

THE TALON



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◀ Cowboy hats aren't the only things you might see littering the arena during Cheyenne Frontier Days. There's often an unlucky cowboy in the hat, too. Photo by Ty Stockton

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**LARAMIE COUNTY
COMMUNITY COLLEGE**

on the cover

Dr. Joe Schaffer comes to LCCC from Montana
State University-Great Falls College of Technology.
Photo by Ty Stockton

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Cheyenne, and right into my first day here at Laramie County Community College.

Words cannot convey the honor and pride my family and I share in being able to join LCCC and share an important role in crafting the future of this amazing institution. As an outsider looking in, I can honestly say how incredibly blessed this community is to have a center of higher education such as LCCC. Within these walls exist some of the West's finest academic programs, student support services, teaching and learning facilities, and cultural events. Behind each of those are the exceptional people, the life blood of the campus, who represent the staunch work ethic and down-home personalities Wyoming is known for. They take these traits, combine them with their amazing experience and expertise, and one by one are changing the lives of our students and improving our community.

You'll be seeing and hearing much from me in the future as I have the privilege to share the highlights of our work here at LCCC. But you'll also be part of our efforts to overcome challenges and capture opportunities as we move the college into the future. And that future is looking good, so stay tuned and stay connected, as I will be looking to hear from you on how we are doing, and most importantly the impact we are having on our students and the community.

Thank you all for the warm Wyoming welcome!
Warmest Regards,

Joe Schaffer
President

"Here we come, Cheyenne!" Those were the words from Samantha, our five year old daughter, as we started our journey from Great Falls, Mont., to our new home here in Wyoming. Isn't it funny how the words of a child can so simply capture the promise of a new adventure, the excitement of a fresh start, and the wonder of the unknown that lies ahead? Well, you can bet I rode Samantha's high all the way to



According to a 2011 survey conducted by the Center for Digital Education and the American Association of Community Colleges, LCCC ranked first in the nation among mid-sized community colleges for its Smart™ classrooms, online services for students, online course management systems, scheduled technology upgrades and faculty and administrative technology to support online students.



Imagine

— *close your eyes
and listen.
What do
you hear?*



The whisper of the wind in the trees, the sharpness of the neighbor's dog barking, the murmured voices of loved ones in the next room, the engine roar of a car driving by, or perhaps you can hear the melodious notes of your favorite song playing on the radio?

Imagine – a small child, a baby really, of 11 months old enduring the pain and anxiety of open heart surgery, too young to understand why his mommy and daddy couldn't make it go away. Imagine being captured by a world of silence, no longer hearing the pattering of raindrops on the roof or the distant honk of geese as they made their way overhead in a perfect V-shape. Imagine cuddling on grandma's lap, but you no longer could hear her humming that special lullaby as she rocked you to sleep.

The child couldn't ask why because he had to relearn to speak, to "sign" his curiosity for the big wonderful world around him. When Grant Powell underwent the surgery that saved his tiny heart and life as a baby, the antibiotics the doctors prescribed robbed him of his sense of hearing, forever changing his course in life. The little boy from Alliance, Neb., forever would be labeled as "different" and "challenged" by the rest of the "normal" world.

But that hasn't stopped him. He leapt over that bump in the road and is continuing to achieve everything he puts his heart and mind to accomplishing. Diagnosed with a 90 percent hearing loss at the age of two, Grant's hearing is improved with the help of a hearing aid. When he wears it, his hearing is improved to about 70 percent. This makes listening to conversations a possibility, feeling the power of music and chatting with friends a reality, and simply enjoying his life a certainty.

His mother taught herself, and then Grant, how to sign when he was 3 years old. She taught him to play the piano, opening the world of music to him, and both parents encouraged him to dream and reach for everything life has to offer a young man. He joined the marching band in high school, learning to “feel” the beat and watch the director to grasp the tempo and play drums.

But when it was time to go to college, he chose a drafting major, fulfilling his love of drawing buildings, constructing homes and businesses from the ground up. “It’s easier for me to draw a picture than to communicate,” he explained.

Here’s where he found challenge. While the hearing aid greatly improves his ability to understand conversation and hear sounds, it is not foolproof. He can read lips if the person speaking talks slow and concise, but he can’t catch everything around him. He explained that it’s kind of like listening in a tunnel – he just can’t grasp every sound. He realized he would need help if he were to go away to college. He would require an interpreter. The college he chose would need to employ a full-time sign language interpreter on staff.

But the challenge didn’t stop there – the school also would need to offer his chosen field of study, drafting. He found both at Laramie County Community College, with the added benefit of being fairly close to home in Nebraska.

And so his adventure in Cheyenne, Wyo., began. Grant Powell successfully has attended LCCC for the past two years. He was inducted into the honorary for two-year colleges, Phi Theta Kappa. He also joined the LCCC Wind Symphony, playing snare drum, xylophone and tambourine, among other percussion instruments. He explained that he first memorizes the musical pieces and practices outside of class. Then he watches the director, instructor Gary Hall, very carefully to get the tempo. Hall explained that Grant very rarely misses a beat, that he’s always “spot on.”

“I like to play with the drummers; I have a lot of fun!” He currently is learning to play guitar also, adding yet another instrument to his musical arsenal.

Grant’s love of music, fostered by his mother, is just one more example of his ability to embrace the marvels of the world around him. And what’s in store for the future? After graduation from LCCC, either after the fall semester of 2012 or the spring of 2013, he plans to stick around Cheyenne. His dream job would be to work for the Wyoming Bureau of Land Management.

So imagine a day in Grant’s life – friends, music, classes – a “normal” college experience for most 20-year-olds. And all because no one told him he couldn’t. ♦

*And all
because
no one
told
him he
couldn't.*







A lifetime of learning starts here

By Lisa Trimble
Director of Alumni Affairs & Event Planning
LCCC Foundation

It Starts Here ... on the first day of classes, with new friendships, with new opportunities and new experiences. These hallways and classrooms have forever changed the lives of many Laramie County Community College alumni. LCCC provided them a place to fit in, a home away from home and an opportunity to begin their college educations in an environment that was welcoming and comfortable.

In 2004, it began for Bryan Wilson. Bryan arrived in Cheyenne from Lander, Wyo., recruited to LCCC on a Livestock Judging scholarship. He also appreciated the smaller atmosphere that was offered by LCCC, its classes and instructors.

Bryan Wilson, far left, instructs students Josh Skelton, right, and John Coles. Photo by Ty Stockton

Bryan recalls, “My experience at LCCC gave me confidence to move forward ... I made connections and was able to network with other students.”

While attending on a scholarship, Bryan was able to pursue his degree in agriculture while serving as an LCCC Ambassador and member of the Livestock Judging and Show Teams.

In 1983, it began for Michele Albert. Michele transferred to LCCC from Casper College and was provided the basics of how to navigate the collegiate experience, from advisors who walked her through selecting and registering for classes to instructors who helped her adjust to being successful in the classroom. Her first experience at LCCC was short, but she returned five years later when looking for a school that would allow her to complete coursework before applying for vet school but remain close to her family.

Michele stated, “I had great instructors ... I was able to develop close relationships with fellow students and enjoyed tutoring and working with study groups.”

In 2001, it began for Luke Hollmann. Luke had been homeschooled and took some time off from school before enrolling at LCCC to receive a degree in engineering. For Luke, LCCC offered the right blend of class size and proximity to home.

“LCCC was a great assistance when transitioning from homeschooling to a more traditional classroom environment,” he said. “It also allowed me to enjoy the social aspects of campus through my involvement in Phi Theta Kappa and the Horse Show Team.”

Many experiences had a profound impact on his LCCC experience, but working with Financial Aid to receive scholarships helped to provide the confidence needed to strive for academic excellence, something that stayed with him after leaving LCCC.

While it begins here, it doesn’t always end here. Many students continue their education and use the experiences gained at LCCC to further their education. Such is the case for our three alumni.

Bryan Wilson received an associate degree in Agriculture in 2006 and went on to the University of

Wyoming to receive two bachelor’s degrees (Animal Science and Agricultural Business) and a master’s degree in Agricultural Economics.

Michele Albert left LCCC and continued her education at the University of Wyoming, receiving a bachelor’s degree in Biochemistry and later a Doctor of Veterinary Medicine from Colorado State University.

Luke Hollmann received his Associate of Science in Engineering and an Associate of Science in Mathematics from LCCC in 2004 before receiving a Bachelor of Science in Electrical Engineering and a Master of Science in Electrical Engineering from the University of Wyoming. Currently he is completing his Ph.D. in electrical engineering at the University of Notre Dame.

While LCCC provides many students with the tools for success, there is always the opportunity for alumni to give back, allowing current and future students to find similar experiences. For Bryan and Michele this meant coming back to LCCC as instructors.

Bryan currently teaches in the agriculture department.

“I liked what LCCC did for me and wanted to do the same for students down the road,” he said.

Michele has been at LCCC for 12 years, five as a full-time faculty member teaching Zoology and Biology courses.

“I enjoy the one-on-one with students,” she said, “helping them navigate the college experience and working with traditional students that need a place to grow.”

It’s a new beginning for students and alumni at LCCC, as we start to expand and grow our alumni database, and we want you to join us in creating outstanding experiences for LCCC students. Join us as a mentor, tutor, financial supporter – through scholarships or program funding, attend cultural and campus events, continue taking classes, and the list goes on.

Tell us your alumni story and how LCCC was the start you needed, update your alumni information or let us know how you would like to get involved by visiting the LCCC Foundation website at www.lcccfoundation.edu or calling 307.778.1285. ❖



Luke Hollmann and his family pose for a holiday photo. Courtesy



Let 'er bu

This ain't your average second job. It's a lot of miles on the highway, a fair amount of sitting around, waiting for the job to start, and if you're lucky, eight seconds of work with the chance of a fat paycheck. Your office is a precarious perch on an animal's back with a handle you're required to hold with only one hand. And your coworker is the animal you're sitting on, but he's not interested in helping you keep the job – he would rather work alone.

No, it's not your average second job, but David Browder, the rodeo coach at Laramie County Community College, isn't your average coach. At 40 years old, he's not far from his own rodeoing days. That's not unusual for many rodeo coaches, but most other coaches remain active in the timed events. Until the Mountain States Circuit Finals in October, though, Browder was still sliding up on a bareback rigging and clinging to some of the best broncs in the region.

Last season, Browder had a great run. He won money in Steamboat a few times; Mitchell, Neb.; Bridgeport, Neb.; and at the Mountain States Circuit Finals.

He rode at Gillette, Wyo.; Rapid City, S.D.; the Denver Stock Show, Crawford, Neb.; and Estes Park, Colo.; and quite a few other rodeos as well, but he didn't place at those events.

The Daddy of 'Em All

Browder also rode at Cheyenne Frontier Days. That's a rodeo not just anyone can enter. Competitors have to be card-carrying members of the Professional Rodeo Cowboys Association to get in the gate. It's a professional rodeo, but not just any professional rodeo. CFD is considered by many to be the biggest, most important rodeo of the year, aside from the Wrangler National Finals Rodeo (WNFR).

Browder may have been a few years older than most of his competitors behind the chutes at CFD, but that fact didn't seem to bother him. It didn't faze any of the other contestants, either. Rodeo cowboys and cowgirls are a close-knit family, and though they're all trying to win the event, they're quick to help other riders make the best ride possible. As Browder sat in the benches



ck

By Ty Stockton
Public Relations Writer/Editor





David Browder rides Triple V Rodeo Company's Red Swan at Cheyenne Frontier Days.

Inset: Browder waits in the cowboy ready area at CFD with his stepson, Blair.

Previous page: Browder rides Rocky Mountain Rodeo Company's Elvira for his first ride at CFD.

under the B stands, taping up his riding arm, lacing on his spurs and going through the motions of the ride, he paused from time to time to talk with other riders about the horses they'd drawn.

"That one's a great draw," he told Tyler Scales. "He'll come out and go to the right, so be ready for that turn."

It's not only the riders who offer help and encouragement, though. Bill Larsen and his wife, Donna Vold Larsen, are stock contractors, and Browder had drawn one of their horses, Red Swan, that day.

"She'll give you a good ride," Larsen said.

Larsen and Browder talked about the upcoming ride as the two were preparing their tack – Larsen got the flank strap in position while Browder powdered his cinch straps and strapped his bareback rigging onto the animal. Through it all, Red Swan craned her neck to watch the pair. Overhead, rodeo announcer Justin McKee's voice

boomed out over the arena, letting the crowd know the day's first steer wrestler's time.

"'Bout time to ride," Larsen said. Browder simply nodded, then headed toward the chutes.

Real-world experience

The energy on the platform behind the chutes was electric. Horses were running up the alley and into the chutes; chute men were hollering out numbers on horses to help the cowboys find their draws; cowboys were pantomiming the movements they'd make in their rides or kneeling in prayer. Browder was lost in thought, gazing into Red Swan's eye. He'd be among the first several cowboys to come out of the chutes in the bareback event.

As the gate closed on the timed-event end of the arena and all attention turned to the bucking chutes, the action became even more intense.

Two chutes ahead of Browder, Scales climbed down on his bronc, rocked back into a reclined position, and nodded his head. There was a millisecond of near silence as the chute opened, then the crowd noise and the announcer's commentary mingled to near deafening levels. But there was no time to watch the ride. Browder would be up after the next rider, so he was already tightening his cinch.

As the next rider left the chute, Browder was climbing down on Red Swan. The horse moved forward and back nervously as Browder worked his gloved right hand into the rigging handle, then he paused for a moment to watch the rider before him get help down from the pick-up man. This was it. Showtime.

Through the chatter of the announcer and the cacophony of the crowd, Browder seemed to be unaware of anything around him but the horse and his own body. The gate man's eyes were trained on Browder, but Browder's stare never wavered from his hand. After a short moment, Browder nodded his head, and the gate swung open.

Red Swan lurched up onto her hind legs, spun to the left, and bolted out into the arena. She leapt high into the air, kicked hard at the top of each jump, and started the violent ballet again. It only took a few jumps to reach the eight-second whistle, but for Browder, time seemed to stand still.

When the whistle blew, the world rushed back in on Browder. He'd made his ride. He reached for the pick-up man, slid off of Red Swan, and gave his mount a respectful wave as she charged away around the arena. It was a long walk back to the chutes for Browder, but it was a pleasant one, listening as McKee announced his 70-point score to the cheering crowd. You couldn't have knocked the smile off Browder's face with a two-by-four.

Switching gears

Browder got stepped on by a bronc a few weeks later at a rodeo in Hyannis, Neb., but it didn't

slow him down much. He kept riding through the season, and he earned enough money to make it to the Mountain States Circuit Finals Rodeo.

"I saved the best ride for the last ride," he said after the circuit finals. He rode Augustus, a two-time NFR-qualifying bronc from Burns Rodeo Company, and scored 81 points on his final ride. The score was enough to earn him a third-place finish in the average.

"I'm done now," he said. "I'll keep roping, but I'm hangin' it up on barebacks."

Though he's retiring from the roughstock end of the arena, he'll keep offering the rodeo athletes at LCCC the wisdom of his years as a professional rodeo cowboy. He no longer dreams of getting to the WNFR on the back of a bucking horse, but he hopes to give as many young riders a better chance through his coaching.

And who knows ... maybe he'll get there as a team roper. ♦



Above: Browder coaches Nick Dinnocenzo on the finer points of bull riding as Mackenzie Fair looks on.

Above left: Browder ties on his glove just before his second ride at Cheyenne Frontier Days.

Meet the New Guy

By Ty Stockton
Public Relations Writer/Editor

Energetic. Engaging. Intelligent. Inspiring.



Those are some of the words used to describe Dr. Joe Schaffer, the new president of Laramie County Community College. But they're not the only words. He's been called exciting, charismatic, visionary – one college employee even referred to him as “dreamy.”

Combine all that with the news from his former place of employment – Montana State University-Great Falls College of Technology – that the entire campus is sad to see him leave, and it seems the LCCC board of trustees made an excellent pick.

Bringing it home

Dr. Schaffer was definitely well liked in Great Falls. He had great support from the MSU-Great Falls board and administration, as well as from the faculty, staff and students. So what would make him want to leave all that behind?





"My wife Brooke and I knew that eventually there would be more opportunity for me somewhere else," he says. "We had been looking for an opportunity to contribute more. This was one of those opportunities that was hard to pass up."

Dr. Schaffer notes that LCCC has faced a number of challenges in recent years, but those challenges offer opportunities to make a positive difference.

"At LCCC, we have the opportunity to make meaningful changes that change hundreds – if not thousands – of lives," he says.

Dr. Schaffer says he is familiar with the types of challenges facing LCCC. He was in a similar situation at MSU-Great Falls. The campus was operating as a "collection of parts," he says, rather than as a cohesive system.



Dr. Joe Schaffer and his wife Brooke pose with their day's harvest after a duck hunt.



Schaffer is a happy hunter after tagging a desert bighorn in Nevada.



Schaffer considers his hunt in Alaska one of his most memorable (if unsuccessful) experiences.

Schaffer and his good friend Kyle Herda are smiling (but wondering what they got themselves into) before flying deep into the Alaskan backcountry.

"We need to align the campus' focus on the future," he says. "We need to move beyond the problems of the past and look ahead. We'll do that by helping individuals find ways to move ahead together. For individuals here, to overcome those challenges, the benefit back to the individual and to the college is very great."

LCCC, Dr. Schaffer says, is in a very good position to make those positive changes.

"This college is doing things already that so many campuses around the nation want to do, or should be doing, and it's doing them quite well," he says. "The academic programming, the adult basic education services, the workforce development, the community outreach, the civic engagement

and service learning – all of those things are alive and well here at LCCC. Looking at that campus and figuring out a way to harness all those things and pull them together I think is something that can make this college stand out, not just in Wyoming, but across the nation. So as I'm looking in, I'm looking at a gem of opportunity here."

When Dr. Schaffer moved into the position of CEO and Dean of MSU-Great Falls, that college was making the leap from a standalone technical college to an arm of the state's university system. He says in the early days, there were a lot of people in various camps.

"We found a way to gel around the campus mission," he says. "The work I did to help people see that role should help us here at LCCC."

Dr. Schaffer says he will work toward that cohesiveness with a palette of leadership styles.

"I define my leadership in two ways, depending on what the situation calls for," he says. He uses a participative form of leadership – interacting with others to come up with the best solutions to problems – when it is called for.

"We can do more together than we can individually," he says.

His alternate leadership style he defines as "situational."

"Different situations require different leadership styles," he says, and his record at MSU-Great Falls shows that he has the ability to adapt quickly and effectively when necessary.

Dr. Schaffer notes that it won't take much to make LCCC into the nationally recognized leader in education he thinks it can be.

"I think this campus is recognized as a good college already," he says. "In the next five years, we can bring coherence and collaborative support. Our biggest opportunities and our biggest challenges are ourselves. The only thing that can make us great or prevent that is our ability to roll up our sleeves and get the job done."

Off the clock

Dr. Schaffer is eager to get to work on what he considers to be lofty but attainable goals, but he's bound to find some time for himself and his family, too.

His wife, Brooke, is a nurse who has worked in pediatrics and obstetrics.

"She's a wonderful nurse and clinician," he says, "and she's been a great support for me. She's also a sports fanatic. I think what you'll be getting

here at LCCC is a very vocal and engaged fan of the LCCC athletics programs," he says with a smile.

The Schaffers have two young daughters – Samantha, 5, and Lia, 1.

"They couldn't be more different from each other," Dr. Schaffer says. "Sammy is a princess who's into dresses and dressing up, and Lia ... Lia has my attention span. She loves exploring and experiencing new things."

As for Dr. Schaffer, he's a self-described hunting fanatic.

"I like to spend as much time in the outdoors as I can," he says. "When I can engage my family in that, it's better. Brooke loves to ski, and she's been a good trooper on hunting trips on occasion, but we'll do the town-and-gown thing, too."

"We need to move beyond the problems of the past and look ahead. We'll do that ..."

A new beginning

Dr. Schaffer had strong roots in northwest Montana, and he says he'll miss the people he got to know there.

"The people in that community are genuine," he says. "They're family – warm individuals who don't let ego or personality get in the way."

That's one of the biggest reasons he's happy to come to Cheyenne, too.

"The people here are very similar to the people in Montana," he says. "It's made the transition easy."

The same reasons could be what the people of Cheyenne and LCCC like the most about Dr. Schaffer, too. He's an energetic, engaging, inspiring, inspirational guy with a healthy dose of humility. He'll fit in here quite nicely. ❖



Photo courtesy of Jamie Gipe, Firefly Photography,
Great Falls, Mont., montanafirefly.com.

ANGRY BIRD



By Josh Thein

No green pigs stole the college's eggs (does the college even have eggs?) ... but the Golden Eagles athletics logo certainly has become one angry bird.

GOING OUT OF STYLE

The full-bodied eagle with six-pack abs was created in 2002 when athletics made its return to LCCC. Brown and Gold, a small Wyoming business that specializes in embroidery and screen printing, was hired by the college to create the graphical identity for LCCC athletics. That design served the college well for about a decade, and subtle changes were made to it over the years, but LCCC Athletics Director Jason Ficca wanted to start from scratch and create a fresh contemporary look.

"It's not very menacing," Ficca said about the former logo. "It's pretty benign, cartoonish looking, doesn't necessarily reflect our fighting spirit, so to speak."

He wanted a look that followed modern design trends, incorporated the college's blue and gold colors and something that the student-athletes and the college could take pride in.



LOOK AT ME NOW

"It's very important to have a sleek, modern, well-produced logo," Ficca said. "It's going to be seen, over and over and over."

The look of the eagle went from soft and friendly to tough and intimidating. With some trial and error, the new logo began to take shape. Scott Souder in the Public Relations office designed the new logo. He pulled inspiration from several professional sports team logos and from photos of actual golden eagles.

"Most current logos have very thick bold lines and sharp angles," Souder explained. "Most are two dimensional with a flat look to them."

Souder sought out input from not only the athletics staff and his coworkers, but from the students. He wanted to be sure that the student population liked the new direction he was taking for the new look.

"I got a lot of different input from students," Souder said. "The students wanted something more current too. I kept hearing the word fierce over and over again."

WIND BENEATH MY WINGS

After the logo had taken a form that was deemed satisfactory by those involved, including the unofficial support of the student body, the bird was let out of its cage and was presented to the Associated Student Government. Souder delivered his creation himself.

"There was a very large group of students there," Souder said. "There was a wide variety of students; Wingspan students, athletic students, people from all different sides of the campus."

ASG president Alex Barker had been shown the logo by Ficca prior to this meeting and said she was excited to present the logo to the student senate.

"There was no debate on the logo that Scott presented to us," Barker said. "It was agreed upon, and we all thought it was a very good change for LCCC."

The ASG response to the new look was a standing ovation, which took Souder by surprise.

"ASG was very excited," he said. "They all really liked it and appreciated its look."

"It sounds silly, but this logo adds a bit of a competitive edge to the LCCC athletics programs," Barker said. "It's a much more fierce and competitive logo."

COME GET SOME

"It's important to have an attractive logo that really represents our institution well," Ficca stressed.

The design aspects are sharp, bold and crisp – descriptive words that also are appropriate in describing the student-athletes. The fighting spirit Ficca mentioned has certainly been on the rise for all of the Golden Eagles athletic teams. Women's soccer, men's soccer and volleyball have all been nationally ranked at some point in the past few years. Rodeo competitors have gone to the College National Finals Rodeo.

The Equestrian team routinely makes national appearances, and the basketball team is on the verge of pushing into the spotlight. A trend of great expectations is becoming the norm for LCCC sports.

"I think the success of our student-athletes in the community, in the classroom, and on the court, on the field, or in the arena, has led to a lot of upgrades for our athletics, and the new logo is just one of them," Ficca said.

FLY AWAY BIRD

The new logo is now showing up on all the college's athletic promotional materials; it can be seen on the team's warm-ups and some other attire and is slowly replacing the former logo.

"There's a pretty long phase-in for us, putting the new eagle logo in," Ficca explained.

Fan apparel and uniforms will be a big part of this phasing out process.

"I got a lot of people talking about if this logo was on a shirt or a hat that they would probably buy something with it on it," Souder said. "They would be more proud to support the athletics program at the college."

Same goes for the coaches and the student athletes. The former logo wasn't really used much in the uniforms themselves. Ficca said it was difficult to incorporate because of the lack of college colors in the logo, and it didn't represent the mentality they wanted to have going into competition.

One of the most noticeable instances of the former logo is center court of the college's gym. Ficca is hopeful to get that repainted within the next year.

"I have to say it's going to be pretty awesome when it shows up on the basketball court," Souder exclaimed. "This was a very fun project, a bit stressful, but fun."

"A new look to the logo is the first domino in a chain of dominos for us that it's going to be a really good year, Ficca said." ♦



Athletics mascot in use from 2002 - 2011.



Dads MAKING A DIFFERENCE

For one determined young man and his little girl,
the Department of Workforce Services program
was the beginning of a brand-new life.

Story by Dava Greenlee
Photos by Ty Stockton



Russell Biehl was beginning to lose hope. He'd been working as a framer, but when the housing market turned, opportunities for construction work dried up. A mistake he'd made and atoned for years before continued to haunt him, making a new job even harder to come by. The sole custodian of his 5-year-old daughter, Hannah, Biehl was desperate to find a way to provide for her. He sought help at the Wyoming Department of Workforce Services (DWS), where he learned about the Dads Making a Difference (DMD) program. For the determined young man and his little girl, it was the beginning of a brand-new life.

Dads Making a Difference was founded three years ago, when Jeff White was observing workforce programs around the state for DWS. He noticed that there were many programs to assist single mothers in career advancement, but there were very few similar opportunities for dads. He got the go-ahead from DWS, assembled a small team, and secured funding for the program, which is now run by Tammy Howard.

The program accommodates cohorts of about 10 men at a time. Participants – who must be 18 or older, custodial or non-custodial fathers, low-income, and drug-free – learn parenting and relationship skills, receive group and individual therapy, and (if necessary) get assistance with substance abuse issues. Group cohesion and support is developed through weekly opportunities for the men and their families to socialize or work on community service projects together.

The primary focus of Dads Making a Difference, however, is to help men transition into careers that will enable them to better support their families financially. This is where LCCC comes in. For each cohort, one training program is chosen for the all of dads to enroll in. The first two cohorts of DMD dads pursued certificates in Integrated Systems Technology at LCCC. Men in other cohorts have attended other educational institutions to earn commercial driver's licenses or certification to operate heavy equipment. A Temporary Assistance for Needy Families grant covers 100 percent of the participants' tuition, while Howard works with financial aid offices and secures funds from the Workforce Investment Act to help cover the remainder of the dads' expenses.

For the training that takes place at LCCC, Howard works closely with Doug Cook, dean of career and technical education. "I'm very interested in this program because I believe in giving

people second chances,” he said. “This is a golden opportunity for men to literally change their lives. If DWS did not have this program in place, I don’t know what these young men would do. I don’t know where they would get this kind of training or the ability to change their lives and get good, meaningful careers.”

While the short-term training programs were successful in helping a high percentage of the DMD dads secure higher-paying jobs, Howard believed the participants would benefit even more from a longer program. Cook agreed, and it happened that just when Biehl was looking for employment opportunities through DWS, Howard and Cook were looking for dads ready to take on the challenge of a nine-month program in diesel technology at LCCC.

Although it was not exactly what he’d had in mind, the idea appealed to Biehl, who had completed his GED at LCCC several years prior. “I’d always wanted to go back to school, but I had no idea where to start, so I never did it,” he said. “It was way too much for me to try to take in and comprehend. But Tammy showed me the stepping stones and opened the door for me.”

Of the dozens of applicants, Biehl and 10 other “Diesel Dads,” as they came to be known, were selected to enroll in LCCC’s diesel technology program. Larry Van Why has been teaching diesel technology at LCCC for nearly two decades, and he developed the program to include a mix of classroom theory and hands-on training. The classroom time (which is carefully planned to ensure that students are prepared to pass the Automotive Service Excellence national certification exams) is followed by the opportunity for students to demonstrate a working knowledge of what they learned in a lab environment.

Biehl was intimidated by this format at first. “I’m the worst student ever,” he’d told Howard in the beginning. “I’ve never been good at school.” But, knowing it would help him make a better life for his daughter, he was determined to persevere. His perseverance paid off; in fact, according to instructor Robert LaFaso, Biehl was the first in his class to grasp electrical theory and was able to explain it to the rest of the students in a way they could understand.

It is this kind of opportunity for accomplishment that gives the DMD dads far more than just technical skills. “You could see our Diesel Dads growing in pride and confidence,” Cook said. “You could see them grow as people.” Howard recently received a call from a DMD graduate who tearfully told her that he’d just heard his dad say the words “I’m proud of you” for the first time in 30 years.

The Diesel Dads do have plenty to be proud of. Of the eleven men who started the program, eight succeeded in meeting the challenge of balancing



family, work and school – as well as making the necessary lifestyle and behavioral changes to graduate from the DMD program. Six of the eight graduates are currently employed in the diesel technology field, and the other two went on to pursue their associate degrees in diesel technology. According to Howard, the overall graduation rate for DMD participants is 85 percent (compared to 65 to 70 percent in similar programs statewide),



“It was always all about Hannah,” he said, “to better her life.”

with 87 percent of graduates transitioning into higher-paying jobs.

The Diesel Dads’ success emboldened Howard to approach her supervisors with an even greater challenge for the next cohort: a two-year associate’s degree in Heating, Ventilation and Air Conditioning (HVAC) at LCCC. They gave her the green light, and she contacted Cook, who embraced the idea with enthusiasm.

“HVAC is a trade that will never go away, and it offers the opportunity to work anywhere in the U.S. should a dad have to do that for custodial reasons,” he said. “Any student who goes through the program will be exposed to state-of-the-art technology and have the option to do a three-week energy audit course in the summer.” LCCC also works with area employers to coordinate internships for HVAC students.

Dave Curry, LCCC’s energy management program coordinator, offered DMD eight of fifteen seats in the HVAC program that began in August 2011. Of the 80 applications Howard received in less than 24 hours, the selection panel was only able to narrow it down to 10, so Curry brought in another instructor and created space for two additional students.

Despite the challenge of a 2-year program, Curry has high hopes for this group of dads. “They are really demonstrating an understanding of how fortunate they are,” he said. “I keep my notes from their interviews, and if someone starts wanting to give up, I pull out the interview sheets and remind them why they want to be here: ‘I want a better life for my kid; I want my kid to see me complete something; I want my kid to complete something.’ I use that as a motivator.”

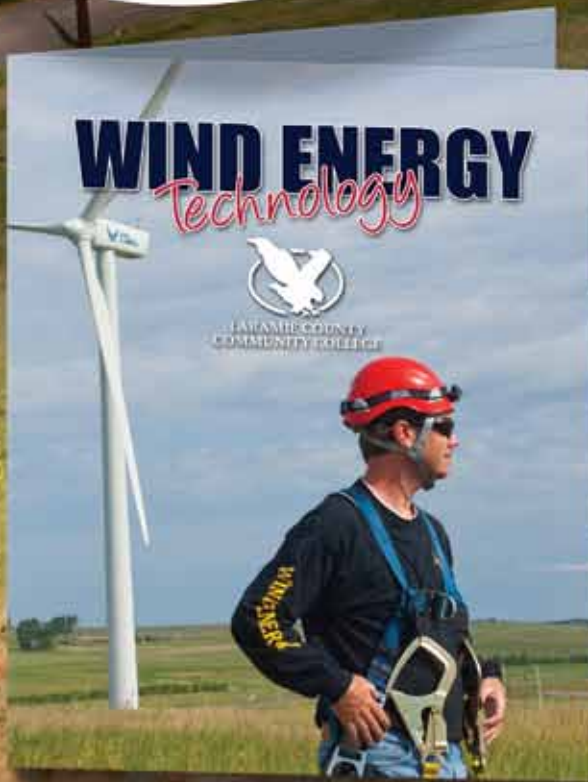
This was certainly sufficient motivation for Biehl. “It was always all about Hannah,” he said, “to better her life.” In fact, Biehl – who once considered himself the “worst student ever” and swore to Howard that he would “never stay for his associates” – is one of the two Diesel Dads pursuing his AAS in diesel technology at LCCC.

He gropes for words to describe the impact the program has had on his life: “It’s huge ... it helped me overcome my past,” he says. “For the first time, I can see myself with a mortgage payment and a good career. And Hannah is so proud of me.” Hannah is too shy to say so, but as she clings to her daddy’s side and stares up into his face, it’s obvious that he is right. ❖

EARN AN OFFICE WITH A VIEW!



F.E. Warren Air Force Base has joined the green energy movement. The base currently has three wind turbines, but it needed help keeping them running. Enter the Laramie County Community College Wind Energy program. Students in the program get hands-on experience with wind turbines in an actual, working wind farm setting, and the base gets a source of clean energy. Wind Energy student Robbie Beckman (pictured) and his instructors took the LCCC PR team on a tour of the turbines in July.

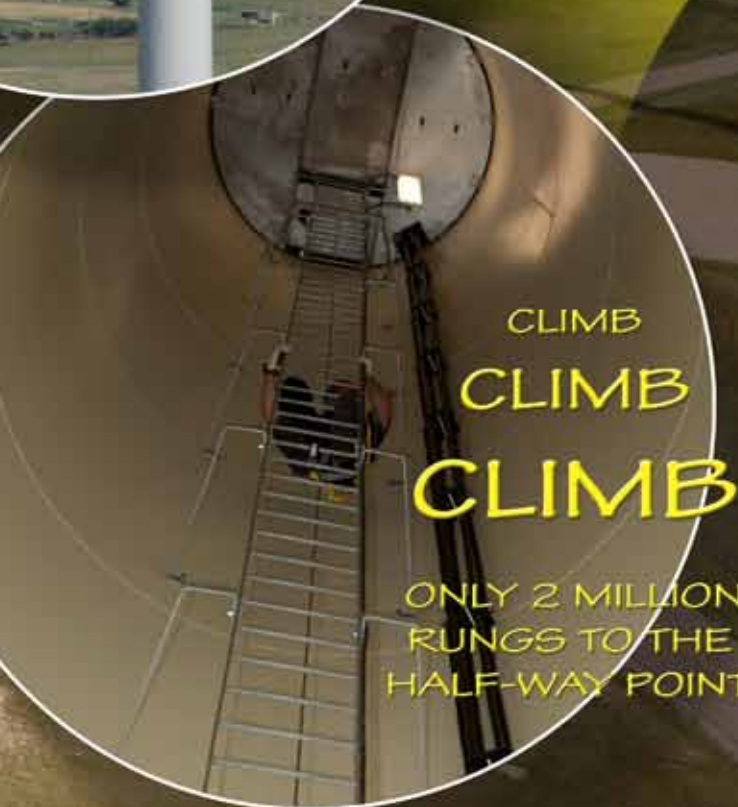


Mel Jones earned a first-place award in photography for this shot at the Wyoming Press Association.

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IT STARTS HERE!

/lccc/Mobile

If you're not mobile ... you're sitting still

By Josh Thein



▼ Laramie County Community College's website isn't sitting still. The college has adapted to the times and developed a website that is smartphone friendly, thanks to the efforts of the web folks in the Public Relations office. It grants easy access to important academic calendar dates; connects you with all the neat LCCC social media venues; tells you which team won that thrilling overtime soccer game; helps you find the right library book for your big research paper; puts the college's contacts literally at your fingertips and more.

According to a September 2011 data report from Nielson, a company that specializes in research of what consumers watch and buy, 40 percent of mobile phone users are smartphone users. That same report predicts that these numbers will continue to increase, as most non-smartphone users now suggest that they want their next phone to be more intelligent.

If you're a proud smartphone user and a lover of LCCC, open that google goggles app and scan the QR code. See the new mobile site yourself. For the non-smartphone users, those weird looking square markings aren't a new age art style. They're called "QR codes," short for quick response codes. They are images that can be scanned with a smartphone and take you to a specific location in the World Wide Web. They'll start popping up on the many different promotional pieces for the college. Start scanning and enjoy the college site from wherever you're most comfortable and have cell service. ❖



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2012 END OF THE WORLD, OR A NEW BEGINNING?

By Ty Stockton, Editor

Holy smokes. Another year has come and gone. We're now in the final year of the Mayan calendar, so some folks believe if you have things you want to do, you better get them done quickly. If those people are right, we don't have much time left before the Earth falls off its orbit and crashes into Jupiter or something.

If you ask me, I don't think those predictions are accurate. It's much more likely that the guy who was assigned to make the Mayan calendar just ran out of time. Think about your own job duties. The boss asks you to get a big project done, then just when you think you've got a handle on it, a thousand other tasks start flooding your inbox. The big project (like this issue of the Talon, which I was hoping to have in your hands before Christmas) gets shoved to the back burner for a while.

So don't worry – the world's not going to end later this year. But why not act as though it might? Treat 2012 as though you're not going to see 2013. Get all those To-Dos you never thought you had time for crossed off your list.

Get in shape. If you only have time for a 15-minute workout each day, make sure to schedule those 15 minutes. Do more, if you can. But schedule it, so you won't have an excuse to miss your time in the gym.

Go visit those relatives you've been meaning to see, but never did. You get vacation time for a reason – use it before you lose it.

Stop putting off those tasks at work you just don't want to do.

The quicker you get them done, the sooner you can go home and hang out with your family. Besides, you don't want to be responsible for a civilization 5,000 years from now thinking the world's going to end because a task you were assigned didn't get done.

Here at the college, we have an added incentive to turn over a new leaf. Our new president, Dr. Joe Schaffer, took the reins on Jan. 17, and he's providing all the motivation we need to approach every day with optimism, excitement and enthusiasm.

The entire college community has perked up noticeably since Dr. Schaffer was announced as our new president. With him at the helm, this college, which has for decades been recognized as one of the best community colleges in the nation, will only improve.

And that brings up another To-Do. Why not register for that class you've always wanted to take? Or even get that degree you've been saying for years you want to complete. We're here, we're excited, we're

having fun, and we're ready to help you achieve your goals.

I'm pretty sure you'll be able to take that class or get your degree before the world comes to an end, but why take the chance?

Start now. ♦





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