Chad Merrill, Alan Stephenson, Marcia Stoneman, Carol Ann Lydon, and I attended the SACSCOC Annual Meeting in Nashville, Tn., December 6-9, 2014. We have received official word from Dr. Belle S. Wheelan, President of Southern Association of Colleges and Schools Commission on Colleges, concerning our Fifth-Year Interim Report submitted last fall. I am pleased to report that we are fully compliant in all of the 17 select standards of the Principles of Accreditation and no other additional information is needed. In addition, our Quality Enhancement Plan (QEP) was fully accepted and showed a strong impact on student learning. This report from Dr. Wheelen represents Blue Ridge Community College’s commitment to academic excellence, and to providing our students with high-quality educational programs and experiences.

The Commission on Accreditation of Allied Health Education Programs (CAAHEP) has awarded continuing accreditation to the Surgical Technology Program. This continuing accreditation follows a comprehensive peer review site visit last spring, and recognizes the program’s substantial compliance with the nationally recognized accreditation Standards. While the program will continue to be monitored through routine annual reporting, the next comprehensive review and on-site visit will occur in 2024.

A re-accreditation audit visit was also held recently for the College’s Basic Law Enforcement Training program. The auditor presented glowing accolades to our staff for an outstanding quality program. He was very complimentary of the program’s record keeping, as well as the organization of equipment and student records. The report was presented with zero deficiencies—something that had never been presented to community college basic law enforcement program. A recommendation for accreditation renewal will be presented to the Criminal Justice Training and Standard full commission meeting in February for approval. The next re-accreditation audit for renewal will be 2018.
Personal enrichment classes are being offered at the Fletcher Town Hall. To kick off the new location, we offered a free Photography workshop January 20. Other courses include Beginning Spanish 1, Social Media Systems for Small Business, Learning to use your iPad/iPhone, Wire Wrapping Jewelry Making, Build a Better Brain, and Conquering Your Fear of Public Speaking.

The College participated in the Asheville Chamber of Commerce Homecoming Job Fair at the Western North Carolina Ag Center on January 7. Ben Kish and Shanda Bedoian represented the College.

Recent corporate and customized training projects were held at Continental Automotive Systems, Elkamet, Cane Creek Cycling, Clement Pappas, and MPS.

The College received a plaque from the Holly Society of America listing our Holly Collection as a Holly Arboretum. The garden is located between the TEDC and the campus lake.

During the recent commencement ceremony, 120 graduates were awarded a total of 138 degrees, diplomas, and certificates. Five Henderson County Early College students graduated early in December with both their high school diploma and associate degree. HCEC graduate Emily Bodley performed the National Anthem at the ceremony.

Pamela J. Saltz Mangum (pictured left), an honors graduate with an A.A.S. in Office Administration, delivered the commencement address and eloquently expressed the challenges she overcame to reach her educational goal and the gratitude she felt towards her instructors and BRCC for their support.
Shanita Jackson has been selected to be Blue Ridge’s North Carolina Community College System Academic Excellence Award recipient for 2015. Criteria for the award is the student must be currently enrolled, must have completed at least 12 semester hours in an associate degree program, and must have a cumulative grade point average of not less than 3.25 and Shanita stood out. Shanita is already both a regionally and a nationally recognized spoken-word poet. As well as both working and attending school, she volunteers to serve food to the homeless at Hope Methodist Church in East Flat Rock every Tuesday night. She will finish both Early College High School AND her Associate in Arts degree 1 year early, graduating in May of 2015. And all of this while dealing with a homelessness situation. Her accomplishments while at Blue Ridge, as well as her work-ethic, natural leadership ability, and her overall demeanor, made her the superior choice as the representative from Blue Ridge who we will be able to celebrate as “one of ours.”

Students who were nominated to the All-USA/ Coca-Cola Community College Academic Team Programs are Crystal Davis and John Olsen from the Henderson County Campus and Abigail Arnold and Lyndsay Queen from the Transylvania Campus.

Section 702 of the Veterans Access, Choice and Accountability Act of 2014 ("Choice Act"), requires VA to disapprove programs of education for payment of benefits under the Post 9/11 GI Bill and Montgomery GI Bill-Active Duty at public institutions of higher learning if the schools charge qualifying Veterans and dependents tuition and fees in excess of the rate for resident students for terms beginning after July 1, 2015. These new requirements will ensure that our Nation’s recently discharged Veterans, and their eligible family members, will not have to bear the cost of out-of-state charges while using their well-deserved education benefits. To remain approved for VA’s GI Bill programs, schools must charge in-state tuition and fee amounts to “covered individuals”. The NC Community College System has included in the 2015-17 budget priorities a request to the General Assembly to carry forward and re-purpose Yellow Ribbon Program funds to support the cost of charging in-state tuition rates.

Rita Blythe, BRCC’s Recruiter, organized a productive meeting/workshop November 13 with Henderson County High School counselors, principals, and Central Office personnel to explore ways to serve our county’s high school students through the Career and College Promise pathways. Challenges with schedules and transportation were addressed and participants also expressed needs for their individual student populations and learned more about the process.

Financial Aid Director Lisanne Masterson (pictured below) was recently awarded the Eleanor S. Morris Distinguished Service Award by the North Carolina Association Student Financial Aid Administrators at its Conference held last week in Asheville. This is the highest award given by the Association and recognizes Lisanne for her many years of important contributions to the Association and the student financial aid profession.

Also, Lisanne Masterson was invited to attend a meeting hosted by the American Council on Education with Department of Education Undersecretary Ted Mitchell on December 17th, to discuss student borrowing and debt issues. BRCC was one of five community colleges from across the country represented at the meeting, and Lisanne is one of five FAAs invited from the Southern region (including one other community college FAA from Florida).
On November 21, ninety-eight students from Rosman Middle School were at the Transylvania County campus to learn about college and career options. Student ambassadors were on hand to guide the groups, and BRCC faculty and staff provided college presentations.

On November 25, Rob Rhodes provided a presentation to a freshman dropout prevention class at Brevard High School. The presentation focused on the merits of higher education and the Career and College Promise program. This same class visited the Transylvania County Campus’s NCWorks office.

On December 5, fifth graders from Pisgah Forest Elementary School visited TCC to learn about exciting career options.

**Early College News**

North Carolina New Schools has selected Henderson County Early College High (HCEC) as a “School of Innovation and Excellence,” identifying it as a leader in academic excellence and innovative practices aligned with the NC New Schools Design Principles. According to North Carolina New Schools, Henderson County Early College has surpassed the state’s rate on ACT performance by more than 30 percentage points and achieved a graduation rate higher than 90 percent in each of the last two years, according to NC New Schools.

Early College hosted a 5K FUNdRUN on December 6 which raised more than $2,000. Early College students also raised money for UNICEF, wrote letters to soldiers, raised money for Salvation Army and collected shoeboxes for Samaritan’s Purse Ministries.

HCEC science teacher, Tom Savage, is one of 20 applicants (out of 250 nationwide) who was selected to be part of a research team for NOAA (National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration).

By the end of the 2014-2015 school year, Early College will have a total of 47 graduates. Forty-one of those students will have earned both high school diploma and an associate degree. Students graduating in May are already receiving acceptance letters from WCU, Lees McRae, UNCC, UNCG and Queens University.

**Award-Winning Balsam Range Returns to Blue Ridge Community College**

The award-winning bluegrass band Balsam Range will appear at Blue Ridge Community College on Friday, March 20, 2015, at 7 p.m. in the Thomas Auditorium on the Henderson County Campus.

Founded in 2007, Balsam Range consists of five friends with unique experiences and backgrounds that blend together effortlessly to form their distinctive sound. Since bursting onto the scene, Balsam Range has made a definite mark in the bluegrass and acoustic music world.

The band recently received numerous top honors in the 2014 IBMA Awards, including Entertainer of the Year. Balsam Range was also honored as Vocal Group of the Year. Buddy Melton was named Male Vocalist of the Year and Tim Surrett received a Mentor Award.

All tickets for the March 20 performance are $22 general admission and are available online at www.blueridge.edu/events. Tickets can also be purchased in person at the Cashier Office in the Sink Building at Blue Ridge Community College Henderson County Campus during normal business hours. Doors open at 6 p.m. on the evening of the concert.

For more information about Balsam Range, visit www.balsamrange.com. For more information about the concert at Blue Ridge Community College, call (828) 694-4747 or e-mail events@blueridge.edu.
Major Gifts

The Fitzpatrick Foundation contributed $9,750 to fund three Mills River Scholarships for the 2015-2016 academic year: The Mills River Scholarship is to provide scholarship support to a full-time Blue Ridge Community College student in a degree-granting curriculum that has and maintains a 2.5 (or higher) grade point average. The recipient must also be a Mills River resident and have the intentions of staying and working in the county.

Kalep, Inc., donated $17,738 ($8,869 general scholarships and $8,869 Fine Arts - Music program) memorializing the life of longtime supporter of the College Helen Savie Underhill who passed away in 2013.

Ray and Judith McKenzie-Wilson contributed $6,500 ($3,250 to be awarded in 2015-2016 and 2016-2017) to fund a second two-year engineering scholarship for women.

Louis and Judith Santiago gifted $5,000 and have designed their gift for the Blair-Santiago Family Scholarship Endowment Fund.

Betty Berg contributed $5,000 to the William A. Keyser Memorial Scholarship awarded with preference to a Transylvania County resident with a financial need.

Connestee Falls Property Owners Association donated $17,000 for 2015-16 scholarships.

Fundraising efforts from the Sixth annual Daniel Furr Memorial Golf Tournament provided a pledge of $8,400 to the J. Daniel Furr Memorial Scholarship fund for 2015-2016 scholarship awards and Continental Automotive Systems pledged $10,000 for 2015-2016 scholarships.

Faculty and Staff Giving Campaign

Blue Ridge Community College employees have now contributed $28,888.76 to the 2014-2015 Faculty and Staff Giving Campaign.

2015-2016 Scholarship Applications

The 2015-2016 Scholarship Application forms are available now and are due on or before Thursday, April 2.

For more information visit the College website at blueridge.edu/scholarships