April 21, 2014

Countdown to Riverside City College's 100th Anniversary

2014 will mark the 40th anniversary of the 1974 selection of Foster Davidoff as the fifth President of Riverside City College. On December 18, 1973 Dr. Kenneth Harper submitted his surprise resignation as the fourth President of Riverside City College (effective July 1, 1974). Dr. Harper stated at the time that the decision was his own and it reflected a desire to teach (he exercised his option to remain in the district as an instructor) and to remove himself from “the constant press of items” and the “responsibility and control over human beings.” The article below appeared in the January 17, 1974 issue of the “Viewpoints” student newspaper.

The search for Dr. Harper’s successor was preceded by the January, 1974 hiring of a special consultant to set up the hiring process. The board chose Dr. John Lombardi, educational consultant and former president of Los Angeles City College. The screening and interviewing of candidates would be carried out by Dr. Lombardi and a president (to be determined) of another community college. Early in February the board announced that Dr. John H. Gransham, superintendent-president of Marin Community College, had been engaged to assist Dr. Lombardi. The search for a new superintendent-president ended on April 22, 1974 when the board announced that it had selected Foster Davidoff from the four finalists considered. Davidoff, at the time, held the position of president of Crafton Hills College of the San Bernardino Community College District) and he had previous experience in college teaching and administration, chiefly at Compton College. The board was unanimous in its decision to hire Davidoff; the trustees were especially impressed with his 12-year experience in California Community College teaching and administration. RCC trustee Alan D. Pauw told the “Viewpoints” RCC student newspaper that the new president’s salary would be $37,000 ($7000 more than he received at Crafton Hills) and $1200 a year for expenses. His RCC contract was for four years. Below is the May 3, 1974 “Viewpoints” front-page headline story that announced his hiring to the college community. On the right is his official presidential portrait.
A high school dropout during World War II, Davidoff entered military service as a flight cadet and emerged a major in the intelligence directorate of SAC headquarters in Omaha. In the meantime, he had served in Asia with General Clair Chennault and taught at the Air Intelligence Staff College at Montgomery, Alabama and the Command and General Staff College at Leavenworth, Kansas. Davidoff left the service at the age of 36 and entered Fresno College, completing B.A. and M.A. requirements in 3 three and one half years. Starting as an English teacher at Compton College in 1955, Davidoff taught English two years before moving up the ladder, successively serving as dean of administration, dean of instruction, and superintendent. As the Compton population became increasingly African-American, Davidoff stated that he returned to the classroom so that the college could have African-American leadership. He taught briefly before going back into administration as the first president of Crafton Hills College in Yucaipa.

Below is an article from the June 18, 1974 “RCC Reports” District publication.

Davidoff is seen (below left) in a photo from a January 16, 1976 issue of “Viewpoints”. The occasion was the groundbreaking for the new Business Education building. On the right is a photo from a April 2, 1976 “Viewpoints” story that called him “The Invisible Man” based on the fact that, in a poll taken by an RCC Statistics class, only 22%
of the male students asked could answer the question “Who is Foster Davidoff?” Of the females, only 25% knew who Davidoff was. Davidoff’s reaction to the poll was, “It doesn’t surprise me. This happens on other campuses also. Most students come and go without getting involved in student activities”.

Foster Davidoff’s tenure as RCC president was to last but four years. At the May 17, 1977 Board of Trustees meeting, Davidoff submitted a letter of resignation (effective June 30, 1978) for “unspecified reasons”. In an article that appeared in the May 20, 1977 issue of “Viewpoints”, Davidoff said, “I just decided to quit” saying his reasons were too private and complex. The announcement apparently was a surprise to the Board. RCCD Trustee Albert Brown Jr. said “It was a total shock. He was one of the greatest administrators I’ve ever seen.” The article below appeared in the May 20, 1977 issue of “Viewpoints”.

It is 1 year and 46 weeks 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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