

March 28, 2011

Countdown to Riverside City College's 100th Anniversary

Chester F. Carlson is one of the more noteworthy graduates of Riverside City College. In 1966 he granted this interview to the "Tiger Times" newspaper where he reflected on his years at the college.

It is 4 years and 50 weeks until RCC's 100th Anniversary on March 13, 2016.



Xerox Inventor Is RCC Alumnus

When RCC students use the Xeroxing machine in the school library, how many of them realize that the inventor of the process once studied in that same library?

In fact the idea for the process might have had its inception at RCC. So says Chester F. Carlson, the inventor of the process and former RCC student. "I remember a discussion we once had in a Riverside physics class concerning the practical uses of electronics. Perhaps the seed was planted at that time," he explains.

Carlson speaks fondly of the three years he spent at RCC, then known as Riverside Junior College. From 1927 to 1930, he participated in a cooperative program under the direction of Howard H. Bliss and Archie J. Twogood, former instructors in engineering and physics.

The program alternated six weeks of classes with six weeks of work arranged by the school. Students usually took four years to complete the program, but this determined student was ready to transfer to California Institute of Technology as a junior in only three years.

But times have not always been so good for Carlson, who has now retired and resides in New York. In fact when he graduated from San Bernardino High School, he did not think he would be able to attend college. Both of his parents were victims of tuberculosis, his mother dying of the disease when he was 17.

Since he was an only child, the main support of his father became his responsibility. He worked as a janitor for the San Bernardino Sun and Telegram and at other odd jobs during high school. Upon his graduation, an uncle suggested that he look into the program at RJC.

He and his father moved to Riverside in the summer of 1925 where he worked at a peach cannery until he could save enough to enter college in 1927. The junior college movement, then still in its infancy, offered him a chance to study tuition-free.

"The next three years were three of the happiest and most valuable years of my life. The periods at class turned out to be exciting and challenging for all of us in the Co-op Course," Carlson describes.

The inventor received his B.S. in physics from Cal Tech in 1930 and an L.L.B. from New York Law School in 1939. After graduating from Cal Tech he worked for a time as a research engineer and later as a patent attorney.

In the early 1930's, while working as a patent attorney, he realized the difficulties of having words and drawings reproduced. He had first become interested in printing processes as high school student, when he tried to publish a paper for amateur chemists.

However, this time the particular problem he encountered was copying work for offices. With these in mind he set out to invent a process which could be incorporated into an automatic office copying machine.

Experimenting with crude equipment and materials in his own kitchen, and studying literature on light-sensitive materials, he considered photo-conductivity and electrostatics.

He conceived of the basic principles and process of xerography in 1937 and, with the help of Otto Kornei, introduced a practical application of the theory in 1938. Since then he has made several improvement inventions in both the process and the equipment.

Until 1944, Carlson was not able to interest industry in his invention. That year Battelle Memorial Institute of Columbus, Ohio assisted him with further development of the process. The Haloid Company, now Xerox Corporation which acquired the license to commercially produce the invention in 1946, introduced it in 1951.

In 1964, RCC honored Carlson by giving him with a distinguished alumnus award. In his prepared acceptance speech, he stated, "My fondest memories go back to the three eventful and productive years I spent at the Riverside Junior College. That period represented a turning point in my life."

In the 1920's, Xerox Process inventor Chester F. Carlson was a student in Riverside Jr. College's Cooperative Program. He was named the 1964 RCCD Alumnus of the Year. In this March 11, 1966 "Tiger Times" article he spoke about his three years at RJC.

The Riverside City College Instructional Media Center is bringing you this five year countdown to RCC's 100th Anniversary. Our intention is to give everyone a weekly glance at the many people and events that have been a part of the college.

Our thanks go to the RCC Digital Library Archives and the District's Office of Strategic Communications and Relations for allowing us to use their photo and newspaper collections. Thanks as well to all of the RCC students and Faculty Advisors that were a part of the yearbook and newspaper staffs. Thanks also to Tom Johnson and Gilbert Jimenez who wrote "the book"

about RCC's history. "Riverside City College 1916-1981- A 65 Year History" is available in the RCC Digital Library.

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