

Michael Goforth: Taking a tour of Indian River State College

By Michael Goforth

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Take a walk with me. It's a warm, sunny day and a slight breeze is blowing.

This is the Fort Pierce campus of Indian River State College, celebrating its 50th anniversary this weekend.

Looking across the campus and the modern buildings, it's hard to believe the school started out with 65 acres on a former landfill donated by the city of Fort Pierce and included only an administration/classroom building, a science building, a maintenance building and a locker room for physical education.

The campus is so large today, we won't have time to visit each facility, but we can look at a few of the most significant. We'll start at the Ben L. Bryan Sr. Administration Building. This is where Ed Massey, the school's third president, has his office and all of the big decisions are made. It's here where the ideas take shape that eventually become a reality on this campus and at the school's four other campuses on the Treasure Coast.

Behind this is the Koblegard Student Union, which includes a bookstore and cafeteria. It's a good place to pick up a book by historian Ada Coats Williams, the former IRSC English and creative writing teacher and professor emeritus who just celebrated her 90th birthday, or to meet someone for a quick lunch. I've done both.

Nearby are the Business Development Center and the National City Careers Building/Corporate and Community Training Center. IRSC has had a long history of working with businesses and training and retraining employees.

A few steps away are the gymnasium and the Anne Wilder Aquatic Complex, named for my late friend and fellow columnist Anne Wilder, who also was a remarkable senior swimming competitor. This is where the IRSC swimming and diving teams train and compete as they continue an unprecedented string of national championships.

Doubling back, we come to the Brenda and Vernon Smith Center for Medical Education. This actually is a branch of Florida State University where the university's medical students come to complete their training to become doctors.

Nearby is the Mary L. Fields Health Science Center. This is where many, if not most, of the nurses and medical technicians who work in hospitals and clinics on the Treasure Coast get their training.

Behind the science center is the Kight Center for Emerging Technologies. There is a huge “wow” factor to this high-tech facility that is considered one of the most advanced in the nation. This is the home to cutting-edge programs in photonics, robotics and cyber security. It’s also home to the school’s new Digital Media Institute.

Taking a short walk north, we come to radio station WQCS, the award-winning public radio station serving the Treasure Coast with nationally syndicated programs such as “All Things Considered” and “A Prairie Home Companion,” as well as locally produced news and cultural programming.

Nearby is the science center and Hallstrom Planetarium. How many communities have their own planetariums, and with an award-winning director in Jon Bell? That’s quite an asset for the area.

Next on our tour is the McAlpin Fine Arts Center, a cultural mecca for college and professional performances. Some may be surprised to learn what strong programs the college has in theater arts, music and dance. I’ve seen such performers as Manhattan Transfer and Judy Collins.

Before we end our tour, we should take one of the college’s golf carts to the 50-acre Treasure Coast Public Safety Training Complex, one of the nation’s leading training centers for police, fire, antiterrorism and disaster relief training. It’s an amazing facility that’s attracting international attention.

Happy birthday, IRSC. You’ve come a remarkably long way.

Follow Goforth’s blog at tcpalm.com/goforth. Contact him at (772) 409-1332 or michael.goforth@scripps.com.



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