

Date: Oct 14, 2011; Section: Front Page; Page: A1

Skagit Valley College chooses a new president

By AARON BURKHALTER

Staff Writer

MOUNT VERNON — Peninsula College President Thomas Keegan will take the reins at Skagit Valley College in January.

The college's board of trustees Wednesday selected Keegan from among three finalists to replace outgoing President Gary Tollefson, who announced his retirement earlier this year.

Keegan was chosen over Spokane Community College President Joseph Dunlap and Ron Langrell, president of Riverland Community College in Minnesota.

At public forums Oct. 6 and 7, Keegan talked about his success garnering \$15 million in grants over six years by partnering with local industry. He worked with local manufacturing companies to build a new composites program at Peninsula College.

Keegan attended Skagit Valley College from 1976 to 1978. He told participants at a forum Oct. 6 in Oak Harbor that it was in a classroom at Skagit Valley College that he decided to major in psychology.

That experience was in the forefront of his mind when he accepted the position this week. "I was struck by the fact that while the buildings are different and the faces are different, that culture of student success was the exact same feel I had in the 1970s," Keegan said Thursday.

Keegan has been president of Peninsula College for the past decade, and the college was selected as a model college by The Partnership for Native American College Access and Success.

Keegan said community colleges must reach out to students who do not traditionally participate in higher education. But he said schools won't find funding to help from the state or federal government.

"I think we're looking to public-private partnerships," Keegan said. "I don't think we can wait for public funding."

Skagit Valley College Board of Trustees Chair Debra Lisser said Keegan was the right fit for the college, citing that he received his associate of arts degree from Skagit.

"In a lot of respects, we feel like he is coming home," Lisser said. "He's a top-notch candidate, and we're very, very lucky to have him coming to Skagit Valley Community College."



Keegan