

VHCC Offers New Engineering Option

Virginia Highlands Community College is now offering a two-year program that will guarantee qualified graduates a seamless transition into the University of Virginia's School of Engineering & Applied Science.

"This is a tremendous opportunity for motivated VHCC students to begin working toward an engineering degree on our campus," said VHCC President F. David Wilkin. "VHCC is a more affordable option for families in our community, and students will receive the strong foundation they need to complete a baccalaureate engineering degree."

Under the agreement signed by UVA and community college leaders, qualified students from VHCC and Virginia's other community colleges must complete at least 54 specific college credits and maintain a GPA of 3.4 or higher. Community college graduates who meet all program requirements -- including a B or better in English composition, calculus, physics, and chemistry -- will be guaranteed admission to UVA's engineering program.

VHCC currently is accepting applications for summer and fall terms. Students are encouraged to work closely with an academic counselor to ensure they meet all criteria for transfer to UVA.

For additional information, please contact Robert May, Dean of the VHCC Division of Science and Engineering Technologies at (276) 739-2432. You may also email him at rmay@vhcc.edu.



VHCC News is produced each month by Anne Dunham of the Office of Institutional Advancement. If you would like to suggest information for the newsletter, please send your ideas to adunham@vhcc.edu or contact her by phone at 276-739-2456. VHCC is an Equal Employment Opportunity/Affirmative Action Institution.

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(Left) Richard Leigh performs the songs that made him famous. (Right, top to bottom) Abingdon Town Council Member Cathy Lowe presents Leigh with a key to the town of Abingdon. Gary Aday and William Van Keyser watch from the audience as Leigh dedicates a song to them.

Grammy Winner Returns to VHCC Campus

A packed house welcomed Grammy Award Winner Richard Leigh back to the VHCC campus April 17 for a benefit concert to honor the beloved faculty members who guided his student career more than 30 years ago.

The hour-long concert of original hits included new songs from Leigh's latest CD and familiar tunes recorded by country greats Reba McEntire, Kathy Mattea and Don Williams. The highlight came as the grand finale when Leigh dedicated his best known hit, "Don't It Make My Brown Eyes Blue," to William Van Keyser and Gary Aday. The two long-time theater instructors watched from the front row as members of the crowd rose to their feet.

Before Leigh hit it big as a country songwriter, he appeared on a VHCC stage as a theatre arts student working under the direction of Keyser and Aday. After graduating from VHCC, he earned a degree from Virginia Commonwealth University and then headed to Nashville. By the mid 1970s, he had hooked up with Crystal Gayle, won a Grammy, and made a name for himself within the country music industry.

Leigh has returned to Abingdon periodically and keeps in touch with many of the friends he met on the VHCC campus. When the VHCC Educational Foundation launched an effort to establish the Keyser-Aday Theatre, he quickly agreed to provide the entertainment at the benefit concert.

Community leaders, old friends, and country music fans crowded into the theater to listen as Leigh crooned the tunes that gained him success and in 1994 earned him a coveted spot on the Nashville Songwriter's Hall of Fame.

Among the songs performed were "Cold Day in July," a song recorded by The Dixie Chicks and the Don Williams' hit "That's the Thing About Love." Leigh also joked that the only tune he now has in circulation is "I Don't Love You Much Do I," the theme song used on the Nature's Own bread commercial. He said he had forgotten about the song until the royalties started rolling in.

A touching moment came when Leigh performed "The Greatest Man I Never Knew," a song that reached No. 1 for Reba McEntire in 1992. Leigh said he wrote the song to describe his relationship with the men who raosed him after he was orphaned as a young child.

The music stopped just long enough to introduce Keyser and Aday with a short video outlining their careers. Both joined VHCC in the early days of the college and were instrumental in establishing a theater program that has provided performing opportunities and entertainment for the entire community. The funds raised through the Keyser-Aday Theatre project will be invested in an endowment to provide student scholarships, support arts program, and establish a regional art collection on campus.

In addition to a standing ovation from the crowd, Leigh was honored with a key to the town of Abingdon, presented by town council members Cathy Lowe and Dr. French Moore Jr.

For more information about the Keyser-Aday Endowment, please contact the VHCC Educational Foundation at (276) 739-2473. To lean more about Richard Leigh, log on to his website at www.richardleigh.com.

Wright Offers Tips for Survival



Brenda White Wright

"Give people their flowers while they are living."

That's just one of the tips for survival that Brenda White Wright shared with guests at the April 10 Administrative Professionals Luncheon sponsored by the Center for Business & Industry at VHCC. Wright, a motivational speaker from Kingsport, delivered the luncheon address during the annual event.

"Have some 'me' time every day," Wright told the crowd of more than 100. "Have at least one hour out of 24 that is not about your job, your spouse, your children...

Women especially have been socialized to take

care of everyone but ourselves. Have quiet time. Get some rest. And please don't think of it as being selfish."

Wright challenged the crowd to develop and commit to a personal and professional plan of action, to excercise - physically, mentally and spiritually - every day, to have an attitude of gratitude, to quit making excuses, and to be more respectful of differences. The world would be a better place if we could all "learn to listen and listen to learn," she said, and "help somebody else along the way."

Everyone should laugh more often, she continued, and we should all "love what we do and do what we love."

The long list of advice comes from years of experience, Wright told the crowd, noting that she overcame the obstacles of being a poor, uneducated black woman because of her willingness to work hard.

"We used to go out and look for drink bottles on the side of the road," she said, recalling the early days of her marriage. "We got where we are through hard work and effort. We never asked anyone to give us anything. We worked and we went to school."

Wright said it took her 14 years to get a bachelor's degree, but she didn't give up. In fact, she soon will complete the requirements for a doctorate degree. Despite the obstacles along the way, Wright said she has raised three children, maintained a happy marriage, and kept her sense of humor

"I was White before I was Wright," she said laughing.



FROM THE ARCHIVES



Before he packed his bags - and guitar - and headed for Nashville, Richard Leigh was a heartthrob on the VHCC campus. Leigh, pictured here in a publicity photo from the 1972 production of "Dames at Sea" earned a Theatre Arts degree from VHCC in 1973.



Rich Evans (left) of Wolf Hills Energy listens as David Matlock, vice president of Institutional Advancement at VHCC, provides tips for making the hole-in-one shot at the recent VHCC Educational Foundation Golf Tournament sponsored by Alpha Natural Resources. At stake was a 2008 FJ Cruiser provided by Toyota of Bristol. The tournament raised about \$15,000 for student scholarships. Congratulations to the winning team from the First Bank of Virginia.

Hamed Wins VCCS Technology Award

The innovative use of technology to find and track salamanders has earned a Virginia Highlands Community College biology instructor top honors at the Virginia Community College System's New Horizons Conference.

Kevin Hamed, assistant professor of biology, was named a conference winner in the Innovative Use of Technology category for an ongoing research project that involves monitoring salamander populations on Whitetop Mountain and at the Tennessee Valley Authority's South Holston Weir Dam. His research also won Best In Show honors during the conference.

Under Hamed's direction, students from VHCC, Abingdon High School, John Battle High School, and East Tennessee State University are using salamander populations to monitor climate changes on the two mountains. The salamanders will climb to higher altitudes if temperatures warm, Hamed explained, adding that students are using global positioning units, data loggers, transponder tags, and other technology to track the salamanders.

Project funding is being provided by the State of Virginia Tech-Prep Initiative, a Virginia Community College System National Science Foundation Grant, the Tennessee Wildlife Resources Agency and a grant from the ETSU Research Development Committee.

Hamed is being assisted by Jane Fleenor of John Battle High School, Brandi Norman and Sarah Sawyers of Abingdon High School, and Dr. Tom Laughlin from ETSU. To date, students and their teachers have spent more than 1,000 hours collecting and analyzing data, and the project is expected to continue for 10 years.

New Horizons is an annual conference sponsored by the VCCS to promote the use of technology within Virginia's 23 community colleges.

New Fringe Benefits Login Launched

A number of VHCC employees utilize medical reimbursement accounts to achieve significant savings on their medical expenses not covered by health insurance.

Fringe Benefits Management Company (FBMC), the company that administers this benefit for state employees, has changed the way customers log in to its www.myFBMC.com web site. All participants are now required to register with the new Premier Login system which is simple and takes only a few moments to complete at the above web address.

After finishing the one-time registration process, the customer may access account information that includes account balances and the status of submitted claims, using their email address and password.

For questions and additional information, contact FBMC Customer Service at 1-800-342-8017 or click the "contact" link on the www.myFBMC.com homepage. You may also contact the VHCC Human Resources Office for assistance.