

## **HISTORY**

In 1947, 450 students attended classes at the newly opened El Camino Junior College. The 80-acre campus included nine buildings—all former World War II barracks from the Santa Ana Army Air Base. Thirty professors, housed in one main faculty office taught lower division courses that included math, speech, economics, geography, English, and history. These dedicated professors used their own cars and trucks to move their teaching materials and other College belongings from the temporary campus located at Leuzinger High School to the new campus at Crenshaw and Redondo Beach boulevards. Students enjoyed weekly dances and fraternity parties, listened to the College string quartet, cheered at football games, and participated in campus celebrations. A new vocational shop, the first permanent building on the campus, was in the planning stages. A women's gym and other athletic facilities would soon follow. The founding faculty and staff were committed to meeting the educational needs of the communities that had enthusiastically supported establishing the new College.

Today the campus has changed considerably. Students at El Camino College enjoy an expansive, 126-acre campus with an open, tree-lined quad area. They are part of a diverse student body of nearly 30,000 who study in the three-story library, use 50 computer labs located throughout the campus, or attend classes in the 30 buildings across campus. The architecture is mid-century modern. A recently approved bond measure will soon enable structural improvements in many of the buildings—some nearly 55 years old. The 1,150 full- and part-time faculty members teach approximately 2,336 sections of pre-baccalaureate, transfer, and vocational courses in 850 programs each semester. Students and community members enjoy cultural and entertainment events in the 2,048-seat Marsee Auditorium cheer at football games in Murdock Stadium, or study in the 120,000-volume Schauerman Library. A new Humanities building, the first new building on campus in two decades, is in the planning stages and will

serve as part of a revitalized entrance to the campus.

The evolution of El Camino Junior College, from nine war barracks to a multi-structured campus, was the vision of many individuals who saw an unusable Alondra Park—always flooded in the winter and arid in the summer—and created a means to turn the parkland into a much needed junior College. The El Camino Junior College campus opened in 1947 to serve the growing local high school graduate population as well as a wave of returning WWII veterans. During our 57 years, El Camino College has become one of the largest single-campus districts in the California Community College system.

Talk of a junior College in the area began as early as the 1930s. However, the initial steps were taken in 1943 when members of the boards of the Centinela Valley, Redondo, Inglewood, and El Segundo school districts saw enrollments at out-of-district community Colleges peaking and area students being turned away. They formed a committee with the goal of creating a junior College for the Inglewood/South Bay area and used a survey completed by UCLA professor Lloyd N. Morrisett to demonstrate that a need existed. The study also proved the area met State Department of Education criteria for creating a junior College - a growing population of College-aged students and a tax base that could support robust curriculum. After introducing the idea of a junior College at chamber of commerce meetings and at other local events, the committee members requested that the Department of Education hold an election. Though voter turnout was light, the community supported the College in a 10-1 margin of approval on June 30, 1946.

With this affirmation, the El Camino Junior College Board of Trustees was established. Courses were scheduled in the evenings at local high schools. Acquiring the land for the permanent College was the next challenge. The Board of Trustees sought a portion of the land in Alondra Park for the site. The Los Angeles County

Board of Supervisors, who held title to the land, could not legally deed it to the College. Carl Arfwedson, acting business manager for the El Camino Junior College District, called Assemblyman Glenn Anderson with a unique solution. Arfwedson persuaded the assemblyman to introduce a bill that would allow the transfer of parklands to junior College districts provided the land had not been used for 20 years. After extensive lobbying, Anderson elicited a unanimous vote from the Assembly. The Los Angeles County Board of Supervisors used the newly passed Assembly Bill 62 to deed 75 acres of Alondra Park to the El Camino Junior College District. That vote rested on a crucial stipulation—that the College agrees to provide community members usage of all recreational facilities on the campus. The Board of Supervisors agreed to the stipulation on May 23, 1947. Soon after, the Army barracks arrived from Santa Ana, and the faculty, staff, and students moved to the new College site.

While numerous individuals dedicated time and effort to creating El Camino Junior College (ECJC), the catalyst was Forrest G. Murdock, then superintendent of the Centinela Valley Union High School District. Murdock had the faith, determination, and tenacity to transform an idea into a reality. He was enthusiastic in gathering community support and was tireless in his efforts to succeed. Murdock served as the acting director of ECJC during the initial planning years and was then selected as the first superintendent/president in 1947. In his 12 years of leadership, Murdock instilled a feeling of community at the College that remains to this day. He was known for his open door policy, as well as for knowing the entire faculty and staff, and most of the students, by name. He attended all campus events and invited faculty to his home after football games. His dedication to creating the College and his leadership through its pioneering years earned him recognition as the “father of El Camino College.”

Murdock could not have fulfilled his vision alone. Carl Arfwedson, former business manager of the Centinela Valley Union High School

District and El Camino’s first business manager, dedicated 14 years to leading the campus through tremendous periods of growth. In the initial planning of ECJC and through its initial years, Arfwedson served as Murdock’s right-hand person. His creativity and initiative took the College from an idea to an expansive campus of modern buildings—all without establishing debt. This remarkable feat gave the College a fiscal stability envied by other districts. It also ensured that El Camino College would be able to offer students educational experiences for decades to come.

The founding members of the Board of Trustees represented the three high school districts served by the College. The first Board of Trustees president, Robert Russell, served on the board for six years. He was known as El Camino Junior College’s financial watchdog, always insisting on negotiating the best deal for the College. For his long-time dedication and leadership, Russell was given the honor of turning the first shovel of dirt at the groundbreaking ceremonies during the summer of 1947.

The culture and facilities of the College are indeed a reflection of its five presidents. Forrest G. Murdock served from 1946 until his retirement in 1958. The 12,600-seat Murdock Stadium is a reminder of his dedication. Dr. Stuart E. Marsee guided El Camino College through 24 years of building and growth, including the prestigious Marsee Auditorium. In 1982, Dr. Rafael Cortada became president and established the El Camino College Foundation, which assists in funding various programs throughout campus. In 1987, Dr. Sam Schauerman, who had served the College as a dean of instruction and as vice president of academic affairs, became the College’s fourth president. His legacy is recognized in the Schauerman Library. In 1995, Dr. Thomas M. Fallo became the fifth superintendent/president of the District after serving as vice president of administrative services for four years.

Under Dr. Fallo’s leadership, the District sought and obtained voter approval for Measure E, a

\$394 million facility and equipment bond in 2002, the largest successful bond for a single campus community College district. This bond was the first-ever in the College's history. Measure E funding will enable El Camino College to upgrade classroom facilities, modernize instructional equipment, and make necessary health and safety repairs throughout campus. A new Humanities building along Crenshaw Boulevard, to be completed in Fall 2006, will serve as a symbol of the tremendous collaborative effort of many individuals who believed in the College and worked toward passage of the bond. Community support of Measure E echoed the sentiment of the original vote to create the College as the bond passed with a 61 percent vote. Soon after, a seven-person Citizen's Bond Oversight Committee was formed to oversee the expenditures of the bond for the next several years.

The five-member Board of Trustees oversees El Camino College's policy and fiscal issues. The board members represent the nine Los Angeles county cities and unincorporated areas served by the District: El Segundo, Hawthorne, Hermosa Beach, Inglewood, Lawndale, Lennox, Manhattan Beach, Redondo Beach, and Torrance. Much like the founding board members, the current board comprises individuals dedicated to ensuring that El Camino College continues to set the standard for community College education. Collectively, the current board members have 61 years of service to the College with one member serving on the board for nearly 30 years.

*This history, written by Dr. Bobbi Villalobos, is based on information from The History of El Camino College, 1946-1966, a dissertation by Steven James Muck.*

