“Head Start Celebrates 50 Years”

Lower Columbia College will celebrate 50 years of Head Start with a gala celebration on April 21st. The college has offered Head Start services since 1972 and today provides free preschool, medical and dental services, mental health, social services, nutrition, and parent engagement to 532 pregnant women and children from birth to age 4. The first classroom was at Kessler Elementary School and served 18 children. Today 28 classrooms are located in Longview, Kelso, and Castle Rock.

The 50th Anniversary dinner will be held at the Cowlitz County Expo Center beginning at 5:30 p.m. Tickets for the dinner and event are $30 and are available by calling (360) 442-2840.

The celebration on April 21st will recognize the contributions of early childhood education programs and family services in our community. Past and current parents served by Head Start will also share what the program has meant to them. Joel Ryan, Director of the Washington State Head Start Association, will provide the keynote remarks on the history and impact of Head Start.

Head Start was born during the “War on Poverty” movement started by President Lyndon Johnson. It was a time in history for adoption of the Food Stamp Act, Job Corps, VISTA, the Elementary and Secondary Education Act, Community Action Programs, and legal services. More than 8 million children have been enrolled in Head Start across
the nation since its inception. The Lower Columbia College Head Start expanded its program in the 1980’s with the addition of the state-funded Early Childhood Education and Assistance Program (ECEAP). Six years ago the Early Head Start program was started, which provides services for pregnant women and infants and toddlers to age three.

“If we want to improve the health of the county, we need to invest in the education of our children”, said Paul Youmans, Director of Pathways 2020. He noted that while the programs are able to serve nearly 50% of the eligible three and four year olds locally, more than 800 go unserved each year.

Head Start Director Sandy Junker noted, “The success of the programs comes from the efforts to make the parents the primary teachers of their children. The successes come from a dedicated staff, parents, volunteers, and supportive community agencies.”

LCC President Chris Bailey will recognize the Wollenberg Foundation and NORPAC employees for their long and significant contributions to Head Start at the anniversary celebration. Their generosity has provided additional classroom space, equipment for children with disabilities, warm coats and mittens during the winter, and medical and dental care. NORPAC was recognized in 2011 as the national business partner of the year by Head Start.

Head Start is now enrolling children for fall classes. Families can call (360) 442-2800 for more information.

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