went to the polls on Election Day to cast their ballots either in support or opposition to the proposal. When the votes were tabulated, residents rejected the formation of the community college district.

“17,879 persons in parts of five counties voted on the referendum question, casting 9,926 no votes and 8,053 yes votes. The vote for the establishment of the community college passed in two counties -- Livingston and Logan. Voters in McLean and Tazewell counties

defeated the measure by a 66 percent margin, while a small number of voters affected by the measure in DeWitt County defeated it by 72 percent.” (21)

While voters rejected the proposal for a new community college district, the issue was not going to disappear according to Dick Erzen, an Illinois State University faculty member and a participant on the Steering Committee. Erzen pointed out at an Issues and Eggs breakfast meeting, sponsored by the Pontiac Area Chamber of Commerce, options facing the community including: establishing a new district, joining an existing district or letting the Illinois Community College Board assign the area to an existing district or establishing a new district at a 22.5 cents tax base. (22)

Farm Bureau leadership hoped for another referendum before the July 1, 1990 deadline. However, State Representative Tom Ewing said that another election would be unlikely. “You want to keep in mind that there are people in Springfield who have been lusting after this area. If we fall on our faces they’ll be in to pick up the pieces. They want us in their districts.” (23)

Ewing was correct. There never was another referendum. Instead “in October 1988, the Illinois Community College Board heard a proposal from an area citizens committee to lower the tax rate on the referendum that had been defeated from 22.5 cents to 18 cents. This was denied, thereby placing the decision of what to do with the unaligned high school districts totally with ICCB.” (24)

The ICCB made a decision to form a new district in October 1989. ICCB spokesman, Chris Merrifield said the measure passed unanimously with no public comment during the proceedings. (25) The question of the formation of the district was now resolved -- not with a bang but a whimper.

Chapter 3 Notes

1. Donald O’Neill, “Community College Update,” McLean County Farm Bureau News, October 1988.
2. Heartland Community College Master Plan Final Draft, April 1993.
3. From the Art Adams Collection. “Background Pieces.” This is a series of seven short data sheets intended to provide information concerning the Community College Referendum on November 3, 1987. These “Pieces” were released to the area media.
4. Ibid. Background Piece #2, “What will a New Community College offer?”
5. Ibid. Background Piece #3, “The Economic Benefits of a Community College.”
6. Ibid. Background Piece #5, “The Tax Impact of a New Community College.” Also refer to Exhibit A for a map of Illinois Public Community Colleges as of September 1985.
7. Ibid.
8. See Exhibit B for a copy of Resolution.

9. From the Art Adams Collection. Letter to Mr. Joe Underwood, Superintendent Lexington District #7, on September 12, 1986.
10. From the Art Adams Collection. Letter to Dr. Richard MacFeely, Superintendent of Normal C.U.S.D. #5 from Leon Perley, President of Illinois Central College on August 18, 1986.
11. From the Art Adams Collection. Letter to Superintendents of Unit or High School Districts in the Pontiac-Bloomington/Normal-Lincoln Corridor Not Presently in a Community College District from Art Adams on December 15, 1988.
12. From the Art Adams Collection. Letter to David R. Pierce, Ed.D. from Scott C. Helmholtz, Hearing Officer on June 11, 1987. Summary of Proceedings and Testimony from a Public Hearing, held on June 8, 1987 at Normal, Illinois, p. 3.
13. Ibid.
14. Ibid. p. 4.
15. Ibid. p. 6.
16. Ibid. pp. 12 and 13.
17. Ibid. pp. 15 and 16.
18. Ibid. p. 16.
19. Ibid. pp. 16 and 17.
20. Refer to Exhibit C for a sampling of letters that appeared in print in local newspapers. Also see Exhibit D for paid advertising either for or against the referendum.
21. From the Art Adams Collection. Carol Kinas, "Community College Proposal Fails," Daily Leader, November 4, 1987.
22. From the Art Adams Collection. Carol Schott, "Voters will Set Course for Community College District," The Citizen, October 19, 1987.
23. Ibid.
24. From the Art Adams Collection. Jack Nutt, "Clarifying Status of College District," The Lincoln Courier. No date provided.
25. From the Art Adams Collection. Kurt Erickson, "Vote secures area college district," The Pantagraph, October 21, 1989.

Chapter 4: The 1990 Election – An Extraordinary Campaign

“I was running against 19 other people and that was...very sobering and very interesting.” (1)

Margaret Esposito, founding Board member

The November 1990 election was like no other in McLean County history. There were 20 candidates vying for seven spots on the ballot. Voters had ample choices and a number of opportunities to hear candidates speak and answer questions at forums held throughout the community college 540 district.

Candidates represented a variety of backgrounds including college professors, high school and grade school teachers, bankers, real estate agents, farmers, administrators, pharmacists, secretaries, insurance agents, and lawyers. Their ages ranged from 28 to 67 years old. Thirteen candidates filed simultaneously for a position on the ballot. This resulted in a lottery conducted on August 28, 1990, in the McLean/DeWitt Regional Office of Education, Room 312 at the McLean County Courthouse at 10:00 a.m. in Bloomington. The lottery determined ballot placement. Candidates who filed later gained ballot position in sequential order according to the time they filed their papers. (2)

While candidates expressed an interest in the new district, they differed on a few key issues. (3) *“One was taxes...and another one was a strong feeling not to have another campus here.” (4)* That sentiment was echoed by candidate Sharon Sullivan(Tarvin).

“We had several opportunities to be interviewed by groups endorsing candidates, as well as a few public forums. I recall some points about those experiences and know that some people heard what they wanted to hear, as later there seemed to be a perception that those of us who were elected all promised no brick and mortar. I believe some candidates may have suggested that, but none of those were elected. I, for one, always used the terms ‘fiscally responsible’ and ‘the needs of the district will drive our decisions on facilities.’ Partly that was because I was fairly new and certainly didn’t pretend to have clarity on the long term educational needs of the district.” (5)

Many candidates campaigned vigorously spending money on yard signs, printed brochures, billboards, newspaper and radio advertising. Some individuals set up election committees, asked for financial support, and sought endorsements from local organizations. (6)

To assist voters in making a choice from such a wide array of candidates, The Pantagraph printed a special election guide that outlined each candidate’s position with respect to the following questions: What would be your number one priority as a member of the community college district board? What type of educational programs should the district provide? For example, vocational/technical training, two-year degree programs, or programs geared toward transfer of credits to a four-year college? What do you think are the district’s facility needs for the first five years? (7)

Other efforts were made to inform voters of candidates’ qualifications and stand on issues. One example included a Candidates’ Forum sponsored by the Government Committee of the McLean County

Chamber of Commerce. The event was scheduled on Friday, October 19, 1990, from 7:30 a. m. to 9:00 a.m. at the downtown Bloomington Office of Champion Federal Savings and Loan Association. Steve Vogel, news directors for WJBC, moderated the discussion. In preparation candidates were expected to respond in writing by October 15 to this question: "What do you consider to be the three most important issues that the new trustees must deal with, and what are your solutions for these issues?"

In addition to answering this question, candidates had two minutes to explain why they were seeking election as a trustee and two minutes to respond to an "at large" question drawn "from a hat" of 20 different prepared questions. (8) Candidates were permitted to make campaign literature available to individuals attending the forum. But rules required that this material could only be placed on table space around the perimeter of the room.

Candidates sought endorsements from a cross-section of organizations throughout the area including the AFL-CIO, Chamber of Commerce, Farm Bureau, and the Illinois Education Association to mention a few. These groups were very interested in seeking out candidates' views by mailing survey questions to each candidate. As an example, the AFL-CIO sent out the following letter and questions:

TO ALL COMMUNITY COLLEGE TRUSTEE CANDIDATES

Dear Candidate,

Enclosed find a survey from our organization on the new community college district. We would appreciate your filling this out and returning it to us by October 15.

We will share these surveys with our COPE (Committee on Political Education) organization, and this group of members will evaluate the surveys and use this as a basis for any endorsements which our organization might make.

Again, thank you for your help and cooperation. Please do not hesitate to call if you have any questions.

Sincerely,
Ronald C. Morehead
President

Questions included the following: 1. How should the community college work with high school and area vocational programs to integrate current programs for vocational-technical training? 2. What would your response be if community college employees, whether clerical, teaching or maintenance, expressed an interest or petitioned for labor union organization? 3. What segments of the community do you feel most need the services of a community college, and how would you reach these populations? 4. What do you think a community college can do to coordinate with employer training programs, existing apprenticeship programs, and other on-going job preparation or skill enhancement efforts? 5. What is your vision for this community college? Who do you think it should serve and how? What do you see as its mandate and its role? 6. Finally, what is your understanding of the prevailing wage law and how it might apply to any community college projects? (9)

After all the surveys, forums, and campaigning had ended, voters got their opportunity to select seven candidates to serve on the founding board. Voters elected Margaret Esposito, Sharon J. Sullivan (Tarvin), Vernon “Art” Adams, Roger L. Tuttle, Fred P. Ragsdale, Jim White, and James R. Pemberton. While all candidates ran at large in the election, voters did select Jim White of Lincoln and Roger Tuttle of Pontiac who were the only candidates not residents of McLean County.

Heartland or District 540 (as it was still referred to in 1990) now had its first official Board of Trustees. This certainly was a major step forward yet the issues, questions, challenges, and decisions that these seven individuals faced would be perplexing and daunting. The college had taken a significant major step but the road ahead was still unpaved. No one could see clearly what the future would bring. The founding Board would be tested as the fledging college slowly moved ahead into, as yet, an uncertain future.

Chapter 4 Notes

1. Oral history interview with Margaret Esposito on August 10, 2004. This interview took place in the narrator’s home in Normal, Illinois.
2. From the Art Adams Collection. News release from the Regional Office of Education, August 27, 1990.
3. From the Margaret Esposito Collection. Daniel Dighton, Pantagraph staff, “College race field crowded,” The Pantagraph, October 29, 1990. In the Art Adams/Heartland Archives there are three container boxes filled with newspaper articles dated from 1990 to 2003 that Margaret Esposito faithfully clipped for the historical record.
4. Oral history interview with Margaret Esposito on August 10, 2004.
5. Oral history interview with Sharon Tarvin (Sullivan) on October 1, 2004 at Heartland Community College.
6. From the Margaret Esposito Collection. The Pantagraph, “Election ‘90,” October 29, 1990, p. 15.
7. From the Art Adams Collection. Committee to Elect Vernon (Art) Adams, Report of Campaign Contributions and Expenditures.
8. Ibid. McLean County Chamber of Commerce letter, September 27, 1990.
9. Ibid. AFL-CIO, Illinois State Central Labor Council, Bloomington and Normal Trades and Labor Assembly letter, September 28, 1990.

Chapter 5: Looking for Leaders

"We were clearly committed to a good community college." (1)

Art Adams, founding Board member

Five men and two women with different backgrounds, interests, and areas of expertise shared a common goal: creating a good community college. Sharon Sullivan (Tarvin) recalled the first meeting held at the old McLean County Courthouse in downtown Bloomington in Room 207.

"Once we were elected, the following Tuesday was our initial Board meeting and the Illinois Community College Board came as well as the support staff from the Regional Office of Education. They helped officiate that meeting which is when we actually drew numbers out of a hat to determine our staggered terms since we were all elected at once and we needed to have staggered terms. We had a choice of getting a one, three, or five-year term. I remember thinking going into that that I thought three would have been about the perfect term because I thought one was too short and five was too long. I got five and I consoled myself that that would be okay....After we selected terms then we also had to elect officers and that was when I was elected Board chair...Then we had a second Board meeting two days later because the pressure was on us. We needed to get our initial tax levy filed and have the proper notice period before that became official in December. So it was pretty much just thrown into the fire at that point in time, a lot of things to do and not a lot of people to help do them at that point." (2)

After the length of terms was determined by a lottery, the new Board focused on selecting a chairperson. A motion was made by Ragsdale and seconded by Esposito to nominate Sullivan (Tarvin). That motion was followed by a second motion made by Tuttle and seconded by White to nominate Adams. Both motions were approved by a unanimous vote. After nominations were closed, Sullivan was selected as Chairperson by a close 4 to 3 vote. The District #540 Board now had a leader. Next the Board elected Margaret Esposito as Vice-Chairperson and James Pemberton as Secretary. (3)

The Board's attention now turned to setting a time and place for regular meetings. It was decided to meet on the second Tuesday of each month, starting at 7:00 P. M. Meeting sites would be announced until a permanent site was found. Although Illinois State University had offered District #540 two temporary offices at no square footage charge, ten parking spaces, and the option of scheduling a meeting location with the building, the Board voted to explore other meeting sites. (4)

The Board of Trustees soon realized that a temporary administrator would be required to handle the day-to-day issues that were already appearing. The Board created four Ad Hoc committees: Administration and Organization, Curriculum, Finance, and Personnel. Work immediately centered on hiring a temporary administrator.

"The first person that we looked at was someone that really had experience with community colleges....And the person who was available to us as our first administrator was Dr. Leon "Bud" Perley who had just retired from Illinois Community College [based in East Peoria] as the president...He was very willing to take a ten-month contract with us to get the institution started. And, of course, had had

all the knowledge from his years of experience that he plugged right in and had great interest and a lot of energy.” (5)

Perley came to the college, after serving for 13 years as president of ICC. Consequently, he made an ideal choice as an interim administrator who provided the new trustees with his experience and expertise. He served in this capacity until October 1, 1991. He told Board members that he was not interested in seeking a permanent position with the college. (6)

Under Perley’s leadership and guidance, the Board established criteria in seeking a permanent administrative leader. What type of leader did the Board of Trustees seek? Board member Roger Tuttle had this to say about the search for a first- time president.

“...We knew that this was not the job for someone who was ready to slow down; we thought it was a job for somebody who was very impassioned about the process of creating a new community college. We knew that if they had prior experience as a community college president that would be even more of an advantage because they would already know a lot of the key players and the processes and the reporting structures and that entire infrastructure. Since we wouldn’t have a staff on board to help guide that new president we knew that having prior experience would be very beneficial. We also wanted them to have an earned doctorate; we felt that we really needed strong credentials within the educational community as well as with the local community...” (7)

The search began in earnest. In an editorial, The Pantagraph commended the Board saying it had set a good example and performed like a well-oiled machine. The newspaper approved of the fact that the Board used existing resources and cited as an example the decision not to hire an outside consulting firm in searching for its first president. The Board served as the search committee and relied on the assistance of Dr. Perley. (8)

According to Roger Tuttle, *“Dr. Perley really did a good job in letting us stumble around but interceding at the proper time and leading us toward our presidential search which we did ourselves. I believe the total cost of that search was \$5,000. We advertised through several mediums and had, I suspect, 75 or 80 candidates for CEO. Board members took it upon themselves to review all those materials from these candidates. I believe we listed our top ten choices and when we got together put them together, found those that matched and it seems to me that in the end we visited three different individuals. Dr. Jon Astroth who was in at Rend Lake Community College was the chosen one and he officially began July 1, 1991, although he spent a lot of days in our district prior to that and it could not have been a finer selection.” (9)*

But before arriving at their final choice, the Board actually interviewed the top candidates in Bloomington in a conference room at People’s Bank. After those initial interviews, the Board conducted on-site visits to interview people on the campus where the candidates worked in order to gain a greater understanding of how their peers and their associates at that time perceived them. (10)

The position of president drew attention from candidates across the country. Nearly 150 people from as far away as London expressed an interest for an opportunity to be the founding president of the new community college. (11)

When the Board made its decision to employ Astroth as its founding president, it faced many other decisions to make the college viable. But now it had a leader who could offer first hand guidance and assistance. Astroth, at the age of 40, came to the community college with vigor, vitality, and vision. He had headed Rend Lake College in Southern Illinois as president for nearly two years. (12) He had spent three years as a vice president at Springfield's Lincoln Land Community College and six years as dean at John Wood Community College in Quincy.

In an editorial The Pantagraph clearly saw Astroth making the new college an asset to the community. The paper liked the fact that he had attended graduate school at Illinois State University, had family ties to the area, and respected his plans for the evolution of the school aligning the college's goals with the needs of the community. The editorial went on to say, "He intends to work with business and industry to tailor programs to meet their needs. He plans to draw on the professional community for faculty and use existing classroom space." (13)

Chapter 5

Notes

1. Oral history interview with Art Adams on November 21, 2003.
2. Oral history interview with Sharon Tarvin on October 1, 2004. Minutes of the first Board meeting on November 13, 1990 revealed the outcome of the lottery resulting in Sullivan (Tarvin), Tuttle, and Pemberton drawing five-year terms, Adams and White drawing three-year terms, and Esposito and Ragsdale serving one-year terms.
3. Minutes of the 1st meeting Board of Trustees District #540, November 13, 1990, p. 1.
4. Ibid. pp. 2 and 3.
5. Oral history interview with Margaret Esposito on August 10, 2004.
6. Tony Parker, "College district seeks name, president," The Pantagraph, Wednesday, January 9, 1991. In minutes of a special meeting of the Board of Trustees, it was reported that the Personnel Committee talked with four candidates for the position of interim administrator. The committee was unanimous in its recommendation to employ Dr. Leon Perley. He was designated Chief Administrative Officer for the college at \$42,000 for a ten month contract beginning December 1, 1990.
7. Don Cavallini, "Archival Anecdotes," The Spectator, November 2009, p. 2, Volume 13, Issue 3. An oral history interview with Sharon Sullivan (Tarvin) summarizes the essential criteria. "Archival Anecdotes" is a column that appeared in Heartland's student newspaper The Spectator.
8. The Pantagraph, "Follow example of new college board," Friday, January 11, 1991, Section A 10.
9. Oral history interview with Roger Tuttle, November 5, 2007.

10. Oral history interview with Sharon Sullivan (Tarvin), October 1, 2004.
11. Daniel Dighton, "Heartland search narrowed to two," The Pantagraph, March 26, 1991, Section A 3.
12. Daniel Dighton, "Educator comes back to take Heartland helm," The Pantagraph, April 1991.
13. The Pantagraph, April 10, 1991, Section A 8.