

Students at the core of LTCC's improvement plan

By Kathryn Reed

Every decision made at Lake Tahoe Community College is done so with the same common denominator – students.

There was a time when the philosophy in higher education was that students had the right to fail. After all, they are adults and can make decisions that may not allow them to succeed.

LTCC President Jeff DeFranco wants none of that. He believes in a student-first scenario where the mantra is students have the right to succeed and that it is those working at the college who must ensure the resources are in place for that to happen.

“We are doing everything we can to make sure they succeed,” DeFranco said. Success means getting them to move onto a four-year university, or graduating with an associate’s degree, or having the skills to find gainful employment.

DeFranco was speaking Sept. 14 to a full house at the Duke Theatre. This was his inaugural convocation where he gave the state of college address. With fall quarter slated to start Monday, this was an opportunity for faculty, staff and the community to hear where the college has been and is going in the short and long term.

DeFranco took over the presidency earlier this year. And while the groundwork was already laid for some of what he spoke about, he is also eager to break new ground and set goals that will define his time in office.

“Public education is a great equalizer,” he said. He spoke of

his roots; his great-grandparents moving to the United States from Italy. A great-uncle was the first in his family to attend higher education – which was at a community college. This paved the path for his mom to go to UC Davis.



The university center at LTCC will help to redefine the South Lake Tahoe college. Photo/LTN

While higher education may be the norm for many families, it is still a novelty for others, while some think it is out of reach.

In 2012-13, 29.1 percent of LTCC's student population was comprised of first generation college students. Last school year that percentage was 34.9 percent. Many are Hispanic; a reflection of the community at large.

LTCC supports Deferred Arrival for Childhood Arrivals (DACA) and has students who are threatened by potential changes to the federal law.

While getting more students is always on the agenda, ensuring

the ones who are enrolled complete their studies and on time are major goals.

Community college enrollment is dropping across the country, and LTCC is not immune to this trend.

One focus is to get more local high school students to attend LTCC. Right now about 35 percent of South Tahoe High grads go to LTCC. The goal is to capture 50 percent. The college also is making a concerted effort to lure Whittell, North Tahoe and Incline high school students, too.

DeFranco talked about “promise grants” – something that was brought up **in March** at a board meeting. Local students would receive one year free at LTCC. Funding for it, though, is still not in place. However, the president wants to launch it in fall 2019.

“If we don’t do this, we will not be serving our community and we will be left behind,” DeFranco said.

Physically, the college is going through a bit of a renaissance thanks to Measure F, the \$55 million bond approved by voters in November 2014. The university center, where students will be able obtain four-year degrees via partnerships with other institutions, is going up rapidly next to where DeFranco was speaking. The plaza outside the library is a new gathering spot – and one with heated walkways. The parking lot is no longer dilapidated; plus, it conforms to ADA regulations.

Upgrades to classrooms are coming.

WiFi throughout campus is much improved, with cellphone boosters in the budget.

Transportation is seen as a barrier to college, and was made more pronounced by last winter’s epic snowfall. Starting in October, LTCC students will be provided free passes for the

local bus. This is a product of ADVANCE, a collaborative network of local organizations, government offices, and employers that work together to support adults in meeting education, career, and other personal goals. Tahoe Transportation District wants to make the college a hub. A bus shelter on campus is on the drawing board.

By 2022, LTCC intends to have **housing on campus** available for students.

LTCC wants to be a partner with other entities in town. Revamping how the theater is used in one way. TedX South Lake Tahoe will be at the college at the end of the month and Valhalla is putting on the play "Joint Chiefs" this year at the theater.

Besides starting a new school year, the most immediate concern of the college's is to retain its accreditation. The review committee from the Western Association of Schools and Colleges will be on campus Oct. 9-12.

While there are plenty of plans in place for LTCC, the last major **strategic planning** session was in 2011. DeFranco plans to have a fresh look at the college's goals in January.