

LTCC president balancing state regs, community desires

By Kathryn Reed

STATELINE – Vision. It's what has kept Lake Tahoe Community College going for nearly 40 years.

President Kindred Murillo credits those who four decades ago created the college – which started in a motel on Highway 50 – as well as those who brought it to its current location off Al Tahoe Boulevard. But she is well aware the work is not done if the college is to be operating in another 40 years.

In a talk March 13 to Soroptimist International South Lake Tahoe at Harrah's Lake Tahoe, Murillo spoke of the challenges facing the two-year college that are being handed down by Sacramento as well as the vision she, the board, staff and the community have for the next 40 years and beyond.

Online classes, aka distance education, are a double-edged sword for LTCC. With 22 percent of the enrollment last year coming from this segment of the population, it helped LTCC. But with a bill introduced into the Legislature last month, it would alter distance ed. It could hurt institutions and help students based on mandating California's public colleges and universities accept faculty-approved online college courses for credit.



LTCC President Kindred Murillo is plotting the college's future.
Photo/Kathryn Reed

The other issue on the horizon is what's called "massive online open course" where students don't have to be enrolled at a university but can take an online course and other institutions must accept those credits.

"That could flip our world upside down," Murillo said.

Another issue affecting LTCC is the state limiting how many times a student may take a class. For an area like South Lake Tahoe, many people in the community repeat physical education, art and culinary classes.

The state wants community colleges to focus on getting students to transfer to a four-year college, training them for a job or helping them with basic skills.

The life-long learning classes that community colleges came to be known for are going by the wayside. LTCC, though, is trying to keep many of them alive through Connect Ed. No grades are given, but some classes are more expensive than what they would have been through LTCC.

"It's feeling like the state of California is raining down challenges on us. It's harder on a small, rural college," Murillo said.

Gov. Jerry Brown also wants to limit the total number of credits a community college student can obtain. So instead of floundering to find themselves, they'll need direction faster.

Another issue for all colleges is that the high school population across the country is declining. Murillo said looking farther down the education chain there is good news with growth in grades 1-3 in Lake Tahoe Unified School

District.

A bill introduced by state Sen. Ted Gaines, R-Roseville, would allow Whittell High School students to attend LTCC at the California rate. This would be a pilot program just for LTCC.

Sacramento is also likely to change how community colleges are funded. Now it is based on full-time equivalent students. There is talk of it changing in the next five years to be based on the number of students who complete a program.

"LTCC is going to have to make choices in the next two years," Murillo said. And she isn't shy about saying the community is going to like all of them.

Class sizes are likely to grow. Her goal is to be effective and efficient.

Murillo and the board are setting a path for LTCC to be a four-year college, a destination college, creating an international program, erecting student housing.

In the next two years, Murillo said LTCC needs to turn around the declining enrollment, deal with repeatability of classes and work with South Tahoe High on matching curriculum.

In May, the college will be inviting the community to give input about its envisions for the future.