



VIEW*S* & VISIONS

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Education and Business – United in Purpose

Dr. Peter G. Checkovich, Founding President
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Dr. Peter G. Checkovich is a lifelong educator, having been involved in higher education since 1974.

After completing service to his country as a Naval Supply Corps officer, he returned to the University of Virginia as a graduate student and earned three degrees over a 10-year span, culminating in a Doctor of Education degree in curriculum and instruction.

He has served in almost every institutional capacity including faculty member, staff member, registrar, director, dean, provost, and has been president of Blue Ridge Community and Technical College since 2004.

In 1973, I returned home from Vietnam. Like so many other decorated war veterans, I thought about where I wanted my life to go. The answer to that question had its origin in something I experienced in serving our country. While I was stationed on the USS Inchon (LPH-12), I had the opportunity to teach a class of sailors through Georgia Military College. It was a rewarding experience and reinforced the importance of **education**, which my two very supportive, loving parents and wonderful grandfather always reminded me is something that, once you achieve it, no one can take from you. When I left the Navy, I made the decision to return to graduate school with the help of one of the best pieces of legislation that Congress has ever passed: the Servicemen's Readjustment Act of 1944, better known as the G.I. Bill.

And so it is, years later, that I find myself privileged to be president of one of the finest community colleges anywhere, Blue Ridge Community and Technical College. I get to live that dream of helping others improve their lives through education. Every day I see students in



the act of learning and gaining knowledge and skills that can lead to lifelong careers. The ability to learn a skill is as critical as the ability to re-educate oneself when the workplace changes, as it can do with record-breaking speed. The ability to read, write, think, compute and value are critical components of a solid education that allows an individual to flex and re-learn.

It is within that context that Blue Ridge was built. When we relocated to Martinsburg in 2001, we were still rather small. Today, we have more than 5,000 students and we serve a large number of businesses by providing an educated workforce. We have become an economic driver in the Eastern Panhandle. We have worked with dozens of businesses, large and small, including Hollywood Casinos, Essroc, Ecolab, Quad



Blue Ridge Community and Technical College, Main Campus



Left: Paramedic student working in EMS Lab • Right: Electric Distribution students complete hands-on training in outdoor pole park. Photo Credit: Rebecca Roberson

Graphics, Macy's and, most recently, Procter & Gamble.

Why is it that so many good employers have come to the Panhandle? That question has several answers. First, the Panhandle has excellent transportation systems. The north/south and east/west corridors offer excellent access to a large portion of the population on the East Coast. Second, there are good services here in the Panhandle. Health care, school systems and infrastructure are excellent. There is a good quality of life within easy access of the nation's capital. Last, but not least, is access to a community college that partners with the region in order to incubate businesses and to educate and train the needed workforce. The Panhandle's story is a successful combination of elements that illustrates what can happen when state government, local government, education and business collaborate and cooperate for the benefit of all.

As Blue Ridge Community and Technical College has grown, the degree and certificate fields that we offer also have taken different directions to include

Mechatronics, Cyber Security, Energy Distribution, Instrumentation and Robotics and Process Control, among others. These fields were virtually unknown 20 years ago; now, they represent high-paying careers alongside the more traditional fields of nursing, business, criminal justice, culinary arts, teaching and so many others.

The relationship between business and education has been uneven. At times, higher education has been criticized as irrelevant in today's business climate. In our case, Blue Ridge is happy to report that criticism is no longer valid. Blue Ridge also has a wonderfully vibrant, customized contract training program for area businesses. Through grant programs offered by West Virginia's Chancellor and community college system, we are able to secure funding for workforce training for our local businesses. The grant programs that are available set us apart in our ability to deliver state-of-the-art education and training to business and industry. Through these grant opportunities, Blue Ridge has secured millions of dollars over the past decade to bring education and training to the area's workforce. It is a perfect

example of what business, education and state government can do when united in purpose to bring opportunity and progress for its citizens.

Each of us sees solutions to life's issues through our own lenses. At Blue Ridge, the lens is one of education that brings opportunity, hope and meaning to the students who come here. The words of my grandfather and parents are as true today as they were a half-century ago: Get a good education. With it, you will have a much better chance at a good life, a productive life, a life in which you can help others and prosper. Blue Ridge Community and Technical College is dedicated to that idea and, in some measure, I believe the Panhandle is stronger for it. The Eastern Panhandle is assured a bright economic future through the successful combination of collaborative efforts of government, business and education. ▾