



**Original campus**

Abandoned and renovated prison buildings made up the original campus of what is now Roanoke-Chowan Community College.

# Born 26 years ago on prison site, RCCC has grown to serve wide area

By Tom Glaviano

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AHOSKIE — Born on the site of the abandoned Union Prison Farm almost 26 years ago, Roanoke-Chowan Community College has grown from a fledgling learning institution offering a handful of basic courses to a vital part of the educational system in the four-county region of Hertford, Bertie, Gates and Northampton.

The college was only a dream until 1960, when Russell Martin, superintendent of Hertford County schools, and the county board of education began working to found an institution that would provide educational opportunities for the Roanoke-Chowan area.

Under the leadership of State Rep. Roberts H. Jernigan Jr. and with the support of State Sen. J.J. "Monk" Harrington and State Rep. Emmett Burden, that dream became a reality.

Established in 1967 as an extension unit of the Department of Community Colleges, Roanoke-Chowan Technical Institute was opened at the renovated prison unit with classes in basic education, nurse's aide and building trades.

Off-campus classes also were held in area churches, stores and community centers. Community interest rapidly surpassed the expectations, and by the end of the first year, 750 students were enrolled in 10 courses that ranged from high school equivalency classes to instruction in commercial sewing machine operation.

From the beginning, the institute sought new educational challenges, with courses ranging from instruction in developmental subjects to industrial program tailored toward employment in local industries.

**First building**

Within a few short years of its birth, the institute filled the confines of the prison buildings and desperately needed additional space. A two-story wooden building was erected in 1969 to house additional classrooms and laboratory spaces for cosmetology, business and architectural drafting programs.

In February, 1974, ground was broken for the Roberts H. Jernigan Jr. Educational Center, the first of four modern buildings. As the need of the school grew and funds were approved, the Julian Pittman Freeman Vocational Education Building, the John W. "Jack" Young Jr. Center and the Hugh Caullic Freeland Industrial Technology Training Center followed. Of the first structures, only the two-story remains.

While the facilities were growing to reflect the mission of the school, the curriculum was growing even more dramatically. When the school

opened, the first course offered was instruction in nurse's aide. In the fall of 1969, a course in Licensed Practical Nursing began; then in the fall of 1980, a two-year nursing education options program was started, granting an associate degree and enabling students to prepare for careers as registered nurses.

In March, 1981, the Hertford County Board of Commissioners voted to change the name of the school to Roanoke-Chowan Technical College to better reflect the growth and the capabilities and offering of the institution.

**Curriculum grows**

While the developmental and vocational courses remain an integral part of the school's mission, the curriculum expanded with associate level courses offered in such areas as architectural technology, business administration, early childhood education and general education.

The curriculum growth of the institution was just a glimmer of the changes yet to come. In October, 1987, the name was changed to Roanoke-Chowan Community College. As it grew, the college tried to address the educational and developmental needs of the people.

Literacy programs, both on and off campus, have enabled area adults to enroll in basic education courses. Last year, 96 students received their high school diploma certificate.

About 2,000 students enroll in continuing education courses each quarter, expanding their education and enriching their lives through such courses as sign language, cake decorating, photography, emergency medical training and ceramics.

Through cooperative agreements with other area educational institutions, students can complete work on an even wider range of offerings.

**Cooperative contracts**

For instance, in cooperation with Pitt Community College in Greenville, students interested in radiological technology careers can complete some of their general and related courses at RCCC, and obtain some of their clinical training at Roanoke-Chowan Hospital.

A general education program is offered through contractual agreement with East Carolina University in Greenville and a transfer agreement was initiated with Elizabeth City State University and Chowan College in Murfreesboro, following its rise to four-year status.

Enrollment growth has been dramatic over the past 10 years. In August, 1992, 876 students enrolled in curricular programs, a 45 percent increase over the August, 1982 total of 601 students. In 1992, 154 students graduated from the curriculum program, compared to 118 in 1982. A total of 3,408 students enrolled in non-credit

courses in the 1991-92 school year.

**Small Business Center**

The Small Business Center takes the college's educational objectives straight to the heart of the area's business sector, offering seminars and managerial expertise to help meet the needs of small businesses and individuals interested in launching new businesses.

The center also oversees the Ahoskie-based Regional Small Business Incubator, which provides low-rent space and technical assistance to new small businesses in their first critical years.

Incubator tenants include Pizzazz, Fielders Choice Sports Cards & Collectibles and Health Services Personnel. Former tenants included Stuch Count and Super Vac.

The welfare of another faction of the community was addressed when the Roanoke-Chowan Sheltered Workshop and Evaluation Center was begun in March, 1975, under the direction of the institute. The center, now named Roanoke-Chowan Industries, provides vocational evaluation and adjustment for physically, mentally and emotionally disabled adults, assisting in making their lives and employment opportunities as full as possible.

As the world moved into the hi-tech computer age, the college kept pace. The Learning Resources Center, which houses the library, an alternative learning center, audio-visuals and a computer-assisted instruction lab, was the first LRC in the state's community college system to have a computerized card catalog. All of the LRC's services are open to the public.

J.W. "Jack" Young Jr., a former teacher, coach and principal in the Hertford County system, headed the institution as its first president.

Three men have served as president since Young's retirement in 1980. They are Dr. Edward H. Wilson Jr., now the president of Wayne Community College in Goldsboro; Dr. David W. Sink Jr.,

now president at Blue Ridge Community College in Flat Rock; and Dr. Harold Mitchell, the current president.

The college has come a long way since the first students came. But the progress to date is just a hint of what the future will hold.

As Ahoskie prepares to enter its second century, Roanoke-Chowan Community College will join it every step of the way, preparing its citizens for the technological advances and meeting the educational challenges of the future head-on.

## AGS was opened in 1956

AHOSKIE — The Ahoskie Graded School was constructed in three phases with the first wing opening in 1956.

The school was built to relieve the overcrowded conditions at the old Ahoskie High School and remained under the control of AHS Principal A. Woodrow Taylor.

The building, which accommodated grades 1-3, consisted of 10 classrooms, cafeteria and kitchen.

The second wing was opened in 1959 and contained 10 classrooms, library, gymnasium and office suite. The school consisted of grades 1-6


with Donald Newsome as principal.

The school remained with this organization until 1970, when total integration brought grades 1-4 in the Ahoskie school district to the school and transferred grades 5-6 to R.L. Vann School. In 1971, the fourth grade was moved to Vann.

The third wing of the school was opened in 1977 to replace several mobile units and to accommodate the state-supported kindergarten, which had occupied the gymnasium the previous year. The organization was now a K-3 school.

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