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Summit College grows with new name, degrees

Dean says school's changes are `kicking it up a notch'

By Katie Byard
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You won't see a lot of sweat shirts or baseball caps that say Summit College.

That's because the school -- formerly named the University of Akron Community and Technical College -- is proud to be a part of UA.

This week, UA is celebrating a belated 40th anniversary for the college. Since 1964, the school has grown from several hundred students to more than 3,000. Degree offerings have gone from just a few to more than 50.

Stan Silverman, who has been dean of the college for one year and previously was chair of UA's counseling department, answered questions about the growth of the college. Much of the school is in the Polsky Building (a former department store) in downtown Akron.

Q. Summit College is the new name of the University of Akron Community and Technical College. What was wrong with the old name?

A. The old name had two limitations: It failed to announce that Summit County has its own community college, and it was rooted in outdated images (of a technical college with limited offerings)... You can come to Summit College and get a certificate, an associate degree or a bachelor's degree.... All of the (other) community colleges throughout the state of Ohio only offer associate degrees. We have broadened the scope of the college (and it now includes UA's work force development and continuing education unit)... To quote a well-known New Orleans chef, ``We are kicking it up a notch.''

Q. What are some of the newer or more popular programs?

A. Post 9/11 has increased the visibility and the interest of the B.S. (bachelor of science) in emergency management program... because of the importance of response planning and technology related to crisis and natural disasters....

We offer an associate degree in graphic information systems/land information systems (which involves use of digital geographic data)....

We are offering cutting-edge education and training in a variety of technical areas within the field of computer information systems....

Our programs in surgical technology, radiology and medical assisting are literally bursting at the seams with student demand.

Q. How have tight state budgets affected the college?

A. The only thing holding us back in many areas today is the lack of state support. We have the faculty and staff needed to offer Northeast Ohio the education and training in new and emerging fields, but we lack the funding to provide the necessary laboratories, technology and other equipment to offer even more of these (in-demand) programs.

Q. Are you seeing more **laid-off folks looking for a career change?**

A. Definitely. More and more people are coming back for career changes after layoffs.... We are also experiencing a large group of (employed) people who already have a bachelor's, master's or even a Ph.D. coming back for an associate degree or an additional bachelor's degree, looking for new job assignments.

Q. What happens to students after graduation?

A. Sixty percent of our associate degree graduates transfer into bachelor's degree programs. Many obtain full-time jobs and return as part-time students to finish the requirements for their bachelor's degrees.

Q. Will a large part of the college remain in the Polsky Building? Some UA officials have said the downtown site pulls students from the main campus several blocks away, diluting the collegiate atmosphere.

A. We like the Polsky Building for its very real connection to the Akron community.... With ongoing plans to revitalize the building's interior, we are confident that it will become more visible in terms of its edifice and as an example of a growing partnership between the Akron community and the university.

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