Cabrillo College candidates meet the community

By TODD GUILD

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WATSONVILLE — The public had its chance Tuesday to meet two candidates vying to fill the president's chair at Cabrillo College in forums in the college's Watsonville and Aptos campuses.

The first of four candidate forums at Cabrillo's Watsonville Center drew a sparse crowd who came to hear presentations from Farley Herrick and Dr. Marie-Eilene Burns.

During the half-hour session, each candidate gave a brief introduction and answered a handful of questions from the audience and moderator Rachel Mayo.

Herrick, who currently serves as president of East Los Angeles College, touted his 32 years in education, which includes two decades as an administrator, including time at Long Beach City College and College of the Desert.

“I haven't changed jobs all that much,” he said.

Herrick said he has worked in a smaller “satellite” campus in his career, which he said gives him an understanding of the challenges faced by the Watsonville location.

“I would do my best to assure that the Watsonville Center had everything the Aptos campus has,” he said. “Sometimes satellite campuses fall short of the support services.”

Herrick said he understands the importance of the political process plays in college affairs, and said he has traveled by bus with student representatives to Sacramento to advocate for college legislation.

He said he has lobbied for career and tech education, and more recently for Proposition 30, which imposed temporary taxes to backfill the state's budget deficit and help education.

“I have a great deal of experience working with legislation in Sacramento and Washington,” he said.

When asked how he would work with governing boards and the college as a whole, Herrick responded that he is, “as

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Dr. Marie-Eilene Burns is one of five candidates hoping to become the new president of Cabrillo.

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open forward and honest as can be,” and said he has an open-door policy.

“In L.A. we had six unions and an academic senate,” he said. “Every constituent leader had my personal cell phone number and was urged to call me if issues came up.”

To help keep graduation rates up and assure students going to college, Herrick said Cabrillo should connect with local K-12 schools, as well as the UC and CSU systems.

“Students have to know at a young age that they can be successful in college,” he said. “If you can promote that culture you can capture those students.”

Involving parents, Herrick said, is also important.

Dr. Marie-Eilene Burns, who is currently vice president of student affairs for the San Jose Evergreen Community College District, said she is a first-generation college student and as such understands the struggles many Cabrillo students are facing.

“I am one of the students that Cabrillo represents,” she said.

Burns has been in education for more than 26 years and has worked at several colleges, including San Francisco State University, University of Southern California, CSU at Long Beach, CSU at Dominguez Hills, Los Angeles Harbor College, Hartnell College, Skyline College and Football College.

Burns described herself as a “walking-around manager” who strives to reach out to the college community.

“I think it's important that the president of a college knows who her students are,” she said. “I'm a person who will reach out to the community, and I want to have feedback as to what your needs are and how Cabrillo can serve you.”

Burns said she would represent Cabrillo's interests in Sacramento and keep the community informed about legislation that could affect the college.

She also said she would hold monthly meetings with all the college's constituent groups to get a sense of their needs and to encourage interdepartmental communication.

This includes the classified staff, which she said are usually the first people students meet when they come to campus, and the administrative staff.

“...I would make sure that all those groups feel valued and that they will be heard with respect,” she said. “We have a mission and we should always be on board with that mission.”

Burns also stated the importance of involving parents in their child's education, and to convince families that undocumented students will not be reported to immigration officials.

“We need to talk to underrepresented students about what it means to be a college student and show them that they can balance work and college,” she said. “From that comprehensive approach we can make students feel better about coming to school.”

The remaining three presidential candidate forums will be scheduled for today at the Watsonville and Aptos campuses.

Watsonville Center - Room A150
318 Union Street, Watsonville, CA
10:00 - 10:30 AM: Dr. Pamela Walker
10:45 - 11:15 AM: Dr. Laurel Jones
11:45 AM - 12:15 PM: Dr. Tod Burnett
Aptos Campus - Samper Recital Hall (VAPA 5000)
5000 Soquel Drive, Aptos, CA
12:00 - 12:30 PM: Dr. Pamela Walker
1:00 - 1:30 PM: Dr. Laurel Jones
2:00 - 2:30 PM: Dr. Tod Burnett

Farley Herrick, a presidential candidate for the president of Cabrillo College, answers questions Wednesday at the Cabrillo Watsonville Center.