Whelen's Olson honored at RVCC scholarship dinner

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Nancy A. Cavanaugh

Photo by: NANCY A. CAVANAUGH After announcing raising $1.3 million for scholarships in the Envisioning a Brighter Future Year of Giving Campaign, Dr. Alicia Harvey-Smith presents John Olson with the River Valley Community College Exemplary Leader and Champion of Learning Award for his continuous efforts to train and develop tomorrow’s workforce.

On Friday, River Valley Community College (RVCC) celebrated the culmination of the Envisioning a Brighter Future Year of Giving Campaign with a dinner at the Common Man Inn last night honoring John Olson, executive vice president of manufacturing at Whelen Engineering in Charlestown. Olson received the River Valley Community College Exemplary Leader and Champion of Learning Award for his continuous efforts to train and develop tomorrow’s workforce.

“Thank you for this award but it really belongs to the 1,900 people who work with me,” said Olson.

“It was one year ago today that we started the campaign,” said Dr. Alicia Harvey-Smith, President of RVCC. “With your help, we are helping students achieve brighter futures. We wanted to raise $1 million.”

Harvey Hill, chair of the Scholarship Development Committee, stood next to Harvey-Smith for the grand unveiling.

“We raised $1.3 million from direct donations, pledges for future donations, grants and more. $620,000 of that will go directly to scholarships for students,” he said.

Hill expressed his excitement with Olson’s selection as this year’s honoree.

“John Olson’s leadership in manufacturing has significantly impacted the state of New Hampshire and is an exemplary model nationally,” he said. “It is a pleasure to introduce a colleague and a friend, John.”

Olson, after presenting his wife of 53 years with a large bouquet of flowers, spoke.

“We’re all in this together. The depth I’ve achieved is only accomplished by the help of my managers. They made this all possible,” he said. “Manufacturing is dying. We don’t have support from our governments. Government is the biggest competitor of manufacturing. That has to stop.
“We have programs in elementary and secondary schools. We have 12-14 in New Hampshire. The students are allowed to work in manufacturing. They’re allowed to run the machines. It is like toys, they love it,” he continued. “We need education. Not for me — I’m 80 years old — but for you and your kids to have a future.

As a River Valley Community College industry partner, Olson has been a civic leader, committed to building manufacturing and promoting career opportunities and jobs in New Hampshire for many years. Olson is a University of New Hampshire graduate, served in the U.S. Coast Guard, and began his career in 1958 at Whelen Engineering, where he was their first full time employee. Olson was named president in 1976, a position he held until Sept. 1, 2015.

The money raised from the dinner will go towards student scholarships.