

YEAR IN REVIEW 2016

LMC ends year on strong note

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BENTON HARBOR — No matter what happens, it's best to concentrate on getting the job done, and let the results speak for themselves.

That's how President Emeritus/Acting CEO Bob Harrison and Board Chairman Mary Jo Tomasini sum up a year that began with the abrupt firing of President Jennifer Spielvogel, and ended with voters' approval of its first ever capital millage.

"We had a fantastic year. We had something unfortunate that happened, but rose above it," Tomasini said. "It made us stronger, and our team came together. We stayed on task. We knew what our job was, and we kept doing it."

This year — in which LMC also opened its Hanson Technology Center, laid the groundwork for its Wine & Culinary Center, and added several new academic programs — has been productive, by any measure, Harrison agrees.

"It's all fine. This is about the community. It's not about me. It's about the college, how we meet the needs of the community, and we're just focused on that," he said.

The Spielvogel affair

Harrison returned in May, after the board fired Spielvogel — who'd spent only three months on the job — amid allegations of unauthorized spending and unprofessional behavior.

Harrison had retired in December 2015. He'd led LMC since 2009.

Tomasini acknowledged some concerns about how the college might be affected because the board didn't respond at length until the May 5 public hearing that resulted in Spielvogel's departure.

"Like I said, it made everyone stronger. They put on their blinders, and they did whatever their job was," she said.

Asked if he shared Tomasini's concerns, Harrison responded: "It's one of those things where you give it a thought, and move on — there's work to be done, and you just say, 'We're gonna keep plugging away, and make things happen.'"

The situation forced LMC to launch its second presidential search in a year, from which four finalists have emerged.



Don Campbell / HP file photo

Work on the Hanson Technology Center, located on the campus of Lake Michigan College in Benton Harbor, was completed this year.

Tomasini feels equally good about how that process turned out.

"You know you've got work to do. You just do it, and don't let yourself get distracted," she said.

Spielvogel has since sued the college for breach of contract, claiming that the board micromanaged her, and undercut her authority, during her brief tenure at LMC. No court date has been set yet.

Capital millage effort

To Harrison, LMC's grassroots support became obvious as the college began promoting its capital millage, which voters approved last month by a 35,619-34,935 tally.

"There's been a lot of very happy people, a lot of, 'Aren't you glad that's behind you now?' — and you can look at some of the things that you want to address," he said.

The 10-year, 0.48-mill levy will help LMC make improvements — such as money-saving energy efficiencies and modernized classrooms — at its Napier Avenue, Niles and South Haven campuses.

Getting across the finish line, however, required a massive effort from a volunteer committee of about 40 people. They joined Harrison and Tomasini in

making about 70 presentations around the area, by their estimates.

"It was probably more than 40 because we had all these people who went out to local meetings, Lions Club, Rotary — they put their shoulder to the wheel," Tomasini said.

The college will use \$7.5 million collected from a community-wide capital campaign, plus \$8.5 million in state grants and other investments to help complete the projects.

LMC raised the \$7.5 million through its "Campaign For Tomorrow" in just under a year, which also shows the depth of its public support, Harrison said.

"For some of us on the inside, it seemed like it took a long time — but on the outside, it was relatively quick," he said.

Other major milestones

Other major milestones at LMC this year included:

■ The Hanson Technology Center's Aug. 23 opening at the Napier Avenue main campus, where all manufacturing technology programs will be housed.

The center will serve as a focal point for job training and education in those areas, and host community meetings and events, Harrison said.

"This is a long-term project. We're pleased where we're at today, and very optimistic about the future. We're still putting things together, thinking up new ideas. We'll continue to demonstrate the value that we offer," he said.

■ The continued addition of new programs — such as for phlebotomy and pharmacy technicians, or the Wine & Culinary Center's opening — that reflect local employers' needs, and students' desire to succeed, Harrison said.

"We talk to them (employers) about: 'What are your issues, where do you see your industry going, how can we help?'" Harrison said. "We're (also) in regular dialogue with school districts about what their issues are. If there's a way we can help, we're glad to do it. It (the dialogue) never stops."

■ Trustee David Maysick's final board meeting Dec. 6.

Maysick, of Berrien Center, didn't run this year after serving 18 years. John Grover won election to his seat.

Maysick served as a business instructor and dean of students at LMC and ran its South Campus, as well.

Asked what prompted his decision, Maysick responded: "If I ran again, I'd be 87 (when the next term ends), and I didn't want to do that. It was time."