RVCC president lives for learning, helping others
By DAMIEN FISHER Staff Writer

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CLAREMONT — During a recent conversation with a student, River Valley Community College President, Alicia Harvey-Smith gave the young woman advice on her future.

“I said to her, ‘there has to be an intersection between your passion and your purpose,’” she said.

The intersection of passion and purpose is an apt way to describe Harvey-Smith’s new position at River Valley. The Baltimore, Md. native got her Ph.D. from the University of Maryland after doing graduate work at Johns Hopkins University. But she wanted more than degrees, she wanted to help people.

“I always wanted to learn more, do more. The dream for me was to be in a place to help others,” she said.

Harvey-Smith is planning to bring about big things at River Valley. She hopes to see the start of the $2.9 million college renovation, and she is pushing for a new strategic plan for the college.

Her passion for teaching and leading drew her toward the community college system, where she could try and serve her purpose of transforming lives through education.

“It was basically the need to want to help others. I learned very early that that was through education,” she said. “I watched so many students who had such a difficult time and it was only after some training and education that they were able to lift themselves up and their families up.”

After serving as the Vice President at the Baltimore City Community College, Harvey-Smith wanted a chance to lead an entire institution. Two and a half months in as the President in Claremont, Harvey-Smith is looking to make an impact with the institution, but more importantly, with the students.

“There is something very unique about a community college student, she said. “Something special about getting students through process where many of them might have difficulty in another locations.”

Harvey Smith wants the college to start planning for the future. The strategic plan she is calling “Envisioning The Future” has her reaching out to community leaders, businesses, students, faculty and staff. She wants to see the college respond to students and their needs, but also be a part of the community around it.

She is looking to form partnerships with four year colleges and businesses to create solid paths for the River Valley students. There have been meetings with Hypertherm and other industry leaders, as well as meetings with Keene State College and Antioch University representatives.
Harvey-Smith said part of the job of the college is to balance the needs of students on various paths, those looking for four years of college, or those looking for a new career.

She walks the halls of the college, talking to staff and students, getting to know the building. She’s already had all-school meetings with the students and with staff, but she likes to also meet with them in small groups to see how things are percolating. She is even starting a student advisory council.

“I’m big on listening,” she said.

The high-powered plans for the future only matter if they can connect to helping the students. She wants to see the school expand the service offered to students to help them on their path through college and into the work force. It always comes back to helping students for Harvey-Smith. That’s why she studied for years for a Ph.D., why she went into the community college system, and why she came to Claremont.

“It's a perfect opportunity to impact the lives of students the way I dream of impacting them,” she said.