Wake up, Tucson, with Joe Higgins and Chris DeSimone on 1030 KVOI, The Voice.

[host] All-righty. 790-2040 is the number, WakeUpTucson@gmail.com. Of course you can watch all our shenanigans on Facebook. If you can’t find us you’ve got problems.

Let’s go right to the phones. We have PCC, Pima Community College, Chancellor Lee Lambert making his debut.

Lee, good morning. Welcome to the show, sir.

[Lambert] Good morning and great to be on the show.

[host] Thanks for having us.

[host] So Lee, a little bit background about yourself and how you came to Tucson and where you are from.

[Lambert] Well, I’m one of those rare individuals where I spent most of my life living on 3 continents because my father was in the U.S. Army.

[host] Ok

[Lambert] So he decided to retire at Fort Lewis which took us to Washington State, where I spent most of my adult life – working and getting my education. My last post prior to coming to Tucson was at Shoreline Community College where I was the president for a little over 7 years including an interim step.

[host] So how big was Shoreline and, in comparison, how big is Pima College, just to put some perspective on it?

[Lambert] So Shoreline is 10,000 for credit students and about 10,000 not-for-credit students, so our total headcount around 20,000. And at Pima it can range from 60 to 75,000.

[host] OK. OK.

[Lambert] about a third
OK, so to put in perspective folks, I’m looking at the budget for Pima College. It’s about 200 million bucks or so - 207 or so last year - partially paid from property tax assessments on everyone in Pima County and partially paid through tuition and fees from the students. You do all kinds of programs – in fact I went to Pima myself and that helped me get through the 4-year college, university. It’s a great step, to have more intimate classroom sizes, more for those perfunctory courses that you have got to get out of the way, and it worked for me. You’ve got lots of folks who are in automobile and aircraft and cooking and all kinds of different skills that are needed in our community.

Absolutely. I’m glad to hear that you went to Pima.

Yeah, it was back in the 80’s – 87, 89, 88 – something

I did my financial accounting and stats class there because it’s a good way to get them. I did that summer one: let’s burn it out in 5 weeks, don’t waste a whole semester of my life on that stuff.

And look at me now, Lee, I’m on AM radio in the morning. That’s how far I could come with a Pima background.

Nothing wrong with that.

Nothing wrong with that at all.

Reaching the public that’s very important

So one of the big issues that you’ve kind of inherited is the accreditation and the probation from the regulatory agency. How’s that coming along, or what are some of the benchmarks. How is that happening?

So let me give a broader context for a moment. Probation is not necessarily a good thing or a bad thing. It’s what you do with it that will determine if it is good or bad. I think this is really an opportunity for us at Pima to really step back and really take a closer look at what are we doing right and where do we need to improve. So I look at it in that context.

With that said also, students and parents should not worry because probation does not mean you’re your students will not be able to have access to financial aid, does not mean that you cannot transfer your credits to one of the three universities in the state of Arizona or to other credit-granting or degree-granting institutions that are accredited. So that’s the good news – it doesn’t strike a negative against the students and parents shouldn’t worry about that piece.

With that said, we have to take this seriously, and we have been taking this very seriously. We’ve gone through an assessment phase, did a gap analysis and determined where do we need to work on to improve. Some of that was identified for us by the Higher Learning Commission. Some of the other areas we have identified through our own self-study, etc. Now we are in that phase of fine-tuning those areas where we know we must put in place an effective plan, show progress to meeting the goals
related to those plans, and then evaluate the effectiveness of our execution as we’re moving forward. And there are about 19 areas where we really feel that we’ve got to strengthen what we’re doing.

[host] So it’s not as bad as Dean Wormer giving you “double-secret probation” is what you’re saying.

[Lambert] Right. That’s right.

[host] Very good.

[Lambert] I’m not saying it’s not bad

[host] laughter

[Lambert] in the sense, you know probation can have a negative connotation. It means you better take it serious and you better start to look at what you can do to do better and earn the confidence of your community, the accreditors and of your peer institutions. So I don’t want to downplay that.

[host] Right.

[host 2] Let’s talk about, one of the big things we’ve talked about is you have the local high schools that are graduating students that have to go through, it seems like, an inordinate amount of remediation when they get to either Pima or the U of A. So as a guy who’s done this for awhile, coming from Shoreline, what do you seeing in relation to what are the local schools in Tucson sending you and how much time and money are we spending on remediation. Is it an appropriate amount, or too much or too little? What?

[Lambert] So again we have to look at this in a larger context. This is a nation-wide challenge that we have. This isn’t just a Tucson challenge, this is a national challenge. From the state in which I came from we could have 80-85% of our students coming out of the K-12 system testing into remedial education courses - that number being higher than what I’ve heard here in Tucson. You don’t think of Seattle in that way but think about it for a moment. It’s more than what the area high schools are doing. There’s a systemic problem that we’ve got to step back and take a look at as a nation and as a local community. So with that said, you’re right. There are a number of our students coming in testing at pre-college, pre-career-readiness levels, either needing a brush-up in reading or writing or mathematics, in many cases mathematics being the most difficult of the three.

There’s a cost associated with that, I can’t give you an exact number at this point in terms of what the cost is, but the cost goes beyond just the dollars and cents – it’s the cost to our community of individuals not ready to go into the workplace and perform the needed services that we have in the community. The great opportunities, whether it’s in automotive, whether it’s in aviation and the other programs you explained. So the cost goes beyond just what we as taxpayers have to support in an effort to bring those students in. The other way to look at it: if we don’t do it, the cost will be far more enormous. That’s because the larger piece around the skills gap challenge that not only the community in Tucson faces, but our nation faces.
[host] Hey Lee, where are we as a community, let’s just start with the math number now. Where are we coming in math-level-wise, the average student that is coming out of a Tucson high school and applying to Pima. Where are they coming in about?

[Lambert] They’re coming in, and I don’t think of it in terms of grade-level, I don’t look at it that way, so some students are coming in probably one to two levels off of being ready to enter college-level work. So in the cases where they’re one level off, that’s something that you can remediate more successfully. If you start to get two to three levels off, then it becomes more challenging to get someone to that important starting line.

[host] Well and I think that there is a real conversation on the national level going on about the role of student debt and these big huge universities and should every kid go to university and get a 4-year degree, should we look at more technical-type trainings and what’s the fit for everyone. I think that’s where Pima gives you that all-encompassing step. There’s a track to go to college, there’s a track to get a trade, that kind of thing.

[Lambert] Let me say one thing, another piece going back to the earlier point. There are other solutions that we can deploy, that we really haven’t done at Pima, that I think can make a big difference in moving students to that college and career-readiness line. For example, I-BEST, which from my former experience was very successful. Bringing students into integrated basic education skills training program contextualized to the program of study. As an example: you would be an aviation student, you would not be a developmental education student, and in aviation we would integrate developmental education as part of your learning. By doing that we found success rates just shoot off the page.

[host] Right.

[host] We’re on with Pima Community College Chancellor Lee Lambert. If you have a quick question 790-2040. Hey we, one of the big things we’ve been dealing with on this show for 5 years now is TUSD, Sunnyside, what they’re doing to get their kids ready. What is the role of a community college like Pima in relation to helping those institutions get those kids better ready for post-high school life.

[Lambert] I think it comes back to something that I’ve said in the community, and that is to talk about how do we align and engage better with all facets of our partners in the community. As we look at the K-12 in this instance, looking at what’s working between us, what’s not working between us, and looking at that gap and saying how can we improve that pipeline if you will. One example of that is could we allow pre-assessment to occur at the K-12 level so the students would earlier on identify their gaps. In doing that our K-12 partners could start to address those gaps more fully with the individuals. That’s one example. Another example is looking at how do we strengthen the dual enrollment piece and start to bring more of that college-level requirements and standards into the high schools to better prepare students as they transition to us. Can we strengthen those things. I think part of that engagement piece and then aligning what we do with what they do so that the path becomes a little bit more seamless.

[host] One of the things the governor has put into place is a real check-and-balance spot at the third-grade level, and again I think you’ll see those happen at different stages. One thing that got mentioned
a couple of years ago, if you remember this Chris, if you think of it at the K-12 level at, say, 10,000 a year is what we’re paying from federal to state to property taxes to put a child through K-12, that’s 120,000 bucks. Someone proposed in the state legislature why don’t we do a charge-back if that student comes not prepared into a college situation or Pima College, then charge back the school district, give that money to Pima to remediate them back up to the space. Kind of out-of-the-box thinking but we’re making this tremendous investment and if the results aren’t there what do we do to help.

[host] Five TUSD administrations just had a seizure. [laughter] Charge-backs we call them in the private world. [laughter]

[Lambert] But again, I think the problem is much more systemic than even that as a solution. I’ll give you an example. If you’re not reading at grade-level by the time you get to fourth-grade, we know your ability to be successful – to graduate high school and go to college – is cut significantly. Part of that challenge is, as a young child within your first few years you need to be exposed to about 3 million words. Well that is happening not at the K-12 system, that’s happening in the home.

[host] Oh, you’re going to the role of the parents. You are so right, Lee.

[Lambert] So what are we doing to make sure we address the home environment so the first teacher of that young child is the parents, and the parents are better equipped? Because if they don’t come ready then it puts a huge burden on our K-12 system, and then to put them in a position where we are going to penalize them for not being successful when the problem is more systemic. We’ve got to think about that.

[host] Hey, Lee. Honey Boo Boo’s on tonight so we’re going to be a little busy with the whole kid thing.

[host] Hey, Lee. We’ve run out of time. We’d love for you come into the studio and stretch with us and go deep on this stuff. We appreciate you calling in from I guess, how cold is it in Florida today?

[Lambert] So I’m in Tampa, the St. Petersburg area, I haven’t gone outside yet but the weather’s not too bad.

[host] OK. Like I said we’ll arrange to have you come in-studio in the next month or so we can go a little deeper and longer.

[Lambert] OK. I’d enjoy that

[host] I appreciate the call in. That is Pima Community College Chancellor Lee Lambert, we will see him very soon.

[host] Yes, Joe.

[Joe] So to set this up, prior administration, prior board, where this all started to get into recalls and a pickle. The Board said: Look; we’re remediating down too low; we’re remediating into the fifth-grade or seventh-grade. I forget the number.
[host] It was the eighth.

[Joe] It was the eighth, what ever. And we look at our cost-benefit of all that money that we’re putting into remediation and 95% of it isn’t, only 5% of the kids are making it through the process. So we’re putting all this money in to remediate these kids, and it’s maybe not the right fit. Maybe they should go into different areas of skill training instead of College route.

[Joe] So they made a Board policy change to not remediate that low, to not invest that money that low, and it caused a big furor and storm immediately around Team Grijalva because a lot of those folks, because student loans are involved and grants and opportunities and all those kind of things. So as a cost-benefit analysis that the Board did, got them in a pickle, that’s caused this recall.

[host] This recall thing - there are so many bigger fish to fry and the house is on fire, the horse is already down in the other county, and SALC wants to come out and go, “Let’s do a recall.”

[host] You got a new chancellor, you got policies, you got all this stuff getting fixed.

[host] Work on TUSD. SALC get a life.

[host] Again 120 grand by the time you get through high school is what we’ve invested in the education of these kids.

[host] Alright. The heavy duty guests continue. The dude is coming up next, Paul Cunningham, John McCain in about 15 minutes. “Wake Up Tucson” 1030 The Voice.

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