March 4, 2013

Countdown to Riverside City College's 100th Anniversary

Quadrangle Room 103 on the Riverside City College campus is dedicated to Thomas M. Johnson. The plaque below is mounted next to the classroom. The photo below the plaque was taken on September 30, 2002, the day the room was dedicated to Tom Johnson.

Thomas Meidell Johnson taught English composition, literature classes and world religions at RCC from 1958 to 1997. Johnson was born in Omaha, Nebraska graduating from Tech High School in 1950. He then attended Doane College in Crete, Nebraska where he met his future wife Sally. Upon his 1954 graduation, he married Sally and joined the Army. After he was honorably discharged from the service he and his family moved to California where he attended the University of Redlands and completed his MA in English in 1958. Soon thereafter, he was hired as an English instructor at RCC and began a more than 47 year association with the Riverside Community College District. Below are two photos from Johnson’s first decade at RCC. In the top left image he is seen enjoying a cup of coffee in the Quadrangle Pit (1959). In the second he is pictured with his third child Kari (1961). Tom and his wife Sally also had two sons, Christopher and Adam; and their first born daughter Kjersti who currently works on the Riverside City College campus as a Support Services Specialist Aide with Disabled Student Services. In the third picture, Johnson is viewed working in his office (1968).
Johnson also was the faculty advisor to the “Tiger Times” student newspaper and served as the English Department Chair. He was chosen by his colleagues to deliver the third Faculty Lecture in 1963. His talk was entitled “Remarks Toward a Philosophy of Freedom”. Below is a “Tiger Times” article from March 28, 1963 announcing his lecture.

In 1964, Johnson was one of the founders of the RCC Faculty Association (later known as the Academic Senate) and served as its President from 1965-67. Towards the end of his tenure at the
college, he became an administrator, first as the Dean of Humanities and Social Sciences, then as Dean of the Communications Division and finally as Vice President for Academic Affairs. Below are photos of Johnson throughout his more than four decade career with the Riverside Community College District.

One of Tom Johnson’s crowning achievements at RCC was his co-authorship, along with Gilbert Jimenez (Associate Professor of History 1970-2005), of “Riverside City College 1916-1981: A 65-Year History”. Johnson and Jimenez spent three years doing extensive research of the college. The idea for the book came from Dr. Charles Kane (RCC’s sixth President 1978-1992) who wanted a recorded history of the college and to show the community the role RCC has played in it. In a May 14, 1982 “Viewpoints” article, Johnson had this to say about the 256 page book’s creation, “Often we had to decide between what was interesting and what was the most important event. Had we kept going the way we started, we would have needed 600 pages. RCC was one of the first junior colleges in the state and in many respects, it is typical. Its history is pretty much an example of any junior college in California”. The cover of the book is seen below along with a photo of Tom Johnson presiding over an RCC Commencement ceremony.

At the time of Johnson’s RCC retirement, Sylvia Thomas (Associate Vice Chancellor, Educational Services; Associate Professor, Reading 1988 to date) was interviewed in the May 15, 1997 “Viewpoints” student newspaper. She had this to say about Johnson: “His contributions as a faculty member and administrator have helped to shape and provide direction for the college. Teaching
excellence and providing students with a supportive environment that meets high academic standards are just two of his many contributions”.

Even after his retirement, Tom Johnson remained with the Riverside Community College District as a part-time consultant working as a special advisor to the Chancellor and administrative liaison, working with the Academic Senate, on college accreditation and contract negotiations. He did this into the mid 2000s. At RCC’s 2009 Commencement Ceremony, Tom Johnson’s granddaughter Nicolette Rohr was the student speaker. She had this to say to the graduates: “RCC first became a part of my life because of my grandfather Tom Johnson who was so impressed with California’s goal of affordable education that he devoted his life’s work to this college and to this community. My grandfather believed that the community college was America’s greatest contribution to higher education and that it was the most democratic of all institutions of higher learning. As an RCC student, it didn’t take me long to discover how right he was”.

It is 3 years and 1 week until RCC’s 100th Anniversary on March 13, 2016.

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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