RVCC President Gets to Know Claremont

Alicia Harvey-Smith is the new president of River Valley Community College. (Valley News — James M. Patterson)

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Claremont — Alicia Harvey-Smith, the new president of River Valley Community College, began her official tenure Monday, but she’s already been immersing herself in the community.

Harvey-Smith, selected in March from among three finalists by the Community College System of New Hampshire Board of Trustees, has visited the city’s Thursday farmers market at Broad Street Park and attended a fundraiser for the Police Department.

“It has been an exciting opportunity to get to know the campus and the community,” Harvey-Smith said Wednesday. “I’ve enjoyed seeing the community at work. The last two days I have been meeting with staff and faculty.”

Harvey-Smith and her husband, Donald, bought a home in Claremont.

“That was an important decision for us,” she said. “We did not want to be separate from the community.”

Most recently, Harvey-Smith, with 25 years of experience in post-secondary education, was vice president for student affairs at Baltimore City Community College in Baltimore, a public institution with 19,000 students. She is credited with leading initiatives on student recruitment, student retention, workforce development and industry partnerships.

At RVCC, Harvey-Smith said she wants to continue building upon the community-based relationships that have been developed over the years.

“One of the things that is so important is looking at the good work being done here and continue expanding those efforts.”

Harvey-Smith said two of her main objectives are partnering with area employers and other organizations and placing a strong emphasis on the value of a community college experience.

“We want students to understand the importance of education and its value in transforming the lives of students, families and the community,” Harvey-Smith said. “We want to engage them in that transformational process.”

Though she arrives in Claremont from a community college in an urban setting, Harvey-Smith said during her 25 years in education she has worked with students from different demographics and sees a commonality in community colleges.

“It is very similar across the board in that you are always looking for creative and innovative ways to help students,” she said. “What I bring is a perspective that continually looks to improve opportunities for education.”

With some students continuing their education at four-year schools after RVCC and others joining the workforce, Harvey-Smith sees the college as being able to facilitate the transition.

“We want to understand the desire and goals of the students and develop curriculum to help get them there. That is why partnering with transitional organizations is critical. What will help propel them forward?”
In recent years, RVCC has increased its visibility in the community beyond the campus by working directly with area employers and helping address their specific needs through training programs.

“One of the most important things has to do with these partnerships. We can’t do it (educate students) in isolation.”

She said along with curriculum, identifying needs of workforce will further strengthen those partnerships.

Other goals Harvey-Smith cited include keeping River Valley affordable to make the learning experience available to as many people as possible who want to pursue a degree and broadening online learning, which also improves access to the college for those who have other commitments such as family and work.

Harvey-Smith has a doctorate in counseling and personal services from the University of Maryland-College Park and also holds a master’s of science in education. She earned her bachelor of science degree from Morgan University in Baltimore.

Harvey-Smith replaces Steve Budd, who resigned about a year ago shortly after he failed in a bid to become president of Berkshire Community College in Massachusetts. Harvey Hill, of Charlestown, served as interim president following Budd’s resignation.

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