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## Touring lieutenant governor impressed by ECC programs

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ELGIN — Lt. Gov. Sheila Simon visited Elgin Community College on Wednesday as part of her tour of the state's 48 community colleges.

"I'm happy to be here," Simon said. "Elgin Community College has the capacity to boost more people toward having college credentials. I appreciate the challenges you have undertaken and the successes you have had. I look forward to even more from you."

Simon listened to a presentation about the Alliance for College Readiness. It brings educators from ECC and the area's four public high school districts together to work on curriculum alignment in English, mathematics and reading. The goal is to prepare students for college-level work and reduce the number of students in remedial courses that tap into financial aid but do not always count toward a degree or certificate.

Simon was especially impressed with the Summer Bridge program that the alliance created for high school graduates who need additional preparation for college readiness. Since 2007, about 73 percent of students who have enrolled in the refresher course in reading, writing and math skills have tested out of at least one remedial course. The Summer Bridge program was opened to adult returning students for the first time this summer.

"The Summer Bridge program needs to be shouted about from the mountaintops," Simon said. "It's an exciting way to get students to become more marketable. Not many programs can do that in just three weeks."

"The programs at ECC are great examples of how we are responding to the recession," said state Sen. Michael Noland, D-Elgin.

He said ECC's programs are more like hockey than baseball.

"In baseball, you wait for the ball to come to you, while in hockey, you go out for the puck," Noland said. "ECC is an example of a college that is moving ahead and not waiting for something to happen."

"We have a strong community that loves this college," said ECC President David Sam. "We are happy to have the word 'community' in our name."

Mock trial success

ECC officials also gave a presentation about the school's mock trial students.

"We are one of five community colleges competing in mock trials," said Ron Kowalczyk, paralegal instructor and adviser to the ECC mock trial team. "We have been recognized by the Illinois House of Representatives and received a letter from President Obama. We traveled to Boston and competed

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against four-year colleges. We at ECC are providing education as good as four-year colleges at a fraction of the price.”

“How proud we were to compete with those schools,” said Jennifer Rieger, past captain of the ECC mock trial team. “I’m thankful to ECC for the opportunity to let us know what we’re worth.”

Rieger has received a scholarship to North Central College, serves on its mock trial team, and plans to go on to law school.

“We have 20 members,” said Judith Spence, current ECC mock trial captain. “We will be the first community college to host a mock trial here. The Spartan Law Review was started here. We believe we are the only community college to publish a law review.”

Welding program jobs

Marcia Luptak, ESL adjunct instructor, talked about how she worked with welding students at the college.

“All of the 11 students I worked with are second language speakers and were unemployed at the time the program started,” Luptak said. “The program began in January and will finish in December with a 12-credit certificate. Two of the students already have found full-time jobs. Four other students now have part-time employment. It’s good to get students employed even before the program ends.”

“I am glad to have a program like this,” said ECC welding student Efrain Martinez. “I feel like I have a career now.”

“We are taking students with zero experience and getting them to work,” said David Reich, welding program coordinator. “Nationwide, we are hurting for welders.”

Reich said the ECC welding lab is about 7,200 square feet and is a work in progress. There are two full-time instructors and four to six adjunct part-time instructors. Jim Meletsis, a part-time instructor, has been in the welding industry for 34 years.

ECC programs are available for all ages. Priscilla Eddleman, 65, found herself unemployed two years ago after many years of secretarial experience. Her typing and shorthand skills no longer opened doors. She enrolled in the ECC medical assistance program and now has a job at Edward Hines Jr. VA Hospital.

“I really appreciate the opportunity I was given through Elgin Community College,” Eddleman said.