

## Interview with Georgia Costello

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Interview # 1: July 23, 2013

Interviewer: Phil Pogue

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**Pogue:** My name is Phil Pogue. We're here in Belleville, Illinois. This is the Abraham Lincoln Presidential Library project on the history of the Illinois Community College system. We have with us today Dr. Georgia Costello, who's going to be talking to us about Southwestern Illinois College, and at this time, it is July 23rd, 2013. So we want to thank you for being a participant in our project. Could you review with us your family background and educational experiences?

**Costello:** Yes. My family background is I'm the daughter of George and Eloise Cockrum from Sesser, Illinois. I was born in Herrin, at the Herrin hospital, then lived in Sesser on a farm with my brother, my sister, and my mom and dad until I was about two. Moved to Benton, Illinois from there; went to kindergarten and first grade in Benton, Illinois. From there, moved to Fort Lauderdale, Florida and went through grade school, from second grade through sixth grade, there. Then moved on to East St. Louis, Illinois. Went seventh grade at Lansdowne Junior High 'til ninth



grade, and then started East St. Louis Senior High School in tenth grade. From that point, for my senior in high school, I went to Belleville West High School. I then became a student at, what was then, Belleville Junior College, in the fall of 1967.

That opportunity led me to reconnect with many of my friends that I had had from high school, and I started dating my now husband of, actually, 45 years this Saturday, Jerry Costello. After my freshman year at what was then Belleville Junior College, we married. From that point, I went on to McKendree College for the remainder of my undergrad, after I completed sixty-four hours at Belleville Junior College. I received a state scholarship to complete those two final years of my education. I completed those two years, actually in three, because as soon as I found out I'd received my scholarship, I also found out that I was pregnant with our third child.

So having that particular circumstance happen, I still decided to go ahead and go to college. Finished college in May of 1977, and from that point walked into my first teaching position in Belleville District 118, in the city of Belleville. I continued on my education at SIU Carbondale for my Master's work, and completed my Master's, I believe it was in '94. And in 2000, I started a doctoral program as a cohort with what was SIU Carbondale and SIU Edwardsville. In 2007, I would have graduated with all honors bestowed, and hooded, at SIU Carbondale when I completed my Doctorate. So that's sort of a quick overview of education from the very beginning.

Pogue: You talked about being at Belleville as a teacher. What kind of assignments did you have?

Costello: In the beginning of my teaching experience, I was what was called a "rover." In other words, I went from one grade school to another. So I traveled on a four-day cycle and saw about 900 students in four days, because I taught physical education and health, and what happened was I would travel from one building to the other. That was in the first five years of my assignment in 118. In 1983, I then went to what was Central Junior High School and became the physical education and health teacher there. Continued teaching in that capacity until right around 1989 and, from that point, took a little hiatus and finished my Master's-level work. Went back to District 118 and substituted for a year in '95, then was offered the dean's position at Central Junior High, which I took., About a year and a half later, by that time I had completed my administrative certificate, which was a type seventy-five here in Illinois, I went on from the dean's position to become the principal at Central Junior High.

I maintained the principalship, almost completing two years there, and from that point, I went on to become the assistant superintendent of the Regional Office of Education. I served under Dr. Rosello Wanzer, who was then the regional superintendent for St. Clair County. I served in that position until 2005, and from 2005 to 2007 I worked part-time and completed the remainder of my dissertation.

After 2007, when I was hired to become the president here at Southwestern Illinois College, I began my presidency here on July 17th in 2008. So I am just beginning, as of this last week, my sixth year in my tenure here as President of Southwestern Illinois College.

Pogue: How long have you lived in the Metro East area?

Costello: I've lived in the Metro East area since I was twelve years old.

Pogue: Now, you indicated you were a student at what was then Belleville Junior College. How was that experience?

Costello: It was a wonderful experience. One of the reasons that I became a student [there] is my parents, at the time, weren't really in a financial position to send me to college. I knew that I wanted to go to college very badly, and if you maintained a residency in the city of Belleville, at that time, you could become a student at the college for five dollars a credit hour. So, reluctantly, I left my friends and, of course, all of the wonderful opportunities that I had had in high school, whether it was cheerleading, or sports, or student council, or whatever I was involved in, and moved to Belleville with my parents, because I was very sincere in wanting to attain an education. My senior year allowed me to maintain a residency in the city of Belleville and start at Belleville Junior College the next fall.

Pogue: As far as the area of the courses that you took at Belleville, what type of courses were you taking?

Costello: Most of the classes that I took were general studies. I knew that I wanted to continue my education and receive my Bachelor's, so I took general studies classes for the most part.

Pogue: How did you find the quality of education at Belleville?

Costello: I thought that, at the time, the quality of education was superior. I felt like the teaching staff really cared about me. I was a name and not a number. Even back then, which is some time ago, I really felt like I was receiving a top-notch quality education, for all practical purposes, for a very reasonable amount of money, as opposed to going to what would have been a four-year institution.

Pogue: And you were living close to this college at the time?

Costello: Yes, sir. Actually, I would say I've lived within a mile radius of this particular campus since I was a very young woman. So this campus, I have been extremely proud of. In my freshman year as a student at Belleville Junior College, we had a campaign, a very active campaign, for a referendum to build what is now Southwestern Illinois College, the campus that we all are sitting at this afternoon. So I had a friend, named Kathy Schaefer, at the time, who wanted me to help distribute literature and work for the vote, or get out the vote, for the referendum

to build the school. So the history of why I'm here, I think, is one that's rather unique, and was meant to be.

Pogue: How did Belleville prepare you for going to McKendree?

Costello: I was very well prepared when I got to McKendree. I felt like they were very fair and very reasonable about the classes that transferred, and I didn't have any trouble in the transition at all.

Pogue: What has been your role on the Illinois Governor's Education Accountability and Education Excellence Taskforce?

Costello: The role that I played in that particular task force was more prone to coping with issues that dealt with No Child Left Behind, NCLB, which was passed in 2001: how it was going to affect the different states, and what impact it was going to have on schools, and testing, and meeting the annual AYP, or annual yearly progress. So that taskforce was established mostly to begin to have some vision as to how K through twelve (K-12) systems were going to cope with the mandated requirements of NCLB.

Pogue: As to being a trustee at McKendree, is that correct?

Costello: Yes, sir.

Pogue: And what is the responsibility of that?

Costello: I'm very proud to represent McKendree University as a trustee, and also as a former graduate of McKendree University, which was McKendree College at the time. It's not only inspirational to me, but it's been an honor and a privilege to serve with such an esteemed group of trustees that actually come from all over the country to serve on that board. Many of them are former students, but also many of them being businessmen and women who are very interested in students receiving a good quality education at a private university or college. So I'm very proud to serve.

Pogue: You've had family members serve in the General Assembly in U.S. Congress. How has that assisted your understanding of federal and state issues on education?

Costello: Well, it's given me a really great opportunity to have a broad overview, not only of the legislation that pertains to education and the impact that the legislation has had, but the differing views of presidential candidates during their candidacies. And then the actual implementation of [policies] of who has become elected as president, and [who] that person has chosen [as] their different respective secretaries of education.

So I've had a great overview, I think, not only from the three branches of federal government, to watch and see—literally up close and personal—what happens with the lobbying efforts towards certain pieces of legislation that are

mandated, most of the time, by the federal government, whether it happens to be NCLB, for an example, or Perkins Federal Funding, or how veterans are affected through what is the Montgomery GI Bill. There's just been an enormous opportunity to watch, up close, the impact of those pieces of legislation, and how they've actually been enacted, and then to be able to see it follow through and affect the lives of students. It's been, I think, a great opportunity, and given me a better perspective to appreciate more of the impact that policy and legislation has on education.

Pogue: As a college president, how do you feel that the federal and state government—their attitude toward community colleges?

Costello: You know, I think you've seen over the last few years, especially in the Obama presidency, I think you've seen more of a prominent role of community college and the community college system throughout the nation. I don't know for sure exactly what year we would say that it became a hot topic, but I think it's early on in the Obama administration, and it appears that community colleges, because of Joe Biden's wife, Dr. Jill Biden. Her role in the community college systems has also brought a national prominence to the forefront of, I think, conversation initially, and then literally more of an engagement with community college systems and what they're all about and the service that we do for the millions of students that we serve throughout our nation.

So I'd say there's a two-fold or a three-fold reason why the community college systems have bubbled up to become more of a hot-button topic, as I would call them, and I think she's had a lot to do. I also think the president led a lot of that.

Pogue: At the state level, you're competing with K-12 for funding, you're competing with the four-year public institutions. How do you view how community colleges have fared with the state of Illinois?

Costello: Well, everybody mentions what we call, in our terms, the three-legged stool for funding: property tax, tuition, and then state funding, so the three-legged system. It's a part of the design of what community college systems are. Unfortunately, that system had begun to—or has begun to—erode some due to the financial situation in the state of Illinois.

So instead of providing a third of the funds, the state now provides closer to one fifth of the funds. The need for the community college education continues to grow for our students, for business and for industry. So our challenge is to continue to provide the highest-quality education with what we would call a flat or a reduced budget. Now, we've raised taxes when necessary to meet state taxation requirements. However, we don't want to burden our local taxpayers, especially in a down economy, with any exorbitant hikes. So instead, what we have done is we have raised tuition. SWIC [Southwestern Illinois College], though, has been able to maintain one of the lowest tuition rates in the state by

making only moderate increases in tuition and fees each year. We're pretty proud of that.

We've also actively pursued grants as a way to compensate for this funding shortfall. We received nearly two million dollars through a multi-tiered Trade Adjustment Assistance Community College and Career Training (TAACCCT) grant, to expand our precision machining technology and welding programs, through new machinery, technology, curriculum, and improved facilities.

Pogue: What do you hear from community college groups on issues of state laws, state funding, capital development, or federal mandates?

Costello: Well, as mentioned before, it appears reimbursing SWIC and other colleges for education expenses, I think everybody's doing their best. We are doing our best at the same level of quality with flat or reduced budget. I think that speaks well for all of us, as community college systems. But what we hear from our governor and from our legislators is that funds are severely limited, at the time, for mostly capital development projects. So we've been extremely fortunate to secure \$19.1 million in a two-year period to complete a new Liberal Arts Complex expansion, which just opened this spring.

As far as federal mandates, what we're looking at with the Affordable Healthcare Act, and the cost of offering health coverage to every employee, is really a huge business concern for us right now. However, the deadlines for that program have been postponed for another year, so we'll take a hard look at it this year, in trying to prepare for what we may face this time next year. But we're also working to develop a care plan, and we're confident that it'll be beneficial to our employees and, in the long term or the long run, it'll be beneficial to the institution.

Pogue: Going to some of the specific issues impacting the college: military waivers. How has that impacted you?

Costello: SWIC serves the largest veteran population and active duty military student population of any institution in Illinois. SWIC has been named a military-friendly school by GI Jobs magazine in 2011 and 2012, and SWIC received the 2013 Governor's Award for Excellence in Education for its veteran-friendly programs. Because the college was founded, in part, to serve returning World War II veterans, the college has a longstanding commitment to assist veterans. An interesting note for Southwestern Illinois College is, of the original 183 students enrolled at the college, 116 were veterans.

So today, we serve more than 1,200 student veterans and active duty military personnel, and nearly 900 dependents turn to SWIC to meet their educational goals. Our additional resources to serve veterans includes veterans' service offices here at our Belleville Campus, same with Granite City Campus, and resource officers from the Illinois Department of Veteran's Affairs at the Belleville office

who visit us once a month, a veteran-to-veteran tutoring program through our success center, and we have a club for student veterans, just to name a few things. It's sequestered, but we have a really wonderful announcement that we're going to get to make in the month of September regarding veterans and our relationship and partnership with veterans nationally. So we're pretty proud, I just can't talk about it just yet.

Pogue: As far as Pell Grants and MAP [Multicultural Achievement Program] Scholarships, how have those...?

Costello: Well, you know, there's an inherent unfairness on the distribution of Pell and MAP. There's so many federal dollars to go around, and the same level of funding is awarded to students at the community college as it is for private universities. So the more expensive institutions, particularly the private, for-profit colleges, cut into the amount of funds that are available to our students by charging two to three times the tuition rate that a community college charges. Why not reward the students who have made that frugal choice of attending a community college in the form of incentives, such an increased allotment for living expenses or transportation expenses? I'm not sure why we don't do something like that.

Pogue: As far as cost-shifting of pensions, that's another hot-button item at the state level.

Costello: You know, we want to be a part of the solution, not a part of the problem. The community college and university presidents and the boards have been working together for a long time, developing a plan for shifting the pension responsibilities. So I guess that just remains to be seen. We'll see where it goes.

Pogue: Illinois just—I think the governor just recently signed the expansion of Medicaid. Has that topic been on the front burner for community college presidents?

Costello: (sighs) It has, and you know, Medicaid also means an increased need for qualified healthcare professionals. So here at SWIC, we offer ten healthcare programs: health information technology, medical assistant, medical billing and coding, medical laboratory technology, nursing education, certified nurse assistant, physical therapist assistant, radiologic technology, respiratory care, and also ward clerks. No doubt there will be a higher demand, and an inevitable expansion of these already popular programs. We attribute a lot of that to what I think everyone knows to be the forecast. That is, that the baby boomers, that all of us, are going to need more services and more healthcare availability, just because of the shift in age of people living longer in our society today. So we're very keen on maintaining as many of the healthcare programs as we can.

The enrollment process for these programs is extremely competitive, and they max out regularly in our enrollment. Proudly, our licensure-pass rate for the graduating class of 2012 was 100 percent for the medical laboratory technology, physical therapy assistant, radiologic technology, and respiratory care programs.

And 97 percent for our nursing education program. And I guarantee you—that's significantly before anyone else would say—it's higher than the norm. It's spectacular, actually.

Pogue: The issue of safety, and perhaps the new law on concealed carry [of guns] in Illinois, how have college presidents dealt with that issue?

Costello: You know, under the concealed carry bill that was just accepted into law, schools are exempt from conceal and carry. So our public safety officers are armed, but they must go through the police academy and receive the same intensive training as municipal officers and the deputies before being able to carry a weapon on campus. I'm pretty proud to say that my oldest son, Jerry the second, was one of the sponsors for that piece of legislation in the Illinois house. So I'm very proud. I know, as an ex-policeman himself, and his father having been an ex-policeman too, he takes it all very seriously. So I think it's a great accomplishment on the legislature's part. I'm in favor of it.

Pogue: As far as adult education and GED [General Education Development or General Equivalency Diploma], that at one time was part of the K-12 system, common schools. Now it's a role of the community colleges. How is that going?

Costello: SWIC offers GED. We offer English as a Second Language. We offer adult and family literacy. We offer citizenship. We offer vocational classes, such as a nursing assistant. We offer forklift, we offer welding, office technology, just to name a few. And we also have specialty programs in the Early School Leaver [Transition] Program. SWIC's adult basic education program is a model within the state of Illinois for its enrollment achievements, its GED attainments that we've had. In fact, I believe, last year we graduated our 10,000th GED graduate at Southwestern Illinois College. It's the only provider of citizenship education services in this entire region of the state. We also are the highest producer of GEDs in the state and had as many as 548 graduates this last year. Since 2008, adult basic education has concentrated on more of its services on college campuses, rather than on what were our extension sites. The principal reason behind that is to encourage student transition from adult education to undergraduate studies. So while on campus, the adult students interact with our college students, they become familiar with college activities, and they're openly encouraged to continue their studies here. And that's resulted in a really high rate of forty to forty-two percent of those adult education students, who have graduated, transition into undergraduate courses, and we're really proud of that. It's the highest, actually—yeah, that's true, I forgot that—actually, it's the highest in the State of Illinois.

Pogue: What public interest exists in this community college district for having a community college, as compared to your interest in K-12 or the four-year schools?



Costello: I think community interest with SWIC is very high. I think the involvement with SWIC is high. SWIC is the largest community college outside of the Chicago area in the entire state of Illinois. We serve more than 24,000 students annually. Of the high school graduates that walk across the stage every year, one in four high school students, out of all eight counties that we represent in District 522, pick SWIC to start their education. And three-out-of-five area residents enroll by the time they're age thirty. So the community involvement in the college ranges exponentially, vastly all over the place, from college education programs, to credit classes, to non-credit classes, to programs and services for older persons.

Programs and Services for Older Persons, which is called PSOP, is the only comprehensive senior service in Illinois affiliated with a community college. This started in 1973. PSOP has more than 1,500 volunteers and serves more than 13,000 senior citizens annually, through social and educational activities in our community.

Pogue: Do you foresee a movement toward more private partnerships and away from state funding for community colleges, as you indicated that leg is somewhat shorter?

Costello: Private partnerships with business and industry can certainly be mutually beneficial, but you know, we can't look to private industry to rescue, so to speak, community colleges from state funding shortfalls. So, instead, what we do here is we form strategic partnerships to offer advanced training to local industries; in return, those industries look to our graduates when they are ready to hire.

Our Selsius,<sup>1</sup> Corporate, and Career Training Department works with numerous industries to provide a very diverse range of skills and training from software, to industrial technology, to OSHA<sup>2</sup> and other industry safety. And also Selsius works with Memorial Hospital in Belleville to provide such as long-term specialized training and consulting for the hospitals, for continuous program improvement for them. They also work with Olin Brass [Company, in Alton] to provide advanced specialized training in welding and leadership development. And Selsius was recently approved as a General Services Administration contractor, which we're really proud of, because it takes some time to acquire that. This is essentially a stamp of approval from the federal government to provide training and consulting for government agencies, so we're busy working on looking at more contracts there.

Each of our associate and applied science degree programs has an advisory board made up of local industry leaders in respective fields. And we also have representatives from K through twelve (K-12) that help shape our curriculum according to, you know, what our industry standards are. We have partnerships with PPG [Industries] and CARSTAR that helped form our auto collision repair

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<sup>1</sup> Online driver safety class

<sup>2</sup> Federal safety regulations

technology program, and the same with Granite City campus. We have recent re-enhancements to our precision machining technology and our welding program, that were made possible by generous donations of equipment from places like Haas Automation, Lincoln Electric, Ehrhardt Tool and Machine, US Steel, and also Anheuser-Busch.

Our health science programs work closely with 179 healthcare facilities in the Metro East, central Illinois, and St. Louis to offer clinical training. And that's, as you know, a part of the degree requirements. We've boasted, and we're really proud of the fact, that some of these partnerships we've had for over forty years. Also, our respiratory care program is taught entirely onsite at St. Elizabeth's Hospital. And the massage therapy program is taught at the Body Therapy Center in Swansea. We work with Memorial Hospital in Belleville and Anderson Hospital in Maryville to offer our paramedic programs. So, as you can see, there's quite an array.

Pogue: What have been some of the more historic events at Southwestern?

(background conversation; inaudible)

Costello: So what would you prefer we do? We do have a good timeline here of things that have transpired, but would you prefer to just...?

Pogue: Would you want to just hit some of the major highlights?

Costello: Some of the highlights? Sure.

Pogue: And go through those?

Costello: Sure, yeah. The timeline—I'll go through some of the major highlights. 1946: Belleville Junior College (BJC) opens at the Belleville Township High School West, with 183 students; one hundred sixteen are returning veterans, using their GI Bill to fund their education. In 1963, there's a referendum passed for the \$7.3 million to construct a new campus on the east end of Belleville, at the intersection of Carlyle and West Boulevard and Orchard Lane, for BJC and the Belleville East High Schools. In 1965, the Junior College Act of 1965 is signed into law, providing state funding for junior colleges, separate from high school districts, and establishing Belleville Junior College as a class-one junior college. In sixty-seven (1967), the land was purchased at the intersection of Carlyle Avenue and Green Mount Road to build the new BJC campus.

In 1971, Southwestern Illinois Police Academy opens. We are now graduating session 121 of the full-time academy, and session 21 of our part-time academy. In 1973, Programs and Services for Older Persons opens at 201 North Church Street in downtown Belleville, the only comprehensive senior citizen program linked to a community college. In 1983, the Granite City campus opens for the fall semester. In 1985, our Red Bud campus opens for the fall semester.

1990: There's legislation passed allowing the Belleville area college board of trustees to be elected by sub-district, instead of by a district-at-large. For the April 1991 election, district 522 is divided into seven sub-districts, each containing approximately 50,000 residents, to ensure that all the residents receive equal representation. 1996: BAC celebrates its fiftieth anniversary. 1997: BAC president Joseph Cipfil, PhD, leaves college here at BAC to become the president and CEO of the Illinois Community College Board. In 1999, SWIC offers classes at the newly formed East St. Louis Community College Center in the spring semester, after Metropolitan Community College is disbanded.

2000: BAC changes its name to Southwestern Illinois College to better reflect the region it serves. 2000: SWIC adopts the Academic Quality Improvement Program, AQIP, a continuous self-assessment process as the college's means of accreditation review. 2000: The information science center opens for fall classes at the Belleville campus, a 10.6 million dollar construction project. 2001: the MetroLink station opens at the Belleville campus. 2001: William and Florence Schmidt Arts Center opens at the Belleville campus; the 2.4 million dollar project is funded almost entirely by private donations from the Schmidt family and others. 2001: Granite City receives federal trio funding to create the student support service program to aid first-time, first-generation, low income, and disabled students.

2002: SWIC receives \$800,000 grant to build the fire science training tower on Freeburg Avenue in Belleville. 2006: Granite City campus is renamed Sam Wolf Granite City campus in honor of long-time board member and former legislator Sam Wolf. 2006: SWIC celebrates its sixtieth birthday. 2006: Liberal arts building opens for class, a 7.7 million dollar project funded through the governor's Opportunity First capital development program. 2008: Georgia Costello, PhD, is the first woman and the first former student to be named president of Southwestern Illinois College. 2010: The sustainability and green economy center opens at the Belleville campus. It is one of only three regional green economy centers in the State of Illinois.

2011: SWIC receives 2.2 million dollar TAACCCT grant over three years to enhance facilities, equipment, and instructional opportunities in precision machining technology and welding programs. 2012: SWIC receives grant from St. Clair County transit district to develop a multi-modal transportation project on the Belleville campus, including a roundabout, a Green Mount north entrance, and pedestrian bike bridges across Green Mount Road and Carlyle Avenue. 2013: A 78,901 square foot, \$19.1 million expansion of the liberal arts complex opens for spring classes in 2013.

Pogue: Was there any issue about changing the name from Belleville to Southwestern?

Costello: That's before Georgia. (laughter) So I could only say that I would imagine that, at that time, there probably were those that would have rather had the name stay the same. But I think, for the most part, it was a good transition. Everyone realized

that it was a good idea to make the name more representative of the area and the boundaries that the college attained at the time.

Pogue: As to issues of labor relations, economic downturns, Illinois unemployment, you talked about the wars and how they influenced Southwestern. Civil rights issues: has that been a big impact for Southwestern?

Costello: (microphone stops working) Let's see, although it's true the faculty did strike in 1980, and we were one of the first colleges to do so, since then I think we've been doing a very strong and cooperative relationship with seven college employee collective bargaining unions. SWIC is one of them. Public safety the other. SWIC meaning SWICEE, educational employees, is one of them, public safety's the other. Adjunct faculty, maintenance, custodial full-time, custodial part-time, and faculty. And recently, SWIC was recognized as having the oldest collective bargaining faculty union in higher education in the country by the National Center for the Study of Collective Bargaining in Higher Education and Professions, at a conference that was held at the City Universities of New York Graduate Center.

And as far as the economic downturn from high unemployment over the years, we've seen our share of displaced workers, but we've been trying to step forward with education, job re-training, and also job placement. Our variety of educational programs has helped these individuals start over in a new career field and also with new employers. So what's unique about the economy in southwestern Illinois is that it has a balance of industries in the northern areas, of business and service in the central, and more agricultural to the south. In this area, you know, we're really close to central. So, one door opened in terms of employment through a multitude of other opportunities. We're very fortunate.

The United States Department of Labor's Workforce Development Act provides tuition assistance to returning adult students, and also some of our displaced workers. And that, itself, helps to improve their skills and, therefore, increases their ability to be employed or employable, including the increases that they then have in their earning potential.

Pogue: Why were branch campuses started at Granite City and Red Bud?

Costello: Well, all of the district residents deserve access to a college education. While we looked at the map, its district extends from New Douglas in Madison County, which is about 40 miles north of Belleville, all the way down to Chester in Randolph County, which is about 60 miles south of Belleville. Belleville campus isn't necessarily easy to access for residents of the district. So, at any one point in the early '80s, forty percent of the enrollment was based at extension sites that we had throughout the district, the largest extension center being an evening college prep program at Washington School in Granite City. That was generating about 10,000 credit hours. The program grew so large, the college community decided it was more beneficial for the students to have a full-service campus, at least in that area.

So when Granite City North High School facility became available, we opted to purchase that property and establish a Granite City campus in 1983. The campus started with general education transfer courses, aviation pilot training, industrial technology, and adult basic education. And it's just been a grounded establishment since that time. So today, that campus offers a full complement of university transfers, career and occupational programs, ranging from aviation maintenance technology, to the CISCO networking academy center, to culinary arts and food management, to electrical – electronics technology, medical assistance, welding technology, to nearly 3,000 students every year.

When we saw this need grow in the district south of the Belleville campus, and several communities approached the college with recommendations for some kind of site in the communities in that area, a proposal was selected that would be based in Red Bud. A group of investors, actually in Red Bud, and local banks, and the City, made a million dollar commitment at the time to build a campus, with the agreement that the college would pay back this investment through what was then an interest-free loan/lease over a twelve-year period.

So the campus opened in the fall of 1985, with 300 students taking university training courses. Today, there are nearly 1,000 students at the campus. Those classes have expanded to include CISCO networking, electronics, and nurse assistant. The campus also offers unique delivery systems, such as block-scheduling for the students, and also Friday-only classes, which is pretty unique.

Pogue: What are some of the other unique programs found at Southwestern?

Costello: The dual credit program allows high school students, 16 years of age and older, to earn high school and college credits while attending identified classes in normal high school classrooms. A high school instructor **must meet the college's minimum instructor requirements**, and then the course is taught as a college-level course. There's no cost to the student and the high school for this program, and it is really what we would consider, in our world, a win-win situation for students, because of what we offer at that program. It serves nearly 2,000 high school students annually in that school credit program.

In the 1980s and the 1990s, the **Belleville Area College** was one of the national leaders in distance learning, with telecourses and video conferencing. And we're a model, I think, at this point, for every college to follow. Today, our distance learning has shifted from video conferencing to online and more hybrid courses, including some with traditional classroom attendance. In the spring of 2013, we offered 193 online courses, and this includes multiple-section courses, with a total of 3,408 enrollments. That includes students enrolled in more than one course. So we've really taken a big jump in enrollments in the recent years.

Pogue: Were there any other programs you wanted to review?

Costello: Yes. The Illinois Green Economy Network (IGEN), which we are founding members of, serves as a leader in sustainability initiatives for resources and opportunities for our college, and also for the surrounding community. SWIC is home to one of three regional green economy centers as part of IGEN. The Sustainability and Green Economy Center serves as a regional clearinghouse for environmental and sustainable resources. Members of our community, local businesses and students, as well as our SWIC employees and student body, can use this center.

The college offers numerous green credit courses, ranging from green building methods to environmental science, and non-credit courses, such as gardening, and then also how to use recyclable materials at home. We not only teach sustainability, we practice it too. For a new building we are building for the new liberal arts complex, we are seeking gold-level LEED certification, which means Leadership in Energy and Environmental Design certification.

As I mentioned before, SWIC received nearly \$2 million from the Trade Assistance Community College Career Training program to enhance facilities, equipment, and instructional opportunities in precision machining technology and welding programs at the Sam Wolf Granite City campus. We celebrate that grand opening of these new facilities on what is now being called National Manufacturing Day. It would be, I believe, scheduled on October the 4th of this fall. So this grant has really enabled us to create what we would call a career manufacturing training facility for our entire area.

We also have over 150 university transfer and technical degree programs. And all of our programs have been established **in direct response to community, student, labor and industry needs**. Ideas for the **new** programs have come to us in a variety of ways. We look to industry trends, local economic needs, and **requests from students**, and also requests from secondary education, and other transfer institutions. So once a need is brought to our attention, we work with our advisory boards to **examine the feasibility of new** programs, and from there we conduct extensive labor market studies, cost analysis, and student engagement. If a program is determined to be necessary and feasible, then a curriculum committee is formed to determine if the classes are necessary, and we establish a framework for those classes. Once a curriculum and a course description is created, we then go to the Illinois Community College Board for approval.

So sometimes during this process, we determine that an entire program isn't necessary to achieve the desired educational or career goals. Sometimes a single class or a single certificate is added to an existing program. But we offer more than 100 certificates of proficiency, which focus on a very specific aspect of degree programs ranging from sustainability, construction management, technology, psychiatric rehabilitation, to human services technology, to web design, web development/administration.

Pogue: As far as your role with the East St. Louis Consortium, what is Southwestern Illinois's responsibilities?

Costello: That started in the spring semester of 1999. SWIC began offering classes at the East St. Louis Community College Center to fill a void left by the defunct Metropolitan Community College. Southwestern Illinois' Collegiate Common Market (SICCM) is the consortium that administers the facilities in East St. Louis. We work in conjunction with SICCM, but we're not a voting member of that consortium. We belong to the consortium, but we don't vote with that consortium.

So when the Illinois Community College Board decided to disband the Metropolitan Community College, they asked for proposals from community colleges to offer courses. We sent a proposal, as did many other institutions. So there were people that were pushing for SWIC to absorb the entire district, because our district surrounded that particular area. However, taking over another college district would have been a huge strain on our faculty and staff, as well as a financial strain on our institution, and a financial strain on our taxpayers. Illinois Community College Board selected proposals from SWIC, from Kaskaskia, from Rend Lake, and from Shawnee Community College to offer classes and services in East St. Louis. SWIC is responsible for offering all of the adult basic education courses, and university transfer, and technical education programs. And Kaskaskia offers allied health and early childhood classes. Over the years, interest has waned in those programs, so Shawnee and Rend Lake no longer offer those programs in East St. Louis. In addition, at the East St. Louis campus, SWIC also extends in-district tuition rates to East St. Louis students for everyone, or anyone, who enrolls in any SWIC campus, at no additional cost.

SWIC also offers enrollment services there, counseling, financial services and staff. They have full-time faculty members, plus the success center, that is not only open to SWIC students, but for Kaskaskia students as well, to attend. We started classes in East St. Louis Community College with 300 students. In the spring semester, SWIC offered 185 classes, seventy-seven in adult basic-education classes, 108 in transfer, technical education, and development classes to 715 students, for a total of 4,575 credit hours. Kaskaskia is our only other institution on site, and they offered seven early childhood education courses, certified nurse assistant, and licensed practical nurse courses to approximately seventy students. So, as you can see, we are the most prominent provider for that location.

Pogue: You've talked quite a bit about Southwestern Illinois's work with area employers. Is there anything else that we should know?

Costello: The faculty and staff at Southwestern Illinois College and our board of trustees are all proud of the college goals and the goals that we've maintained in a relationship with our business partners. Assessment of our advisory councils for career and technical education programs, and our employers, are given a role in shaping our current and future curricula. These relationships, as you know, are

created and maintained with regular meetings and many informal contacts. In addition, the relationships that we have with businesses are developed, in many cases, with many of our internship opportunities for our students. In fiscal year 2012, we had more than 250 students placed in an internship with local employers.

Those relationships with businesses are also developed and maintained by our career center. We have job fairs, and we have many other recruitment activities. We have six job fairs throughout the year, with over 200 employers and 1,400 job seekers. Those are just from the year of 2012. And the center then partnered with community agencies to co-sponsor a “jobs plus” fair, which was attended by fifty-two employers and another 1600 job seekers. Seventeen employers were also on campus for individual recruitments, speaking to over 219 interested students.

Some of our college’s **most** distinctive relationships are with our local municipalities, our towns, our state agencies, as it provides training for some of our police and fire personnel. Southwestern Illinois’ Police Academy is one of only five state-approved colleges to provide law enforcement training for our police officers. Our graduates from our academy are state-certified and perform entry-level law enforcement duties for many of the local and county law enforcement agencies in Illinois. The police academy also offers basic training for full- and part-time police officers and, since its inception in 1971, SWIC’s academy graduates’ test scores have been among the highest state certification test score averages in the state.

SWIC is also the sole provider for basic arson investigator training, and the college offers an eighty-hour course to provide an avenue for part-time police officers to transition into becoming full-time police officers, when they are going to a full-time police position. Our fire science program offers twelve certificate programs, which are open to active fire department members, rescue team members, or other medical emergency service providers. These programs are designed to meet some various national fire service training standards, and they lead the league in certification by the Illinois Office of the State Fire Marshal.

The college partners with local employers like US Steel, Global Glass, as well as trade unions, to provide customized for-credit institution instruction at the Industrial Technology Center. That was started in 2008. The framework for 2013: there are 8,788 apprentice enrollments, resulting in 34,434 credit hours. In addition to that, during the same time frame, the technical education division administered four Illinois Community College Board Pathways to Results Grants and received TAACCCT grants totaling approximately \$2 million.

Pogue: Our final question, kind of, is a summary. What do you think’s going to be the major challenges for Southwestern Illinois over the next decade? You’ve given us a great history of how the college began after World War II, and your role coming into the college. Where do you think the college will be going in the next ten years?



Costello: Now the instability of state government in Illinois **is a concern for all of us**, and particularly, **this pension crisis**. The Affordable Care Act and performance funding are unknowns as far as the future fiscal planning. And I think that the negative impact of the recent economic difficulties on residential and commercial development has slowed down the increase in our **equalized assessed valuation**, constraining SWIC's property tax revenue. So this, in combination with what I just stated, continues to put a substantial burden on SWIC and SWIC's students. And the changes, also, in federal financial aid regulations, along with the underfunding of the MAP (Monetary Award Program<sup>3</sup>), Illinois Student Assistance Commission awards, presents a significant challenge to maintaining or increasing our student enrollment and retention.

So the success of the national and regional for-profit, or the proprietary higher education institutions, despite the recent setbacks, still represents a very significant competitive force for us to **contend** with. Additionally, increased attention to our alternate course delivery models, such as MOOCs, Massive [Open] Online Courses, is very difficult, and the concerns for a community college are ones that are national concerns.

Also, we think that developmental education reform movements, coupled with performance funding and increased attention on degree completion rates, those, too, will threaten to reduce both access and excellence to the main community college systems and community college education. Over a dozen states currently either restrict access to college for under-prepared students, or have reduced or limited availability of **needed remediation**. Such initiatives, in our opinion, need to be closely watched in the future. Also, as increasing students have debt, and those debt responsibilities gain more national attention, middle-class wage growth seems to continue to stagnate. That is just evidence that there is a **growing misperception** that college isn't worth it anymore. This misperception threatens not just college enrollment, but also long-term socioeconomic decline. When we had sixty-two percent of our twenty-one-year olds that are not enrolled currently in college, that is an issue.

So keeping pace with the rapid changes in informational technology, also, that too poses significant challenges to the community college. And the constant evolution of technology, where our students already are using so much technology, then so the **increased accessibility** of mobile technology, cloud computing, and the security challenges, are going to require increased resources for us here at the community college system. This is happening at a time, as you know, when resources are extremely limited.

Pogue: Well, Dr. Costello, I want to thank you very much for sharing the history of Southwestern Illinois from your own experience as a student, to your education in the Belleville district and the regional office, and now here at Southwestern, and

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<sup>3</sup> grants which do not need to be repaid

helping explain how the community college in this region serves so many students in a variety of capacities. So thank you very much.

Costello: You're welcome. Thank you.

(end of interview)