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# Skagit Valley Herald

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Frank Varga / Skagit Valley Herald

**Dr. Thomas Keegan** took office as the new Skagit Valley College president on Monday.

## Keegan begins work as SVC president

By **ERINN UNGER**  
Staff Writer

Skagit Valley College President Thomas Keegan has gone back to his roots, looking out at the school he used to attend from the broad windows of his new office.

Keegan attended the college from 1976-78, playing on the college's soccer team as a forward and baseball team as a shortstop, and then came back to Mount Vernon as a graduate intern at the school while pursuing his master's

at Western Washington University in Bellingham.

Keegan returned to Mount Vernon on March 12 after being selected in November to replace retiring President Gary Tollefson.

"It was in the classroom and on the athletic fields and in my meetings with my advisors and coaches and mentors that I decided I wanted to be a community college professional," Keegan said. "I didn't know exactly what I wanted to do, but I came here with really little or no concept of what aca-

demic discipline I wanted to study, and I left here two years later completely passionate about that discipline."

He's been in the community-college system in Washington for 33 years, most recently as president at Peninsula College in Port Angeles.

"I've always kept track of Skagit Valley College," he said. "It has a special place in my heart."

During his first week, Keegan's days have been filled with meeting people

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# Keegan

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and learning about the college's issues. He expects that process to be ongoing and will refine the vision for the school.

"My job is to listen, learn, refine, and respect the culture and respect the values of the college and community," he said.

He defined his leadership style as governed by a short list of basic principles: teaching and learning, collaboration, respect, integrity and open and

honest communication. In the spirit of these, he plans to hold a monthly meeting with staff and faculty on both of the college's campuses — Mount Vernon and Oak Harbor — and focus on topics and share information that can't be explored through just an e-mail.

He'll be looking for valuable feedback, he said.

The transition has been smooth, he said, and the community has been welcoming. Peninsula College was named a model college by The Partnership for Native American College Access and Success during his tenure, and after a farewell ceremony from tribes

on the Peninsula, the local tribes have reached out to him. Likewise, he is excited to reach out to the community.

"The college community and the Board of Trustees are extremely pleased," said Debra Lisser, chair of the Board of Trustees, adding that Keegan is "well-known as an innovator," and that's important in times of cuts in funding to schools.

There will be an official welcome in May, Lisser said.

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■ Erinn Unger can be reached at 360-416-2141 or at [eunger@skagitpublishing.com](mailto:eunger@skagitpublishing.com). Follow her on Twitter at [www.twitter.com/schools\\_svh](http://www.twitter.com/schools_svh).