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# Stephenson's Contract Extended at TRC

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*A SMT News Report*

POPLAR BLUFF, Mo. – Three River’s president is staying in Southeast Missouri.

The college Board of Trustees met this week and agreed to terms that will extend his contract through 2015. The extension of his contract at the Southeast Missouri community college is contingent upon withdrawing of his name as a nominated candidate for the presidency at Daytona State College in Daytona Beach, Fla.

An official vote will be taken during regular session at the May 18 board meeting.

“I feel Dr. Stephenson has been a very valuable asset to the college ever since he came on board,” said Phil Davis, a trustee from Doniphan who sat on the Presidential Search Committee that hired Stephenson. “He is very well-liked in the community and throughout the state. He does an excellent job of helping us find funding, such as the \$4 million he’s secured through external grants and other sources, which is crucial this day and age. I think the future of his presidency will bring a tremendous period of growth for the college. Because Dr. Stephenson and the board share the same vision of where the college is headed, I believe we will accomplish great things.”

“The Board and I have mutually agreed that our work at Three Rivers College must continue and that even more exciting times are ahead for the college,” said Stephenson.

“This four-year contract extension will allow us to further the work we began in 2009. The next few years will be very challenging as we continue to grow, expand capacity, and build partnerships. Most important will be the college’s positioning in higher education in this state and region, and the building of new facilities that will help us meet the future educational and training demands of Southeast Missouri.”

Members of the TRC board, faculty, community members and those involved with community colleges in the state have praised Stephenson and his work at Three Rivers.

“Dr. Stephenson brought a student-first philosophy to Three Rivers, and the board feels that this is important to continue,” said Board Chair Wilbur Thornton. “Under Dr. Stephenson’s leadership, we have kept tuition as low as possible, while expanding opportunities for our students and maintaining our high-quality education standards. We have put the keys to the front door of success into the hands of students who would not normally have them.”

Stephenson is recognized for forging a record number of partnerships that have resulted in more than \$5 million worth of donations, including 40 acres of prime real estate in Sikeston, in addition to other land, buildings and equipment. In February of 2011, the college received its largest endowed scholarship, a gift of \$236,000 from the Blue family.

“Dr. Stephenson’s vision has widespread support throughout the district,” said Doug Libla, of Libla Industries and Mid Continent Nail. “Many citizens and community leaders throughout Southeast Missouri have been drawn together to promote and build this great opportunity for educating our youth, and for furthering economic development that will provide many years of growth. The Presidential Search Committee did a wonderful job of identifying and bringing a great and tireless leader to Three Rivers.”

"Three Rivers has never been perceived in a more positive light, and the credit for this goes to Dr. Stephenson and his administration," said Trustee Marion Tibbs, who was chairman of the board this past year. “Dr. Stephenson is focused on building the community’s confidence in the college and this has led to the many successes we are achieving. He is one of those individuals who comes along once in the lifetime of a college."

Despite the economic downturn, the college continues to grow, and has experienced a 22 percent increase in enrollment since Stephenson became president in the summer of 2009. Programs have been expanded to increase opportunities for students. This includes full AA degrees available at Sikeston, Kennett, Malden, and Cape Girardeau; a full AA degree

available entirely online; and high-demand, quality training available through Three Rivers' new Public Safety Institute and Nursing and Allied Health Center. Community partnerships nurtured by Stephenson have also resulted in the opening of the Center at Dexter.

Stephenson has also succeeded in building the college's reserve fund from \$2.3 million to more than \$4 million, the largest contingency balance in the history of the college. Through the work of the Three Rivers Endowment Trust (also created under Stephenson's leadership), the college is preparing to launch a multi-million dollar capital campaign to raise funds for additional classrooms and campus facilities both in Poplar Bluff and Sikeston. Additionally, Stephenson has been praised by the Board of Trustees for controlling costs and increasing revenue through the use of a zero-based budgeting model, while at the same time maintaining the college's reputation for high-quality educational programs.

Stephenson has received praise and recognition from both Three Rivers faculty and higher education professionals across the country. The Alabama native was one of a select group invited to attend a U.S. Department of Education Summit on Community Colleges in San Diego, Calif., earlier this year.

"I was very glad to hear that Three Rivers' board has renewed Dr. Devin Stephenson's contract," said Zora Mulligan, Executive Director of the Missouri Community College Association. "During his time at Three Rivers, Dr. Stephenson has shown that he really cares about community colleges and the students who attend them – both in southeast Missouri and at the statewide level. He has built truly remarkable relationships with community leaders, legislative advocates, and higher education colleagues. Those relationships will allow him to continue his work to take Three Rivers to the next level."

"With his leadership and inspiration, Dr. Stephenson has changed everything here, and in a good way," said Stan Cunningham, a retiring Three Rivers math instructor. "He has breathed life into all of us, and we are all better for it. A leader is a pathfinder. Dr. Stephenson has always seen the path, and now the rest of us can see it, too."

"Change is difficult and necessary," said Dr. Mary Lou Brown, Division Chair for Business, Education, Math, Science and Technology at Three Rivers. "Being a leader in the twenty-first century requires courage and a willingness to change. Dr. Stephenson has demonstrated both of those things, and is leading our already-strong institution into the future. You can't just sit on the train tracks. You have to decide to get on the train, or get out of the way. Three Rivers, its students, and this community are all definitely on the

train.”

“This is a renaissance time for the college,” said Stephenson. “Judy and I are eagerly anticipating four more great years of success working with the outstanding team members at the college and with our many partners in this region.”

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