

A Master Plan for the Future

A Q&A with Collin College President Neil Matkin

by Heather DARROW



Dr. Neil Matkin joined Collin College as its third president in April 2015, and since then has become a leading advocate for Collin County and for the vital role higher education plays in the growth of our region. Dr. Matkin previously served as president of the San Jacinto College Central Campus in Pasadena, Texas, and has held executive positions with the Louisiana and Virginia community college systems and the Illinois Board of Higher Education. In the Q&A that follows, he shares his thoughts about the college and its master plan, including the bond issue that will be on the ballot on May 6.

Q *How would you summarize your vision for Collin College?*

A Collin College has been an exemplar institution for almost 32 years. In that time, Collin County has grown from a mostly rural bedroom community to the powerhouse that it is today—a home for business and industry headquarters and growing communities with an amazing quality of life. The county's population is expected to double by 2030 and triple by 2040. My vision for the college is straightforward: to successfully serve all of Collin County. The vision statement adopted by our board is "Delivering a Brighter Future for Our Students and Communities." That is what we're all about—offering the right programs at convenient locations that are necessary to sustain Collin County's amazing quality of life and serve our students' needs.

Q *How and why was a master plan developed, and what does it include?*

A In late 2015, college leaders started talking about a master plan to respond to the immense growth we saw all around us. We examined current operations and potential future needs and looked at demographics, labor market trends, as well as traffic and growth patterns to try to understand future academic and technical programming requirements as well as ideal locations.

What came out of the six-month effort was a comprehensive plan that was further refined by college staff and the board of trustees through a series of workshops. In June 2016, the master plan was finalized and approved by the board of trustees. In February of this year, the board passed a resolution to ask the voters for bond authority up to $600 million to implement the plan over the next five to seven years.

Q *How will the master plan benefit the City of Allen and its residents?*

A The master plan is designed to do two things: one, expand the academic and technical programming to meet the needs of our communities and students; and two, expand the footprint of the college to allow students to get to and from the college more readily as the county continues to grow.

A technical center will be built near State Highway 121 and Custer Road, adjacent to the planned Allen High School expansion. The center is projected to house up to 360,000 square feet on 31 acres and will provide robust offerings through a partnership with Allen, Frisco, McKinney and Plano high schools, as well as programs for adults looking to enter the workforce more quickly with degrees in such areas as electrical, welding, advanced manufacturing, heating, ventilation and air conditioning, and many other areas. The center will be able to serve about 7,500 students when complete.

The Public Safety Training Center,



although being constructed in McKinney, is a joint effort with the City of Allen. The center will train first responders—both police and fire—for the entire region.

Q What about the rest of Collin County?

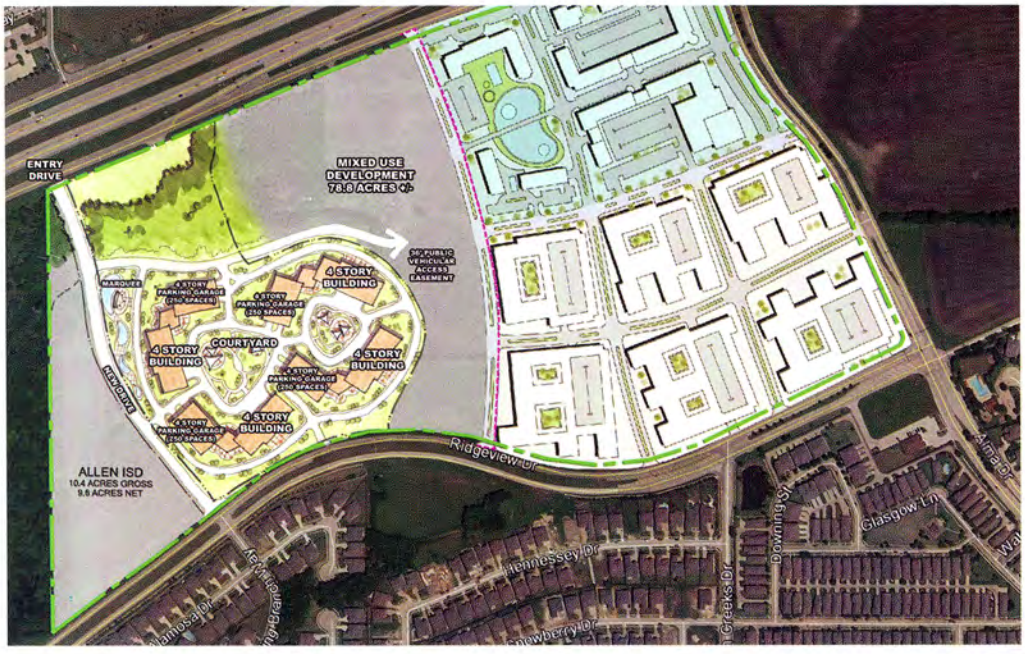
A Our board has also recognized for many years the growing need to serve students in the Wylie, Celina and Farmersville areas, which is why the plan includes facilities there, as well as an IT center of excellence on our Frisco campus.

Q The college's board of trustees has placed a bond issue on the May 6 ballot. Can you share the details of the bond, and what impact, if any, it will have on local taxes?

The board has called for a bond issue up to $600 million to facilitate the master plan over the next 5-7 years. Due to the rapid expansion of the tax base in Collin County, the tax rate can be kept level and still manage repayment of the bonds. The reputation of Collin College as an excellent fiscal steward is unsurpassed, and the college enjoys the lowest tuition in the state, along with the second lowest tax rate out of all 50 community college districts in Texas.

Q How will students benefit from the master plan?

A Students will have more options than ever before and will be able to choose from a wider variety of technical and university transfer programming. Students will also have more education options closer to where they live, which is critical in a county like ours where growing traffic congestion continues to be a challenge.



Q You speak often about why Collin College is such a great value for students, employers and the community in general. Describe for us what you mean.

A The most recent data estimated that the college's economic benefit to the community was more than a half-billion dollars per year. That includes the impact of operations spending, student spending and alumni on the region. The truth is that the college does not just serve Collin County residents.

Twenty-two percent of the student body comes from outside the county and another nine percent are from out of state. These dollars flow into Collin County and help to sustain our economy.

The college is part of the economic engine that drives the county. Low-cost, high-quality training is good for our residents, businesses, and industries. University partnerships that allow individuals to attend Collin College for their first two years and then transfer to a university can easily save students $30,000 per year.

There is not a greater value than Collin College. The master plan was constructed to ensure that high-quality, low-cost higher education is accessible to all our students and communities now and in the future.

Q How can local residents learn more about Collin College and the master plan?

A The master plan is detailed on the Collin College website at www.collin.edu/masterplan. ❖

Heather Darrow is a public relations writer at Collin College.

Photo by Nick Young, Collin College photographer.