

A woman. on a mission

by Amanda Arnold | photos by Sally Buchanan

The president of Wallace Community College takes on the task of expanding the school through the 'Campaign for Excellence'

It is sometime between 4:30 and 5 am, and Dr. Linda C. Young, president of Wallace Community College, has already begun her day.

"No workday is typical," she says, but by the time she leaves her home in Ozark, she will have read or skimmed a few of the seven area newspapers that are delivered to her home every week. And those not read in the mornings get saved for the weekend. She can reel them off: *The Eufaula Tribune*, *Abbeville Herald*, *The Dothan Eagle*, *Elba Clipper*, *Southeast Sun* from Enterprise, *The Southern Star* from Ozark, and

The Montgomery Advertiser.

"I do that," she explains, "because I want to know what's happening in the communities that this college serves. I've lived in five of the counties in southeast Alabama, and it helps me to know how the college can be involved in what's going on."

Reading has always been a joy, ever since as a young pre-school girl in her hometown of Elba, she sat on her father's lap, while he read to her aloud. Her father loved reading, she recalls, "[He] read all the time – newspapers, books, magazines

Dr. Linda C. Young, Hugh Wheelless, Charles Coggins and Keith Granger have been instrumental in Wallace Community College's Campaign for Excellence. This is the first in a four-part series in *Dothan Magazine* profiling these four community leaders.



– anything he could get his hands on.” He was a farmer and a mechanic, 15 years older than her mother, who was “an excellent seamstress.” Although neither of her parents finished high school, they strongly supported and encouraged education for both their children, including Linda’s brother, Felix, who is 14 years older than her. “It was like I had three parents,” she says, “my father, my mother and my brother.”

Felix was the first in their family to graduate from high school; Linda was the first to graduate from college. After attending Enterprise State Junior College (now known as Enterprise-Ozark Community College), she graduated magna cum laude from Troy, earning a Bachelor’s degree in three years because she “went straight through,” skipping summer vacations.

The decades-long career path of this first-generation college graduate would continue with her getting her Master’s at Troy, then an Ed.D. from Auburn. In 1988 she became only the third female in Alabama to be appointed to the presidency of a two-year college (and the first at a state technical college), Sparks in Eufaula. After its merger with George C. Wallace Community College in 1999, she became the first female president at Wallace. Only in hindsight, does it seem as if an invisible road map involving two key turning points guided her way.

With a Business Education major and an English minor from Troy, she began her career as a 4th grade teacher, “in the days when you could easily teach out of field, unlike nowadays, which is

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an improvement.”

“Early on, I wanted to be a teacher. While my mother sewed at home, before she went to work in the sewing factory when I was in first grade, I remember that I had this little slate chalk board, and I would ‘teach school.’ I would teach her at the sewing machine while she sewed.”

During her second year of teaching, while she pursued her Master’s in Foundations of Education at Troy, Linda taught junior high school English. “That was a good learning experience,” she says laughing, “because it made me very happy to get to the junior college to work! It’s very trying to teach junior high school.”

For 13 years, she worked at Enterprise State Junior College, first as Cooperative Education Director and an instructor of business subjects such as business communications, filing, typing and records management. Then, with help from a federal grant, she set up a Career Development

Center to enable students and citizens in the community decide in which fields they wanted to work. “We did Career Fairs, and a lot of exciting things,” she says.

After three years, she worked as Director of Career Programs, non-academic transfer courses focused on particular fields such as real estate, insurance, and child development. It was

Wallace Community College’s Campaign for Excellence

Wallace Community College’s Campaign for Excellence is the first major gifts campaign in the college’s 56-year history. With over \$3 million already raised toward a \$4 million goal, the funds will be used over five years to expand workforce development services, healthcare training programs, humanities courses, literary presentations, a writing program and scholarship endowments.

For two years, the four people pictured to the left and others have worked closely and diligently on the Campaign for Excellence, which celebrated its public kickoff in October, 2005. Their partnership is contributing immeasurably to the success of the Campaign, which is integral to ongoing development of the region. While the college is raising funds, it is also building and sustaining important relationships with key community leaders for the future.

Beginning here and continuing in the next three issues of *Dothan Magazine*, Amanda Arnold profiles the compelling life journeys of those pictured to the left, discovering how they each evolved into their current professional roles and what motivates them personally as they continue.



Dr. Linda C. Young,
president of Wallace
Community College.



Continued photos



Dr. Linda Young visits her mother every Sunday at a nursing home in Opp. Dr. Young enjoys cooking for her mother, who has been diagnosed with Alzheimer's disease.

during this time that she also earned her doctorate from Auburn in Vocational and Adult Education. She then became Dean of Development, which involved working with external funding and foundations.

The first of two career changes proved to be pivotal in leading to the position she holds today. With no guarantee that she would get her former job back, only a job that was comparable, she took a leave of absence "from the somewhat comfortable dean's job at Enterprise State Junior College." She had the opportunity to do a lot of different things there, "but I knew I needed to broaden my experience beyond that one institution. I needed to move on."

And move she did. Back and forth for three years, Linda traveled home every weekend to Enterprise after working in Montgomery in the Department of Postsecondary Education as the Executive Assistant to then-Chancellor, Dr. Charles Payne. She credits this invaluable first-hand experience of learning about the Alabama system of two-year colleges as "good preparation for a presidency," but not something she wanted to do long-term.

"You don't really deal with students," she explains, "and you don't see many results of what you are doing. It's more bureaucratic and reactive." So, in 1988, she relocated – this time both her job and her home – to Andalusia, to what was then Lurleen B. Wallace (LBW) Junior College to serve as Dean of Academic Affairs.

After only five months, the second turning point appeared. The president's position at Sparks State Technical College had opened up. She applied, and got the job. "I really hated to leave LBW," she says, "because I loved that school. It was a wonderful college, but I knew that timing is essential to making career moves. And if I were to become a president, I needed to move then, because I had this recent experience in Montgomery, and it was just the right time. At least I hadn't yet unpacked all of my boxes!"

Today, as a result of mergers, there are 26 two-year colleges in Alabama, 11 of which have female presidents. In 1988, becoming one of only three female presidents in a system of 41 colleges meant overcoming some personal and

professional isolation. First, there was moving again, this time to Eufaula. Then, she and her first husband divorced. On her own now in a new community meant other adjustments. "You deal with some loneliness for awhile, until you're 'accepted,'" she remembers.

As for her new professional role, she found it difficult at times to determine the degree to which particular problems she faced in a workday were related to her gender, versus which were "par for the course" for anyone in the position. "It is fatiguing to be your own support system," she says. "However, I quickly learned that my male colleagues, other two-year college presidents, were eager to assist, if asked. Working with females was a new experience for them as well."

She remembers getting the message from women and men alike that she was being watched to see if she, as a female, "could hack the technical college president's job." She says she felt placed under a microscope with no margin for error, adding that, "We women often feel extra pressure to prove ourselves."

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Dr. Linda C. Young

Her advice for women and men planning to succeed in business: "Know the job you want—and be careful what you wish for. Prepare for it with the advanced education required. Be visible by networking and being actively involved in professional organizations. Demonstrate seriousness about a career. Let it be known what your goals are, and take care of your health."

Linda Young certainly follows her own advice. She is active in ten organizations, serving on several as a member of the Board of Directors, including Dothan's Area Chamber of Commerce and the Dothan Rotary Club. Through networking she was able to begin informing Charles Coggins, an active and well-connected civic leader, of the College's present and potential contributions to regional workforce development. He became a member of the Wallace Community College Foundation Board in 2001, and now serves as its 2005-2006 Chairman. She credits him with being the key influence in helping the College in terms of contacts and getting other community leaders involved.

Working together with Campaign for Excellence co-chairs Keith Granger and Hugh Wheelless, they initiated Wallace's first major gifts campaign in its 56-year history. Over \$3 million dollars have already been raised toward a \$4 million dollar goal, on target for attainment by late spring.

She relies upon Charles to tell her "exactly what he thinks, and he doesn't mince any words, for which I am very grateful," she says. "We need that in a Foundation member. I ask them all to do that because we need to hear from them anything in terms of ways we can improve the College."

Charles Coggins credits her with being "just absolutely

committed to what she's doing. That's the kind of person I like. When what you're doing is real, affecting a lot of people, you need to do the best you can do. She understands that she's responsible for that institution and she's going to do everything possible to make sure that everything's done properly. That's Linda Young. She'll hound you to death to get what she wants done, but she's turning that institution around."

After arriving home at the end of a long day, Linda looks forward to working out

for 45 minutes or so with weights and with Pilates and aerobics videos. "I really enjoy that," she says. "It helps to de-stress, relaxes; can't tell you how valuable it is."

Then, if she hasn't already had dinner at a business meeting, it's dinner with her husband of 15 years, Jacky, a retired businessman, who enjoys cooking. "If he weren't so supportive, I don't know what I'd do." After that, they might watch a movie together on television.

On weekends, she cooks foods that her mother loves and liked cooking as Linda was growing up: peas, cornbread, turnips, and squash. Linda takes this food to the nursing home in Opp, where her 91-year-old mother, diagnosed with Alzheimer's, has lived for the past five years. Throughout this time, her brother Felix, has visited their mother every weekday, usually twice a day.



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Charles Coggins
Chairman,
WCC Foundation Board

On Sundays, it's Linda's turn and she wouldn't miss it. Sometimes her mother recognizes her, sometimes not, and sometimes what her mother says "will just crack you up," Linda says. "You can only laugh." And keep on going, while hoping for a cure.

She has no regrets about never having had children herself, "except," she says with a chuckle, "I wonder who's going to bring me food when I'm in the nursing home." Then she remembers all the parents she sees there whose children don't come to visit, and adds with a wry smile, "If I had children, they might not come either."

Rarely does she have time for personal reading, but professional favorites include books on communication and *The Five Dysfunctions of a Team* by Patrick Lencioni and *Thinking in the Future Tense* by Jennifer James. Other favorites include books by John Eldredge: *Epic*, *Waking the Dead* and *Captivating*.

Usually, her day ends by continuing to prepare for her job: Reading a myriad of monthly newsletters about academic leadership or Alabama politics, preparing for a next-day's meeting, or reviewing materials gathered from professional seminars.

So her day ends as it begins – with reading. Not one who is early to bed, early to rise, it's usually late to bed and early to rise for Linda.

"I've really had to work on making myself sleep more," she says.

But when she thinks of all the people who don't yet know "what all the wonderful faculty and staff are doing at Wallace, it just makes you want to work day and night to have the college reach its full potential and to tell its story."

As for her future, Dr. Linda C. Young says, "I love community colleges – wouldn't want to be anywhere else. Couldn't throw me in a university, couldn't throw me back in K-12. This is just where I want to be."

If only there were more hours in a day. And a cure for her mother's Alzheimer's. **D**



Dr. Young spends 45 minutes each day keeping fit. "It helps to de-stress," she says.