September 28, 2015

Countdown to Riverside City College's 100th Anniversary

James Mathews Kross, a long-time member of the Riverside City College staff, passed away on September 19, 2015. He worked at R.C.C. from 1972 to 2000, spending 19 of those years as the College’s Athletic Director. Kross attended RCC as a student / athlete from 1960 to 1962. He was a member of both the Tiger Football and Basketball teams during those years. In 1961, he was selected as tackle on the All-Eastern Conference and All-America first teams.

In the 1961 (top) and 1960 (bottom) photos below, he can be seen as a member of the Football team, wearing the number 77.

In the Basketball team photo below, Kross can be seen wearing number 14 (bottom row, second from the right).
He returned to R.C.C. in 1972 as a faculty member in the Physical Education Department. A few years later, he was named the Tigers' head football coach. The photo and article below appeared in the January 16, 1976 edition of the “Viewpoints” student newspaper. It was authored by staff sports writer Jeff Krupsaw. The headline above the article read: “Kross taking positive approach”.

JIM KROSS
New football coach
“ ‘Whatever we do, right or wrong, it will be full boar to build a winner,’ said RCC’s new head football coach, Jim Kross. Kross, a former RCC football star and graduate was given the head football coaching reigns just before the Christmas break, replacing former coach, Al Fages. Fages, who compiled a 9-28-2 record in his four years as RCC’s head mentor, said he was shocked when he received the word of his removal. He said that if he were to start over as head coach again today he would do nothing differently. He said that to build a winner you must have quality ball players as well as a good drawing area. Fages did not feel he had an abundance of good ball players, but says in regard to next year, ‘next year’s group of players is the best group that have been here in six or seven years.’ Kross, as did Fages, will face the same problems in recruiting. He must draw his players from the limited Riverside area and trying to keep the kids in the city is not an easy thing to do. Kross feels that UCR’s dropping of football will help the RCC program. ‘We won’t lose any kids, and it will help with community backing,’ said Kross. After spending two years playing football at RCC, Kross transferred to Fresno St. His coaching experience extends from being an assistant at Clovis High School in Fresno, to three years as defensive and offensive line coach at Riverside’s North High School before coming to RCC in 1972. The young 36-year-old coach would like to see his team strong in both the offensive and defensive aspects of the game, but admits the biggest improvement must come on offense. He said: ‘We are talking to a number of quarterbacks in the area.’ Quarterbacking is a critical area the Tigers must receive help in if they wish to turn the football program into a winning one. Kross has already named Bob Dohr as the offensive coach. Kross said the offense will focus on an I formation, shifting to split backs with a man in motion. He also named two part-time coaches who will be continuing their work with RCC football. Chuck Sudor, an Arlington High School history teacher will work with the offensive line and Fontana Continuation High School math teacher Dick Shelborne, will work with the defensive line. Kross says he will not go out of the district to get his ball players as he feels it is not in the true spirit of community college athletics. It must be noted that many schools do have our-of-district players on their football team this year. Kross feels the student body must be made more aware of the football team. He suggested that one way of stimulate interest is by instituting student activities like this year’s homecoming. The new coach is taking a very optimistic and fresh approach to his job and sums up the situation like this: ‘We have to build up enthusiasm, be positive approach and do our job to the best of our ability’.”

In 1980, R.C.C.’s first Athletic Director, T. Mark Johnson, retired after 20 years. Jim Kross was named his successor and held the position for some 19 years.

When Kross stepped down as R.C.C.’s Athletic Director, the photo and article below appeared in the May 13, 1999 edition of “Viewpoints”. The article was written by newspaper Staff Assistant Bill Mulligan.
“Jim Kross has witnessed a lot of changes being an athletic director at Riverside Community College. In July, it is his turn to take a new direction when Kross is stepping down as RCC’s athletic director. He will remain at RCC next fall as a physical education instructor until his retirement in two years. Kross’ tenure as athletic director began in 1981, and even before that time, Kross worked other positions at RCC. His career started in 1972 when RCC hired Kross as a full-time assistant football coach. A couple years later, he was appointed RCC’s head football coach until his current position. Even before he came to RCC as a faculty member 27 years ago, Kross had Tiger’s blood dating back when he was a standout student-athlete at RCC 38 years ago. He also graduated in 1957 graduate from Riverside Poly High School, when RCC and Poly shared the same campus. His athletic career as a Tiger was highlighted by being All-American in football as a lineman. He starred on both the offensive and defensive line. After the football season, he was a two-year starter in basketball. One of his teammates on the football team was Rich Ramirez, the current vice president of Student Services at RCC. ‘Jim was a self-made athlete,’ Ramirez said. ‘He was very hard working on the field and in the classroom.’ He was coached by John Matulich in basketball, Don Birren and the late Bob Dohr in football. Dohr was the head coach while Birren was Kross’s line coach. Birren knew Kross for 39 years as an athlete and later a co-worker at RCC. Birren still works as a substitute in the physical education department. ‘First off, Jim Kross bloomed into a great college lineman by his sophomore year in 1961,’ Birren said. ‘It was pretty remarkable since Jim never played football in high school. I think after playing at Fresno State, he might have been a pro football player but he decided to join the Marines after college.’ ‘I enjoyed teaching and coaching when Jim became athletic director because he always gave the coaches a fair shake. He never acted that he was my superior and always tries to give a straight answer on college affairs.’ ‘Jim works well with people, and is respected by his peers,’ Ramirez said. ‘He is a man of his word and has been the center of the athletic program at RCC for the last 19 years. We will miss him.’ ‘It has been a great run for me being RCC’s athletic director for 19 years,’ said Kross. ‘Having good people, who worked with me, behind me, was very helpful.’ ‘Two of the biggest that I have witnessed since 1980 are the increased opportunities for women student-athletes by adding a couple of women’s sports such as soccer and water polo. More requirements in the classroom that all athletes must follow.’ In 1980, he took over a male-dominated athletic program. Now RCC offers 19 intercollegiate athletic teams including nine women’s sports. Under Kross, Riverside has become Title IX compliant, meeting standards for gender equality for athletics.
Some of the standards Kross helped set were equal funding, facilities, and sports for women. Kross's trademark as athletic director is his old, red bike. He needs to cover a lot of ground in the physical education area from Huntley Gym to Evans Sports Complex behind Riverside Community Hospital, so he uses the bike to travel from one place to another so he can get there quicker and save energy. He enjoyed working with his office co-workers Dr. David Waxman, Asst. Athletic Director Clara Lowden and athletic secretary Dorine Cobos. For 18 years, Ruth Unrath was Kross' secretary until her retirement last July. Kross helped hire more than a dozen of RCC's head coaches along with numerous personnel, including former men's head basketball coach and his successor as athletic director, Bob Schermerhorn. Schermerhorn will take over the top spot beginning in July. Kross's position carried a lot of responsibility including overseeing athletic budgeting, transportation, eligibility, facility usage and athletic fund raising. Also, he needed to find staffing for RCC’s on-campus sporting events along with attending nearly every home athletic event. Another duty that Kross handles is overseeing the Tiger Backers, RCC’s athletic booster club. The Tiger Backers help finance some of the costs of the athletic programs at RCC including organizing tailgate parties before home football games. ‘I feel being a good college athletic director means to treat every person or team fairly,’ said Kross. ‘To be patient with everyone along with having good listening skills.’ Beside seeing RCC win countless Orange Empire Conference championships, under Kross’s era, RCC won state titles in women’s basketball, football, men’s and women’s track and women’s swimming. Kross also witnessed RCC win a national championship in football in 1989. Just a year ago, RCC won the Orange Empire Conference Supremacy Award having the best overall athletic program in the conference. With his free time, Kross is looking forward to spending time with his wife, Sue, an RCC nursing teacher, and traveling more including trips to Las Vegas. Kross also plans to attend more drag races, which is one of his many interests.”

The appreciation (below) of Jim Kross appeared in the same edition of “Viewpoints”. It was written by Sports Editor Kevin Pearson.
“In life, a man is judged by his accomplishments. These accomplishments include many things from service to others, his honor and the respect he has gained from others. By these criteria, Athletic Director Jim Kross may be one of the more accomplished men Riverside Community College has ever had step foot onto its campus. In the time I have known Kross, I have considered myself lucky to know him. Kross is a man of his word who will give straight answers to all questions asked of him. Under Kross, the athletic department at RCC has soared to new heights and has become one of the best athletic departments there is. He has the respect of everyone he has come into contact with during his 19 years as the commander-in-chief of Tiger sports. Kross has earned that respect through nearly two decades of service to Riverside’s athletes, coaches, staff and fans. The job as athletic director at RCC is one that few can perform with such skill as Kross. The long hours spent at games, overseeing budgets and keeping things flowing with ease is something that can only be done by the best. Kross was the best. From the time he first began his tenure as athletic director struggling to make the transition from an athletic department with a male-dominated emphasis, to now, when the number of women’s sports is nearly equal to men’s, Kross has placed the athletes first. In the two years I have known Kross, I have learned that he takes his job with pride and passion, and that he loves RCC and the people with whom he has worked. In his 19 years as the top man, the world around collegiate sports has evolved beyond what anyone could foresee. Kross has helped make the changes necessary at RCC to keep the Tigers moving into the new millennium. Kross, the man, has stayed the same as he always was. A man of his word, who is respected by his peers and who does his job with honor. From the time he played football for the Tigers and was an all-American until today, those who have known him have always said he was a man who built himself around hard work and loyalty. All these things combined have made Kross a man who can be judged by his accomplishments, and can be placed with some of the top Tigers RCC has ever known.”

In 2002, Jim Kross was inducted into R.C.C.’s Athletic Hall of Fame.

There are 23 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. For copyright purposes, all images originating from Riverside City College publications and the District’s Office of Strategic Communications and Relations are the property of the Riverside Community College District.