

Community college board candidates speak at forum

From "COLLEGE," Page 1

then look farther out. Academic programs need money so they can have enough of the right equipment, she said. McMahan said she has been impressed by programs at the college that combine online work with in-person classes. Technology is changing, she said, and all of the college's programs need to keep up. McMahan said the college also should restructure its spending. Leiker said he also thinks the college should focus on quality and stay affordable. Wages have stagnated, he said, but college costs have increased. "That puts people out of the ability to go to college," he said. It is going to take change and effort to stay afloat, he added. McDonald said people need to get involved in the college again. He said he was disappointed that only a few citizens attended the interviews of candidates for college president. The college also needs to improve the quality of its programs, he said. "People need to want to come here because we're the best," he said.

Herschberger said keeping up with technology is important. Sometimes it can be expensive, he said, but technology opens up a whole new frontier. "There's no reason why we can't be on the cutting edge," he said.

Charles said an aging population makes supporting the college's health-care majors important. The college needs to recruit more for programs like nursing and massage therapy, she said. Area farmers are getting older, she said, yet their kids have not stayed in the area. "We need to figure out how we can recruit their children to come back and take over the farm," she said.

During the economic downturn, what is one thing the college should do?

Rogers said the college is going to have to be more efficient and find ways to attract money. The college should focus on majors and training programs that

will allow students to find jobs in Thomas County, which would attract more in-county students.

"It's going to be rough," she said, "but it can be done if we work together."

McMahan said most people have had to change the way they spend money, and the college must do that as well. It needs to bring in more nontraditional, or older, students and be creative in finding grant money, she said.

Leiker said the college needs to be more aggressive in going after money. Costs keep going up, he said, and the college hasn't been as aggressive as it should be in finding more money.

McDonald said figuring out how to weather the downturn should be the first goal of the new president. He and the college staff should evaluate the situation and then bring a solution to the board for discussion.

Herschberger said the staff and employees were going to have to spend a lot more time and effort to get through the bad economy. The college also needs to recruit more, he said, and do only needed maintenance.

Charles said marketing the college will be an important step. The college needs to advertise its in-county tuition incentive better, she said, and needs to listen to the student body and make sure it is serving their needs.

Wells said the college needs to evaluate its programs to see which are cost-effective.

"We can't afford to keep programs intact if they can't pay the bills," he said.

What are your ideas for maintaining and sustaining enrollment?

McMahan said the college should have more internship programs for students to give them experience in their fields. Each program should make an effort to get to career fairs at high schools, she said.

Leiker said many Kansas colleges have seen an increase in enrollment, and the number of students is at an all-time high across the nation. Colby needs to market itself better, he said.

McDonald said the college needs to make sure students get



Bob Selby, president of the Colby Community College Faculty Alliance, introduced the college board candidates at the forum Tuesday.

good value for the money they spend. It also needs to look at what unique programs it can offer, he said.

"What can we specialize in that no one else can," he said.

Herschberger said the college needs to stick with what's working. Programs like nursing are some of the best in the area, he said.

"We need to make it fun and affordable and help them want to stay," he said.

Charles said the college has to make sure its meeting students' needs, whether they need housing or a particular class. It needs to promote student accomplishment, she said, and attract students who want to stay in Colby.

Wells said the college needs to sell what it does well, and while mediocre programs may slip, agriculture and health programs will continue to be good.

Rogers said the nursing program is a good example of how to be successful because there are nurses teaching nurses, students who went back into the community, got experience in their field and then came back to the college

KEVIN BOTTRELL/Colby Free Press

to teach. Rogers said the college has to look at each program and make sure they are the ones the students need and not the ones the teachers want.

Do you see value in a partnership with Northwest Kansas Technical College?

Leiker said a merger would benefit both schools. The state has forced Northwest Tech to become a community college, in that it now has to offer general education courses, and the two schools now recruit against each other.

Cooperation between Colby and Northwest Tech has not worked well in the past he said, but there have been three instances in Kansas of community colleges and technical colleges merging to the benefit of both.

"Until I find an example where cooperation has worked," he said, "I would lean toward becoming one institution."

McDonald said the issue has come up before, but trying to cooperate may not work. In any merger, McDonald said, he would like to see Colby in charge.

Herschberger said the two

schools are competing for students, but Goodland needs Colby more than the reverse. Students with technical skills taught in Goodland also need business and administration skills they can get in Colby, he said, or they can never be successful business owners.

Charles said the two have many classes that could be merged by teleconferencing from one location or the other. She said she didn't know if one college should override the other, but they could work together to eliminate duplicate classes.

Wells said the colleges should work together so they can keep costs down. They could share programs and administrations to cut down on expenses.

Rogers said that over the past few years, as Goodland got stronger, Colby got weaker. Cooperation won't be an issue, she said, if Colby can grow its enrollment and specialize in programs not offered in Goodland.

McMahan said the more the two schools merge resources, they stronger they will become.

What do you see as the role of the college board?

McDonald said the board should set the goals and policies for the president, and the evaluate his performance each year to see if changes need to be made.

Herschberger said the board needs to monitor the president and make sure he is acting in accordance with the board's policies and the law. The board should also be another pair of ears for him in town.

Charles said the board needs to make sure the president adheres to the policies it sets. There are procedures if the president doesn't, she said, and the board needs to stay within those.

Wells said setting policy is important, but the board should also bring information from the community back to the president and staff. The board has been a bit lax in setting and meeting goals, he said.

Rogers said the president is one person, while board is several. This means the board can bring more ideas and diverse opinions, she said, and they can argue until they come up with a right

answer. Rogers said that the board and the president should work together, rather than setting one above the other.

McMahan said the board should act as a sounding board for the president's ideas, in addition to setting policies.

Leiker said the president has the education background to help the board make decisions on policy. Board members have a lot of learning to do, he said, but its up to them to make the final choices. It's important to have the president on board when setting a policy, he said, and its important for the president to have board support on his decisions.

McDonald said the board has to learn about the issues it faces, and the president should be vital in that education. The board and president have to have a good working relationship, he said.

What is one idea you want to pursue if elected?

Herschberger said he didn't have any specific agenda, but he wants to see the students leave the college as honorable people and to see the town prosper.

Charles said she wants to see every high school graduate in Thomas County have a chance to come to the college and make sure word gets out on what it has to offer.

Wells said he can offer leadership and help re-establish quality and integrity on the board. He said he wants to keep the faculty strong.

"They have the most contact with the students," he said, "and the students are our success."

Rogers said she doesn't want to see Colby die. She said she wants to make sure the college is treated as such, and not as a high school.

McMahan said she would like to see the campus be more open and inviting to the public.

Leiker said he would like to encourage more older people to take classes.

"Once you bring adults into education, quality goes up," he said. "They're paying for it; their hearts are in it."

McDonald said he would like to bring the college "out of the trees and into the community," as well as restoring its integrity.

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