



“Historical Perspective: Preparing the Groundwork for a New College” By Mr. Merle Morris

“Merle Morris, one of the original concerned citizens of South Phoenix, recalls the struggle to obtain a college in the South Mountain area. He recalls that several people had discussed the need of having a college in the area because of the community isolation that existed, since there were no bridges across the river to the South Phoenix community. In 1975, a small group formed what was known as the Citizen Advisory Committee and their goal was to establish a college on the south side. In the beginning there were about 7 or 8 people at the meetings, but as word spread more people became involved. Merle Morris was president of the South Mountain Business Association at that time and joined the Citizen Advisory Committee. Later on, several members of the South Mountain Business Committee joined the Citizen Advisory Committee and helped in the cause.

“Over the next two years, they picked up a considerable number of people who began to work toward getting a college built in the area. It was not easy. Morris recalls having at least two or three meetings a month. They tried different angles on how to approach the people and the legislature. The state legislature had no use for a college on the south side, and didn’t want to put up money for the college. We met opposition in almost every section of the city. However, we did eventually get enough pressure worked up so that the people on the Maricopa County Board began to listen,. They were the people that had to make the initial recommendation.

“There were fifty people on the Board. Finally they granted a hearing in the fall of 1977. At the hearing there were several legislative people present. The hall was packed. About thirty Citizen Advisory Committee members were allowed to speak. When the meeting first started it was very cold. It didn’t look like we stood a prayer of a chance. However, some things were said and done and a little hilarity was brought in on the deliberations. This “unspooked” and moved the legislative people, and it turned out to be fun. The position of the Citizen Advisory Committee prevailed and the County Board unanimously voted in favor to build a college on the south side of Phoenix.

“Now came the really hard part. In the spring, another meeting was held down between Casa Grande and Florence. We never understood why it was held there. Morris recalls 52 people on the State Community College Board. The speaker or chairman of that committee had formed an ad hoc committee and they wrote up a whole page of restrictions which would have been nothing but a built-in failure if they ever did approve the establishment of a college.

“As deliberation proceeded, most state board members changed their minds and did want to see a college built on the south side. They made motions and amendments to the motions but the chairman was stonewalling them so they couldn’t get anything accomplished at the meeting. Many political people from the legislature and the city spoke. Eventually members from the Citizen Advisory Committee were allowed to speak. Some of the testimony got rough but the truth was laid on the line, ‘the way it was.’ The wind-up was, as soon as the speakers were through, the first motion that came up was to ‘cancel all former motions and amendments,’ and was passed. The next motion was to build South Mountain Community College. Merle recalls that the motion passed about 50 out of 52.”