

## Partnerships and Education

By Dr. Al Roberts

In the early seventeenth century, poet John Donne wrote, “No man is an island, entire of itself; every man is a piece of the continent, a part of the main” (Meditation XVII, 1624).

The observation about the ways in which we are all interconnected is especially evident in education. Education requires diligent work by a student and a teacher. The teacher prepares lessons, presents material, and provides a feedback mechanism to evaluate progress. The student attends to lessons, completes assignments, and employs an active mind to push beyond barriers and overcome obstacles. In the most effective learning environments, students become teachers and teachers become learners. Everyone benefits.

But education is more than just the relationship between a single teacher and one student. At Southside Virginia Community College, virtually all our programs involve collaborative efforts. SVCC’s service region, the largest in the Commonwealth, spans ten counties plus the city of Emporia. In order to deliver education opportunities throughout this vast territory, we work in concert with many other entities that provide classroom space and other services. Off-campus centers include the Estes Community Center in Chase City, the Lake Country Advanced Knowledge Center in South Hill, the Occupational Technical Center at Pickett Park in Blackstone, the Southside Virginia Education Center in Greensville County, and the Southern Virginia Higher Education Center in South Boston.

In addition, local high school students and their families benefit from our dual enrollment program, which involves partnerships with K-12 schools and regional superintendents. Area hospitals, nursing homes, and other health care providers offer resources and job opportunities for students in SVCC’s nursing and allied health programs. And, since its inception, the Tobacco Region Revitalization Commission has provided much-needed financial support for innovative programming focused on finding creative solutions to problems that result from poverty and unemployment.

Another superb example of teamwork between education and employers is the recently launched Power Line Worker Program at Pickett Park. Virginia’s 13 consumer-owned electric cooperatives, together with their peers in Maryland and Delaware, projected a critical shortage of experienced electric utility line workers. To help address this skills gap, SVCC acted in collaboration with other public and private sector entities to develop a program that would prepare students for entry into the profession. The Power Line Worker Program relies on curriculum developed by the National Association for Construction Education and Research (NCCER), whose credentials are internationally recognized.

A complete list of SVCC’s partners would go on and on, but these few serve to illustrate some of the ways in which education partnerships build bridges to connect and enhance our communities. Businesses benefit from the availability of a qualified workforce, and local citizens earn industry-recognized credentials that open the doors of opportunity to sustainable, self- or family-supporting careers.

*Dr. Al Roberts is president of Southside Virginia Community College, an institution of higher learning that provides a wide variety of education opportunities to a diverse student population within a service area that spans ten counties and the city of Emporia. He can be reached via email at [al.roberts@southside.edu](mailto:al.roberts@southside.edu).*