

Lynda

Top



Stanley takes flight

There are two kinds of people in the world. There are the singular self-starters, the ones who go it alone, the solipsistic soloists who insist on pulling themselves up by their own bootstraps. Then there are the more community-minded folks, people like Lynda Stanley, people who prefer to suit up, fly in formation and arrive at their destination in the company of friends. You might say that Stanley, the newly installed chairperson of ACCT's Board of Directors, embodies the community in community college.

by John Pulley
photos by Keith Weller

As educational leaders go, Stanley is well-regarded and highly qualified. She has served for 16 years on the Board of Trustees of Brunswick Community College, in North Carolina, a state with one of the most robust systems of two-year institutions in the country. During her tenure, she has earned a reputation for being available. "She always has an ear to listen to you," says Stephen Greiner, president of Brunswick Community College.

Stanley is the third trustee from a North Carolina community college to lead ACCT's Board. She assumed her duties in September after being elected to the association's top volunteer post by her peers. Her predecessor, Kitty Boyle, passed the mantle to Stanley during ACCT's annual meeting in San Diego.

One of Stanley's proudest moments as a member of the Brunswick-Board occurred a few years ago when the community there endorsed the college's worth in a way that counts — with their pocketbooks. Residents of Brunswick voted in 2004 to pass a \$30-million bond referendum to benefit the two-year institution. Absent Stanley's support, it very well might have failed. Stanley, undeterred by voters' rejections of similar referendums in the past, pushed to get the bond on the ballot and tirelessly urged voters to support it.

The measure's passage provides funds for the construction of new campus facilities, including an athletics and aquatics center that will provide a "place of gathering for our entire community," Stanley says. "Everybody will have access. That's what I'm all about."

Gun

That is what her term as chair will be about, as well, says Stanley, who has vowed to focus her agenda and her energy on three main goals. Aware that community and communication go hand in hand, she promises to strengthen ACCT's network of state coordinators and make it a reliable conduit of information from Washington, DC to the associations 6,500 trustees throughout the country — and back again.

Second, she intends to expand and bolster the association's relationship with the community college caucuses that ACCT helped to create in the U.S. Senate and House of Representatives. Stanley knows that communities are better able to thrive when they have the support of people in power.

Finally, Stanley aims to initiate a national dialogue about ways in which community colleges can help to eradicate one of society's most intractable problems: poverty. It is widely acknowledged that education provides the lift of upward socioeconomic mobility. Two-year institutions, by their nature, are arguably the most accessible

most vibrant community gathering places, a beauty salon operated by her mother, a cosmetologist.

"She says I grew up there," recalls Stanley of her mother, a natural caretaker who also worked as an aide in the public schools. "My mother has taken so little and given me so much. She is the person who, when I'm down, I call her. When I need advice, I call her. When I want to feel better or share something, I call her. She is my true hero."

As a single parent working two jobs, Stanley's mother leaned on her parents, who helped to raise her daughter. Money was tight, but Stanley recalls her needs being met. It was a "principle centered" home, Stanley says. "Church was important and education was important."

The emphasis on education was in spite of (or perhaps because of) the fact that her grandfather did not finish high school and her grandmother only completed the 11th grade. The family also esteemed hard work and pluck. Her grandfather labored in the

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and most affordable social elevators available to the masses, including community colleges' 12 million students, nearly half the country's post-secondary population.

But why aren't more of the people who are desperately in need of a leg up taking better advantage of community colleges? Stanley asks. Where is access impeded? What can community colleges do to get more people onboard?

"In terms of being community-minded," says Greiner, "there is no one who exemplifies that better than Lynda Stanley."

Rural Roots

Stanley's journey began in Harnett County, NC, the only child of parents who divorced when she was a young girl. At an early age, Stanley realized that her mother and her extended family had high expectations for her, a presumption of success that she says she internalized.

"I put myself under pressure to excel," says Stanley, who graduated near the top of her high school class despite not having the academic talent possessed by some of her peers. "I worked very hard. I wasn't one of those people who could get it at first pass."

Her sense of community began to take shape early on. During her formative years, Stanley spent many hours at one of Harnett's

tobacco and cotton fields. He went on to found a trucking and busing company and later opened a home for the aged, an ideal outlet for Stanley's mother. Her grandfather persevered in his entrepreneurial pursuits despite the lack of formal education, a severe liability that would have short-circuited the dreams of many men.

"When I was very young, I recognized that my grandfather could not read. I would sit in his lap and read my *See Spot Run* books to him. He would read it back to me, by memory, I'm sure," Stanley says. "They wanted me to do better than they were able to do."

Stanley has realized her family's expectations, and then some. She earned a bachelor's degree in 1982 from the University of North Carolina at Greensboro. Taking graduate-level courses on weekends, she went on to earn a master's degree in health administration from Central Michigan University.

She is a successful career woman, the chief operating officer at Doshier Memorial Hospital. She serves on the board of First Citizens Bank in Southport, NC, and has served as president of the Southport-Oak Island Area Chamber of Commerce.

Stanley is the first to acknowledge that she didn't do it alone, that she had help each step of the way. When she was in the 10th grade, her neighbors pooled their money to send the teenager to France, Italy and Switzerland, a pivotal experience that opened



THE LYNDA STANLEY FILE

BORN

July 1, Harnett County, North Carolina

EDUCATION

B.S in medical technology, 1982
University of North Carolina at Greensboro
Master's in health administration, 1989
Central Michigan University

CAREER

Dosher Memorial Hospital
Chief Operating Officer
Employed since 1986

FAMILY

Married to Joe Stanley since 1990
Children: Victoria, 15, and Tyler, 9

SERVICE

Association of Community College Trustees
Chair, September 2007 (just re-elected for 2008)
Brunswick Community College Board of Trustees
1991 to Present
First Citizens Bank in Southport, North Carolina
Board Member, 1993 to present
American College of Health Care Executives
Member, 2007
Southport-Oak Island Area Chamber of Commerce
President, 2004-5
Delta Sigma Theta Sorority
Lifetime Member since 1997

AWARDS

Hope Harbor Home Women of Distinction Honor, 2003
2007 YWCA Women of Achievement Award Nominee
Daughters of the American Revolution Honoree

PERSONALITY TYPE

Intense and driven (self-described)

LAST BOOK READ

Reposition Yourself by T.D. Jakes

FAVORITE ELECTRONIC DEVICE

Blackberry

PEOPLE SHE'D LIKE TO MEET

Oprah Winfrey and Nelson Mandela

FAVORITE MOVIES

Pretty Woman and *The Color Purple*



Stanley's eyes to the global community beyond the Harnett County line. "I was able to recognize that life was much bigger than the small community I lived in," she says.

"When they say it takes a village, that is truly how I was raised," she says. "If I needed tutoring and my mother couldn't do it, a woman down the street would help me with my math."

Community Centered

By any name and in almost any form — relatives, church, colleagues, friends — the concept of community has been a steadying force in Stanley's life. Her pillars are family, job and neighbors. Spirituality provides the underlying foundation that supports it all.

"I'm revitalized through my faith," she says.

For Stanley, the concept of family doesn't end at her front door but "goes beyond my household." For 48 consecutive years, relatives stemming from her grandfather's branch of the family tree have reunited annually for a weekend in Harnett County. "That is our opportunity to share what has gone on, get acquainted, share successes, and just have fun" she says.

The weekend is also the time when the clan awards an educational scholarship to one of its own. Stanley was instrumental in creating the award eight years ago recognizing that "my family has helped me to get where I am," she says. "When I was in college, my aunt in New York City would send me a monetary contribution every single month. It may have been \$25, but it helped me so much. I thought what an opportunity for us to do that for another family member."

Prospective scholarship recipients apply for the monthly stipend by making their case to a committee of family members. "We want them to tell us about themselves and how the family can be stronger, and why they deserve the scholarship," Stanley says.

On the career front, as well, she credits others for helping her to achieve success. There was the young woman, a medical technologist and mentor, who helped Stanley to land a summer job in the lab of a local hospital. There was the family physician who guided her in declaring a college major. There were her bosses and colleagues at Doshier Memorial, who encouraged Stanley to get the advanced degree that catapulted her from director of lab services to chief operating officer.

Then there is her husband, Joe, a native of Brunswick, whom she met within the first two months of moving to Southport, one of the southernmost towns in North Carolina. "He introduced me to a lot of people in Brunswick County," Stanley says.

She and Joe became friends, they dated, they married and had children: Victoria, 15, and Tyler, 9. Twenty years after arriving in Southport for what was to have been a two-year stint, Stanley is an entrenched part of the community.

Giving Back

She hadn't been in Southport long when she became involved with Brunswick County Community College. It was her husband's



uncle, Lewis Stanley, who encouraged her to get involved in the two-year college. He made sure that Brunswick County Commissioners noticed his niece and saw the value of appointing her to the board, Stanley says.

"I think he saw that I was a reasonable person who could see issues from both sides and that I had a position in the community that was respected," says Stanley. "He kind of thought I was smart and that I could think on my feet."

At the time of her appointment, Stanley was the only black woman on the board. (She was recently reappointed to her fifth four-year term.) She went on to become the first black woman to chair the board, and now she is the chair of ACCT's board. Serving two-year institutions is in her blood.

"Once you get into the governance of a community college and you see that you can make a difference in the lives of others, it becomes a passion," Stanley says. "You don't want to let it go."

Like many communities, Brunswick County is undergoing rapid growth and major demographic shifts. Fueled by an influx of retirees and immigrants, the once-sleepy Brunswick is one of the fastest growing counties in the country. As a result, enrollment at the local community college surged 19 percent last semester, a growth rate that has necessitated construction of six new buildings.

"Lynda reminded all of us that those buildings are for the community, not just the college," says Greiner. "She treats everyone she comes into contact with as if they were members of her extended family."

Among the college's fastest-growing constituencies are Latinos, many of whom are drawn to Brunswick to get jobs created by the county's economic boom. Eager to serve Brunswick's Hispanic residents, the college has opened a transition center. The objective is to help new arrivals enter the mainstream and to help their children succeed in the public schools. The college has entered into an agreement with Mexico's Secretary of Education to participate in an exchange program. The hope is that the initiative will broaden Brunswick's perspective and help it to better serve the new constituency.

"I was one of the first to go to Mexico to develop this transition center," Stanley says. "We want to provide access and affordable education to everyone."

Moving Forward

Stanley's service and accomplishments in North Carolina made her a "rising star" and a natural to lead on the national stage, says Helen Newsome, a former chairperson of ACCT and a mentor to Stanley. "I know Lynda well enough to know that she looks at the nation as her community now," Newsome says.

In theory, a one-year term doesn't afford much time for an incoming chairperson to make lasting change. As a practical matter, board chairs serve to continue leadership.

"One of the beauties of the continuity of the organization is the way it's organized" Stanley says. "Because we work so closely as an



Community College Leadership: ACCT Chair Lynda Stanley with AACC Chair Ding-Jo Currie and Kitty Boyle, ACCT Immediate Past Chair.

executive committee, we can take initiatives started by one chair and move it through the organization."

So it is that she intends to advance the Senate and House community caucuses created in recent years. Stanley seeks to recruit more Capitol Hill lawmakers for caucus membership. Beyond sheer numbers, "we want to have a system in place to educate those members on a routine basis," Stanley says, "not just in February when we come to Washington" for the Community College National Legislative Summit.

"They kind of take us for granted," she says. "We need to make sure they are educated about what is going on so that when the time comes to make a decision, they can make an informed decision."

ACCT must shore up its internal communications, as well, says Stanley. To that end, the association has revamped its network of state coordinators to better disseminate information to the field. Stanley has promised to continue those improvements, which she characterizes as a work in progress.

"That will strengthen our organization," she says. "We've been a little loose in having that communication."

Then there is the issue of poverty. Stanley recognizes that she might be seen as overreaching, but she feels strongly that community colleges can be a critical component in solving this problem. At the least, she hopes to encourage her colleagues at two-year institutions to begin thinking about ways in which community colleges can ameliorate the scourge of poverty.

"It's a big issue. It's not a new issue," Stanley says. "I recognize that a lot of research is being done on it, that lots of people are talking about it, but rarely do I see where the trustees are a part of that conversation. ... Community colleges have the vehicle of open accessibility and affordability. How do we identify barriers that are keeping them from us?"

Poverty, she says, isn't inevitable — whatever the odds.

"I am an African American female who comes from a small rural town," says the new chair. "In some people's eyes, that is beating the odds."