

Leading the focus on workforce development



MCC hired Todd Oldham in April for newly created post to tighten ties to businesses

By NATE DOUGHERTY

His position did not exist at this time last year, but Todd Oldham thinks within a few years it will put Monroe Community College at the forefront of workforce development.

Oldham, vice president for the Division of Economic Development and Innovative Workforce Services, oversees many aspects of workforce development and serves as the college's main point of outreach to the business community. He plans to use that position to beef up the college's programs while creating a structure that integrates credit and non-credit programs.

Ultimately, Oldham envisions a college better able to respond to the needs of local industry and one that sets a standard nationwide for how job skills programs are structured.

His position was created by the college this year for oversight of what is MCC's fifth division, including the offices of workforce development and technical education, an agriculture and life sciences institute and the public safety training center. Combined this division has a total budget of \$6 million, with another \$10 million in grant funding, and has 60 total employees.

Bringing these offices together creates an opportunity for what Oldham calls a meta-strategy so they can grow more in tandem.

Since taking the job in April, Oldham has been working to build the division's infrastructure, hiring a full-time grant writer and incorporating new grant software while also meeting with representatives from the business community.

Many colleges are talking about improving

workforce development, but what sets MCC apart is that it took steps to do so, he says.

"It's one thing to say, 'We want to do workforce development,' but it's another thing to go out and hire a vice president and reorganize a whole part of our college," says Oldham, 37. "It takes a big commitment to do that, and for some schools that don't see workforce development as the mission, you will probably see less of a push as there is less reason for them to go to it."

His position also will address what MCC found to be a weakness. Though the college had strong programs to teach job skills and grant work certificates, these sometimes lagged behind what businesses needed.

"We identified a gap between the needs of MCC and the community," says Anne Kress, MCC president. "One thing in particular we found was a gap between our ability to respond as quickly as the businesses needed to their workforce needs. We looked at ways to better organize ourselves internally to do that, and one was to create this position."

Experience

Oldham has a background in both higher education and business. He grew up in Orange County, Calif., where his father was an aerospace engineer and later an entrepreneur. Throughout his youth, Oldham worked in his father's business, welding in their home machine shops and pitching in to help for larger projects.

After graduating from the University of California at Los Angeles, Oldham started in business-to-business sales. He worked a few sales jobs before transitioning to

higher education, taking a position at Chapman College in California as the manager of IT education programs there.

Oldham worked toward his MBA while he was there, and after graduating he moved on to become director of corporate education at Clark College in Vancouver, Wash.

"The work I did there is very similar to what I'm doing here, a lot of workforce development," Oldham says. "We had an emphasis on training, putting customized trainings together for businesses, and we participated a lot in the American Recovery and Reinvestment Act projects."

"We also worked together with our version of RochesterWorks to put together open-enrollment programs to recruit students and build programs in health care, more middle-skill-oriented programs, and manufacturing training in Lean and Six Sigma."

For one program, Oldham created an interactive e-learning program separate from what the rest of the college used. This allowed for the creation of custom content for local businesses, such as a program for a hospital that taught cultural competence in the health care environment.

The economic makeup of Vancouver differed somewhat from Rochester's, Oldham notes. With Intel Corp. not far away in Northern California, many businesses supplied it with parts such as silicon wafers. But some of the problems in Vancouver were the same as Rochester's, such as difficulties in manufacturing and unemployment.

When the MCC opportunity arose, Oldham jumped at the chance to join one of the best-regarded community colleges in the nation. He also says he was drawn to the college's unique structure, with credit-

bearing and non-credit programs under the same umbrella.

"One of the big pushes within our world is career pathways, the idea that you have a way for students to come through a curriculum that's designed to have multiple stop-off points and to allow someone to come in for industry-level training as they're easing into a one-year or two-year degree," he says. "The structure that we have at MCC allows us to do things that in other areas would need to be done in a much more rigid way."

"If you want to have a more cutting-edge, 21st-century institution, which was the push President Obama and the White House summit a couple years ago started, this is the model."

Plans for MCC

For MCC, Oldham plans to transform the college's office of workforce development into what he terms a "corporate college model." The office would be more involved with the business community and use technology to connect better with local industry.

This means expanding the types of conversations MCC has with local industry, Oldham says.

"When we dialogue with companies, we want it to be about the entire continuum of education the college has to offer," he says. "In the past when we talked it was just about non-credit areas."

Oldham hopes to use his experience in business-to-business sales to connect with local industry at MCC. The college will use databases such as one at Salesforce.com to help it connect with these business-

Continued on next page

Continued from previous page

es and will hire a full-time relations director to call those companies and establish marketing and communications strategies.

"We want deeper and broader relationships with them," Oldham says. "This isn't just to inform them of new programs, but also to understand how we can participate with them on new grants. It's how we can get information with them in terms of surveys on workforce needs."

This will allow MCC to have a better sense for the needs of the business community and will deepen relationships, Oldham says. His goal is to set up most of the system by the end of the calendar year and have it fully operational by spring.

So far, the outreach to businesses has been going well, he adds.

"It's been very positive, and I think there's a desire for the college to continue the solid role it's already been playing," Oldham says. "But I'm a big proponent of continuous improvement as a person; I'm a lifelong learner. I think there are always ways you can do things better and more efficiently, though."

This outreach has elicited a positive response from local industry groups, such as the Finger Lakes Advanced Manufacturers' Enterprise, known as FAME, Oldham says. A more efficient program at MCC and a stronger pipeline of workers are mutual goals.

"We're willing to make those investments that will help out those industries," Oldham says. "But in the long term, if we've solved their problem we've solved our problem, because we're looking for enrollment management."

Michael Mandina, president of the optics manufacturer Optimax Systems Inc., says the college's move to create a dedicated position for workforce development is progressive. The initiative also can take advantage of the area's strengths in manufacturing, especially groups like FAME and the Rochester Technology and Manufacturing Association, he adds.

"For a long time colleges were focused on pushing students out rather than meeting workforce needs," says Mandina, one of the founders of FAME. "I applaud Todd's commitment to the long term in this area. It was a long time ago that FAME and Optimax decided having one more job fair just wasn't going to cut it in meeting our workforce needs."

Oldham says so far he has spent about 60 percent of his time working on building the structure within the college and 40 percent meeting with local businesses and industry groups. Mandina says it seems like much more.

"For a while, every time there was an after-hours event or networking opportunity, Todd was there," Mandina says. "Even when he was sick, he would still show up

"We want deeper and broader relationships."

to meet with people and talk about their needs. It's clear he's passionate about what he's doing, and it makes everyone else want to work with the college too."

For Oldham, his work life is important but he balances his priorities between MCC and his home in Pittsford, where he has a wife and two young boys. He tries

to spend as much time with the boys as he can, building models and playing guitar in his spare time, he says.

New structure

The restructuring of the office at MCC involves the creation of different institutes around core program areas such as skilled trades, IT and process improvement. Within those institutes there will be both credit and non-credit programs, Oldham says.

The institutes would have a modular curriculum, one that offers more short-term training programs to get students ready for entry-level work. At the lower levels the courses would address the basic skills many workers lack, moving up toward certificates and two-year degrees.

This model would be flexible, so as new needs arise or local businesses are in need of different skills, the programs could be changed or altered. With the greater communication between the college and busi-

nesses, these shifts could be anticipated and addressed sooner, Oldham says.

MCC already has seen the benefits of this communication, Kress says.

"Even though he's only been here a few months, the work he's done has been remarkable," Kress says. "He has reinvigorated all the industry groups and their relationships with the college, so now industry leaders are sitting with faculty and department chairs, talking about what curriculum needs they need met."

Opening more channels of communication can also help pay for the cost of the expanded programs, Oldham says. In a difficult economy with shrinking funding from the state, this can be a powerful advantage, he adds.

"The more companies you contact and the more you're making an effort to work with, the more needs you uncover, and with the more needs you uncover, the more like-

Continued on page 12

You're the decision-maker. So talk to a decision-maker.



Todd Oldham

Position: Vice president for economic development and innovative workforce services, Monroe Community College

Age: 37

Education: A.A., Orange Coast College, Costa Mesa, Calif., 1994; B.A. in socio-cultural anthropology and history, University of California, Los Angeles, 1996; MBA, George L. Argyros School of Business & Economics, Chapman University, Orange, Calif., 2004; certificate in project management, Boston University Corporate Education Center, 2010

Family: Wife Alina, sons Brandon, 5, and Ethan, 3

Residence: Pittsford

Activities: Playing guitar, reading, building models

Quote: "If you want to have a more cutting-edge, 21st-century institution, which was the push President Obama and the White House summit a couple years ago started, this is the model."

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COUNTY EXECUTIVE

Continued from page 1

Monroe County is encouraging, but many of those job increases have occurred in Ontario County. Brooks can't take credit for those jobs.

"It's great that we collaborate, that we work with our neighboring counties and communities to improve the economic base of this region. That benefits everyone. But we still need to focus on creating jobs for people right here in Monroe County. If jobs leave, people leave. That really doesn't bode well for our future."

Brooks said the county's job losses are the result of continuing reductions at Rochester's largest manufacturers, and Monroe County is responsible for retaining or creating 80,000 jobs since she took office in 2004.

"You can dispute numbers and say, well, there are fewer jobs," she said in an interview with the RBJ this week. "But when you look at the downsizing that we have seen at the corporate level, when you've seen those companies that have transitioned away from various aspects of their business, like Kodak, we've been able to take some of those spinoff companies and keep them here."

Eastman Kodak Co. spinoff Carestream Health Inc. and ITT Corp.'s Geospatial Systems division are examples, Brooks said.

"We've been able to refocus our attention on small to midsize companies," she said, "and manufacturing is still a big part of that."

Taxes and jobs

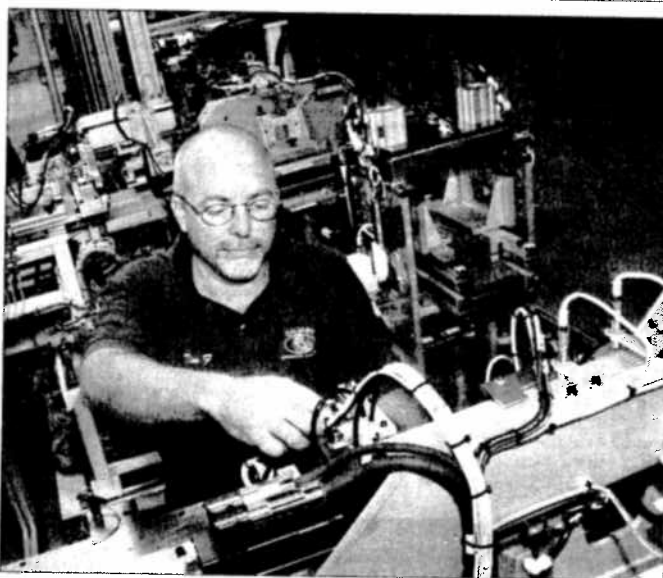
Jobs and tax stability are Brooks' focus, she said.

"I think it's a dual track, and it all falls under the umbrella of economy," she said. "When I took office in 2004, people were talking about two things: jobs and tax stability. Eight years later, people are still concerned about the economy—national, state and local. People are still talking about taxes and jobs. Economy is top of mind for everyone."

"It's really why we have made stable property taxes our priority. The tax rate is lower than when I took office in 2004. We've made a concerted effort to focus on the issue that I hear most often about."

Job growth is on the same plane as stable taxes, Brooks said.

"People want to have opportunities to work, and we have really made a concerted effort to focus on job creation," she said. "Government doesn't create jobs, but we've certainly been at the table as it relates to retention, as it relates to assistance (and) being able to level the playing field for companies as they make decisions about where to grow and expand."



Both Brooks and Frankel say retaining and adding jobs is a top priority.

File photo by Kimberly McKinzie

And we've had some success.

"There are 80,000 jobs in the community today—retention and new jobs that weren't here in 2004. Those 80,000 were impacted in some way by what we've done in county government. The private sector creates the jobs, but those 80,000 were in some way touched by the county government as a productive partner in economic development."

The two candidates agree that Monroe County is not much different from the rest of Upstate New York in its lack of strong economic growth.

"In fact, we've stagnated," Frankel said. "We've had job and population loss. We haven't benefited. We haven't had the extreme highs and lows, but we haven't moved forward."

"We have so many wonderful assets here, and the potential for a vibrant, terrific future. We have great educational institutions, a talented, skilled workforce, great natural resources, fresh water, short commutes, affordable housing. There are so many things that would be attractive to people thinking about relocating and bringing their businesses here."

"We've got a focused expertise in areas that we ought to be capitalizing on: medical services, medical technology and research, optics, infotonics, hydrogen fuel cell development and other green initiatives. We can really enhance the economy of this area."

That expertise, coupled with the county's arts and cultural institutions, could make this a potential mecca for economic

growth and tourism, Frankel said.

"Our history is so rich here that heritage tourism is another area that we could exploit," she said. "The opportunities are remarkable, but we've stagnated. We need a new focus and new approach, a strategic plan that will direct investments into the areas that we as a community determine are our prime areas for growth."

"I'm eager to work with the city, with the suburbs, as I have even as town supervisor, and, with the recommendations that will come out of the governor's regional economic council, put together a plan of

NAVITAR

Continued from page 8

Julian Goldstein said the key to the company's success is its longevity, as well as its employees and their ability to keep delivering products and systems in line with changing technologies and industries.

"It goes a long way in helping the company continue to make leading-edge technology (products)," he said.

Navitar was launched in 1972 as D.O. Industries. Julian and Jeremy Goldstein purchased Navitar in 1994 from their father, David Goldstein.

The business is able to increase production levels for current and future growth at its Henrietta site and New Jersey manufacturing facility, the Goldsteins said.

Navitar recently expanded its engineer-

ing department and purchased new equipment to enhance testing and measurement capabilities at both manufacturing facilities.

Rod Sterling, chief engineer with California-based JVC Digital Image Technology Center, part of JVC Kenwood Corp., said his firm has worked with Navitar for more than four years. The local company builds custom lenses for projectors JVC makes for aircraft simulators.

Navitar's engineering and manufacturing capabilities help the company stand out, Sterling said, noting that Navitar was able to work with JVC's initial designs and enhance the products.

Sterling also lauded Navitar's ability to complete projects smoothly and on time. "It's a very high-performance custom design, and they deliver," he said.

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The attribute that sets Frankel apart from Brooks is her commitment to open, transparent and accessible government, Frankel said.

Continued on page 15

The government

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OLDHAM

Continued from page 11

ly it is that you'll find similar needs among companies and you can pull people into curricula and share the cost across the organization," Oldham says. "That can drive the cost of the access of education down, which can allow even in a tough economy for it to become more affordable."

Workforce development tends to rely on grant funding, so initiatives tend to wait for money from the system. When the funding stops, so do the programs, Oldham says. For a program like the one he is setting up at MCC to work, it must be sustainable without the starts and stops that come with grant funding.

Oldham feels strongly that MCC should be doing more with its existing operating funds and organize in a more efficient way. The full-time marketing position, for

example, can help the college provide a resource to community partners and allow MCC to better address industry needs.

"The most important thing for us is to be proactive, but that doesn't just happen," Oldham says. "We're making the investments we need to have that system in place."

New standard

For years, colleges across the country have discussed the kind of modular programs being implemented at MCC, and Oldham thinks MCC will lead on what will become a national standard.

When it awards grants, the Department of Labor wants to see the kind of "stackable" programs that give students job skills and certificates earlier and build to higher credentials, Oldham notes. That also is becoming more important to other funding organizations, such as the Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation, he adds.

"I just came back from a conference last week on (science, technology, engineering and mathematics) programming and talked to some schools that are experimenting with this system, but there are still a lot more talking about it than doing it," he says.

Making the change to this kind of system is not a challenge in itself, but overcoming the often rigid mindset of academia can be difficult, Oldham says.

"Obviously you'll see this more coming from the two-year institutions than four-year institutions, but by nature colleges tend to be status quo institutions looking for status quo reforms," he says.

This model would include new tools, such as a website that students can access to help them decide which career path would be best. This searchable database gives students an interconnected map of jobs, showing graphs on salaries and information on what courses they would need

to take.

Oldham hesitates to call what MCC is doing a new model, saying he has heard discussions of implementing such a workforce model for his entire career in higher education. The innovation is in implementing the system, he says.

If MCC can be successful, it will be a model for other colleges, Oldham says.

"If we were able to do this in a robust way—and I'm not talking about having one or two students in it, but having it where you have two or three departments and healthy cohorts going through it and working through the K-12 pipeline—I wouldn't say we would be the only school in the country, but I think you could do some presentations on it," he says. "Not that this is the reason we're doing it. We're doing it because we think it's a much more effective model."

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