Thirty years ago, local voters approved the creation of the first public higher education institution in Collin County. Three decades later, Collin College is a powerhouse for higher education adding $528.5 million to the local economy annually with countless alumni now employed locally and around the world.

As the college celebrates its 30th anniversary, the Board of Trustees is proud to introduce the third district president of Collin College, Dr. Neil Matkin. He came to Collin County from the Louisiana Community and Technical College System, where he served as executive vice president. Prior to his post in Louisiana, Dr. Matkin served as president of the Central Campus of San Jacinto College and served in a variety of administrative and staff roles with the Virginia Community College System, the Illinois Board of Higher Education and Ambassador University. He holds both an Associate of Arts and a Bachelor of Arts from Ambassador College as well as a Master of Science degree from Golden Gate University, a Master of Business Administration degree from the University of Dallas and a Doctorate of Education from Texas A&M University-Commerce.

Entering a new era, the college celebrates the spirit that inspired 500 volunteers in the mid-1980s to get involved and go door-to-door gathering more than 25,000 signatures on a petition for an election that would become the second-youngest community college in Texas. In the fall of 1985, about 1,500 eager students stepped into classrooms for the first time. This year, nearly 52,000 students will attend Collin College's seven campuses and locations. At the same time, the tax rate has stayed low, and tuition is the lowest in the state of Texas.

This special edition newsletter gives a glimpse into the college's legacy through a salute to Collin College alumni. In the following pages, you will see stories of four amazing individuals. Collin College is proud to welcome them to The Pride, the new association for the college's alumni and friends. Success stories like Chad, Michael, Laura and Ben will be the cornerstone of a new awareness campaign called “Promise. Power. Pride.” in which alumni from all walks of life explain how Collin College helped them unlock their PROMISE, seize the POWER of higher education and experience the PRIDE of professional accomplishment made possible by their degrees.

Three decades flew by very quickly, but thanks to the foresight of Collin County citizens, aspiring students today have access to one of the finest community colleges in the nation. This is only the beginning, and we hope you will join in the celebration as Collin College springboards into the next era.
College launches alumni association

It’s official! To commemorate the 30th anniversary, Collin College and the Collin College Foundation have officially announced the formation of The Pride, the official association for alumni and friends.

The Pride will foster lifelong relationships among alumni and offer benefits to members, including discount cards, invitations to special events and eventually career networking opportunities.

“The mission of the Pride is to keep alumni and friends connected to each other, to Collin College and to the Collin College Foundation. The Pride will also help further the mission of the college and foundation while contributing to a vibrant community,” said Patricia Gregory, who directs alumni relations for the college.

Based on results from an alumni survey, the first signature event for the association will be a 5K and 1K fun run, scheduled for April 9, 2016, at the Preston Ridge Campus in Frisco. Proceeds from the event will fund alumni activities as well as scholarships for current Collin College students.

The Pride is open to all alumni and friends, regardless of how many hours completed at the college, and registering for The Pride is free. As membership in the alumni association grows, there will be opportunities for alumni to volunteer at events as well as board and committee service.

If you or someone you know attended Collin College, show your support by contacting Patricia Gregory at pgregory@collin.edu or 972.599.3146 or register for The Pride at www.collin.edu/alumni.

Bluebonnets declared official flower as 30th anniversary tribute to alumni

On May 27, 2014, the Collin College Board of Trustees declared the Texas Bluebonnet as the college’s official flower. The flower’s royal blue petals topped by a crown of white parallel the college’s official colors, and the flowers bloom each spring just prior to commencement as a prelude to a new class of graduates and a tribute to alumni.

An enthusiastic group of trustees, alumni, students, faculty and staff dubbed the “Blue Crew” (pictured at right) volunteered to plant bluebonnets at campuses throughout the district last summer. Special thanks to founding trustee Dr. J. Robert Collins and his wife Claude Ann for donating native bluebonnet seeds from their farm for the first planting at the college’s original campus, Central Park Campus, in McKinney.

Right on cue, the bluebonnets bloomed this April, and leaders look forward to welcoming the community to campus for family photos each spring as the bluebonnets mature.

The bluebonnet is well known as the state flower of Texas, and bluebonnets are now a local symbol of higher education, because, as Lady Bird Johnson once said, “Where flowers bloom, so does hope.”
Driving his beat-up, old Chevy Silverado to Washington D.C., the month after graduating from Southern Methodist University (SMU), Chad Wolf knew he had a few things. He had the dream of working in public service. He had a love of history and government that fueled that dream. He had a strong educational foundation that first began taking shape at Collin College. There were a couple of things he didn’t have, though.

“I didn’t have a job, and I didn’t have a place to stay,” Wolf said. “A friend was going to let me sleep on the floor.”

Armed with a stack of resumes, Wolf spent his first week in D.C. walking around Capitol Hill trying to meet with as many staff members of the Texas delegation as he could. Eventually, he landed a job in Sen. Phil Gramm’s (R-TX) office answering phones.

That job was the start of a rapid rise in Washington D.C. for the Plano native, who has worked in two branches of government, has been recognized for his security policy work on the national stage and has spent the last nine years helping others get things done in the Capitol with Wexler|Walker, a public policy strategy firm. Wolf is quick to point out that the things he has accomplished in his life are a culmination of experiences, including two-and-a-half years studying history and political science at SMU, his time in the public sector and his work building an effective private sector business, but he traces the start of that road to the time he spent at Collin College.

“The two years at Collin laid the foundation to build upon,” he said. “A lot of what I do and a lot of the institutions I deal with, I was introduced to at Collin through different coursework.”

A graduate of Plano East Senior High, Wolf came to Collin on a tennis scholarship.

“I knew that my time at Collin had an expiration date, and I wanted to make sure I was prepared academically for whatever university I chose to finish my studies,” he said.

Wolf had an idea that he wanted to study history and government, and that was only reinforced by the classes he took at Collin. He appreciated the storytelling aspect of history and the way that government influences and shapes our daily lives.

“[It is good] just understanding and having that perspective of those who came before you, how the country was founded, the manner in which the government operates and the impact it has on the way we live,” he said.

That’s not to say history was the only thing he learned at Collin. Wolf credits the college with teaching him the basics of reading critically and writing persuasively, something he has continued to develop and uses every day as a vice president at Wexler|Walker.

He also learned the importance of putting real effort into his work, thanks to a freshman sociology class.

“The lectures were fun and interesting, but I had failed to take a lot of detailed notes,” he said. “Well, when the first exam came along, that was my college ‘wake up’ call that I needed to apply myself if I wanted to excel at Collin and beyond. Things went smoother after that incident. With most things in life, you get out what you put in. I put a great deal of work in at Collin and believe I benefited greatly from the personal attention by the professors and staff.”

Wolf said another memorable instructor sparked his interest in pursuing a history major and political science minor.

continued on page 7
Star from deep in the heart of Texas

Michael Urie
Broadway, Television and Film Actor, Director, Producer
Alumnus of Collin College and The Juilliard School
Drama Desk Award, Best Solo Performance
Lucille Lortel Award for Outstanding Lead Actor
John Houseman Prize for Excellence in Classical Theatre

From the bright lights of Broadway, one Texas star has brought his shining talents back to his home roots.

Collin College alumnus and actor Michael Urie, famous for his role as fashion assistant Marc St. James on the Golden Globe Award-winning TV show “Ugly Betty,” recently brought his one-man show to Dallas for a special hometown finale.

“It’s always great to be home in Dallas,” Urie said. “There’s no place like it.”

Urie’s critically-acclaimed show “Buyer and Cellar” featured his award-winning performance as a struggling actor who works in Barbra Streisand’s basement in Malibu. For his first foray into completing a solo show, Urie had to overcome challenges.

“It can be tough to be alone on stage for so long without a break,” Urie said. “The audience is really the other character in the play, and every night the audience is different. I’m so excited I was able to bring the show to Dallas and perform for the home crowd.”

The Plano native first got his theatrical start at Collin College, performing in “God’s Country,” “Sylvia,” “Locked Away” and “Titus Andronicus.” Now a member of the Collin Theatre Center Hall-of-Fame, Urie said Collin College professor Brad Baker, a U.S. Professor of the Year, was the person who first motivated him to apply for admission to The Juilliard School.

“Brad was the first person who told me to think about Juilliard,” Urie said. “It wasn’t really on my radar before that, but he believed in me and encouraged me to apply. That decision changed my life.”

Urie was accepted to the legendary fine arts school and graduated with the 2002 John Houseman Prize for Excellence in Classical Theatre.

After Juilliard, he hit big both on-screen and on-stage, and his work in the entertainment industry has taken him all over the world.

In addition to his unforgettable part in “Ugly Betty,” Urie played a role in the film “Uptown Girls” and was nominated for the Best Actor Award for his work in the independent post-September 11 film “WTC View.” He also performed in numerous plays, films and commercials.

For the off-Broadway production of “The Temeraritnals,” Urie earned the Lucille Lortel Award for Outstanding Lead Actor. In 2012, he made his Broadway debut in “How to Succeed in Business Without Really Trying” opposite Nick Jonas and Beau Bridges.

“Collin College really gives you that solid foundation in the world of theatre and how production works,” Urie explained. “Everything from the acting to the lighting and design is top-notch. Everyone treats things seriously and acts professionally, which helps greatly when you go out into the real world.”

Collin College’s theatre department is the proud home to many distinguished alumni, including actor and Tony Award nominee Brian J. Smith, as well as actor Scott Michael Foster from the TV show “Greek,” in addition to numerous others who are working in theatre, film and television.

Currently, Urie is broadening his horizons, as he directed his first film and also starred in “He’s Way More Famous Than You.” He also guest starred on the Emmy Award-winning sitcom “Modern Family.”

While he’s accomplished plenty in his impressive career, Urie looks forward to the future with more work in front of and behind the camera.

“I’m most proud of the fact that I’ve been able to create my own work,” Urie said. “As actors, we can’t work until we get the opportunity. Writers can write what they want and painters can paint what they want anytime. Actors have to be given the opportunity. I’ve been lucky to find my own way.”

For more information about Collin College’s theatre program, visit www.collintheatrecenter.com/home.htm.
Laura Perdomo has more than one reason to look back at Collin College with fond memories. As she reflects on how the college helped her reach her dream of becoming a pharmacist, she is also celebrating a new chapter in her life with a marriage to her high school sweetheart and fellow Collin College alumnus Matt Miller. The two were so excited that they took their engagement photos among the brick arches of Collin College’s beautiful Central Park Campus.

Perdomo’s special bond with Collin College began when both her brother and mom attended Collin and shared their positive experiences.

“I knew that the education was high quality, and it was affordable for a family that had three college students,” said Perdomo.

In fact, her family’s endorsement of the college was so positive that Perdomo was eager to get her education started and stepped foot onto campus at Collin College just one month out of high school.

Her interest in the pharmaceutical industry started while she attended McKinney North High School. During her time there she researched multiple fields, such as architecture and law, but once she volunteered at the Medical Center of McKinney, she realized she found the perfect fit.

“I really loved the environment that I came into every day. The people were great, and I really felt like I could grow,” said Perdomo.

As quickly as she started at Collin College, Perdomo also got a position working as a pharmacy technician at a local Target. Perdomo fell in love with the profession. However, becoming a certified “Pharm.D.” pharmacist would take roughly eight years of education, as well as passing the rigorous North American Pharmacist Licensure Examination.

Nonetheless, Perdomo accepted the challenge ahead of her and claims she was prepared thanks to the top-notch education that the college offers. She specifically remembers one professor who influenced her the most, Dr. Amina El-Ashmawy, a Collin College professor of chemistry who was honored this year by the Minnie Stevens Piper Foundation as one of Texas’ best instructors.

“Dr. El-Ashmawy taught her courses based upon the American Chemical Society certification standards,” Perdomo said. “ACS certified programs are considered to be the top in the nation, and to be learning at that level in an introductory course was Dr. El-Ashmawy’s choice to provide her students with the best learning materials. When I got to my senior-level organic chemistry courses at the University of North Texas, we were required to take the ACS exam as our final, and I remember how many students in the course were completely unprepared for how challenging it would be. For me, I had already learned to study for that kind of exam, and I really felt ahead of my peers.”

The standard of education was not the only thing that got her ready for the future. Her involvement as a student assistant helped her grow as an individual, as well as continue to develop a bond with Collin College.

Like her mother before her, Perdomo worked for the college’s art gallery at the Spring Creek Campus and later as a student assistant for the faculty. While working there, she met Betty Siber, who recently retired as a professor of art history and the director of galleries.

“Laura was an exceptional student,” Siber recalls. “She was very focused, made goals and went the extra mile. She wouldn’t be where she is if she weren’t.”

Perdomo grinned, “If there is one thing that all Collin College professors had in common, it was a passion for teaching,” she said.

After graduating from Collin, Perdomo continued her studies at The University of North Texas in Denton, where she completed her prerequisites for pharmacy school. She was then accepted into the Texas Tech University Health Science Center School of Pharmacy in Dallas. She recently completed her final year of schooling and graduated from the Doctorate of Pharmacy (Pharm.D.) program.
President Harry Truman sits visibly agitated at a desk, turning this way and that, unable to find a comfortable sitting position before getting up and going to a window, where he looks out over Potsdam, Germany.

Startled by a knock at the door, he jumps, then invites the man standing there into the office. It is clear he was lost in thought, torn as we see moments later, by his decision to use the atomic bomb to end World War II.

“I’m going to be known as the president who murdered thousands of innocent people,” he says, lamenting the loss of the citizens of Hiroshima and Nagasaki.

So begins “Truman,” a short film by Dallas filmmaker and Collin College alumnus Ben Davis. Told in a series of conversations and flashbacks shot in multiple locations, including the cockpit of a B-25 bomber, the film examines what it would have been like to wrestle with the responsibilities faced by the president. The decision was a turning point for the world, revealing the destructive power of the bomb and igniting an arms race that would shape the planet for the next half century.

In a way, the 20-minute short was a turning point for Davis. Filmed for a history class at Collin College, Davis said it was his first foray into serious filmmaking. Although he had made short videos with his friends for years, this was different.

“It was inspiration I never thought I’d find at a community college and just one small sample of how well Collin prepared me for Baylor and gave me the fuel to keep chasing this crazy dream,” he said.

The crazy dream had begun long before, with a less-than-stealthy attempt to watch “Jurassic Park.”

“I think I was four or five and I remember my friends at kindergarten talking about it,” he said. “My parents were watching it, and I kind of snuck behind the couch to watch it too.”

His parents found him, but rather than send him to his room, they decided to start the movie over and let him watch it with them.

“I have wanted to make movies ever since,” he said. “It was kind of a childhood dream that has turned into a livelihood.”

Davis said he has always found himself comfortable in the world of film, immersing himself especially in the action/adventure genre. His parents fostered his love of the form, he said, by showing him movies like “Star Wars” and “Raiders of the Lost Ark.” He said that at one point, he wanted to be Harrison Ford. Ultimately, though, those kinds of movies brought him to a different kind of role model – Steven Spielberg.

“If you go to film school and you are asked who your favorite director is, I feel like you are supposed to say some off-the-wall French guy,” he said. “Spielberg has always done it for me, and he is still, to this day, my favorite director.”

Davis appreciates the way Spielberg can work heartfelt moments into even the most action-packed science fiction movies. You can see Spielberg’s influence on projects like Davis’ feature “American Cliché” and the short film “Watch the Skies,” which follows a son’s search for the truth about his father’s disappearance. Taking cues from Spielberg’s “E.T.: The Extraterrestrial” and “Close Encounters of the Third Kind,” Davis explores the possibility that there is more to the universe than most people imagine.

“Watch the Skies” is one of the projects Davis is most pleased with and serves as the basis for a feature-length film he would like to make one day.

Davis’ writing partner Tyler Hiott said Davis is a very passionate director. “Ben never just gives 50 percent or even 80 percent for that matter,” Hiott said. “No matter what the project, he’s always 100 percent emotionally invested.”

The two have known each other since high school and are pursuing their dream together. The pair earned acclaim for the music video “Truth Is,” by Allen singer/songwriter Marcella. The pop song with a strong anti-bullying message took home the 2013 Indie Music Channel “Best Video of the Year” award. The pair also won the “Best Teen Video over $5,000” and “Best Teen Video over $5,000” awards.

Davis and another friend, Cole Timms, have also received good reviews for the screenplay “Chasing Shadows.” The sci-fi/noir mash-up finished in the top 15 percent of screenplays submitted for the Academy of Motion Pictures Nicholl Fellowship, an international screenwriting competition to identify new and promising screenwriters.

continued on page 7
“Chad was one of those students that you could just tell had great things ahead of them – the look in their eyes, the way they carry themselves, their relationships with others. You could detect a desire to want to make a difference and the natural leadership,” said associate professor Joe Jaynes. “I have a lifelong passion for my subject. I think in Chad’s case, he has that same passion.”

That passion helped carry Wolf through his time at SMU, where he continued to develop the skills he’d begun to sharpen at Collin.

“What I gained at Collin – the skill set, the knowledge base – helped prepare me for that advanced-level coursework my junior and senior year at SMU,” he said, noting that his time at Collin also assisted in securing a partial scholarship which helped him pay for his later education.

Wolf graduated Magna Cum Laude with a Bachelor of Science in U.S. History from SMU, then hit the road for Washington D.C. and landed in Sen. Gramm’s office. From there, he moved on to the office of Sen. Chuck Hagel (R-NE) where, instead of just answering phones, Wolf was able to get even more involved in the gears of government.

In addition to other duties, Wolf worked on transportation, tax, appropriations, government reform and judiciary issues for the senator. Anytime there was a bill on the floor that fell within his areas of expertise, he would study it, summarize it and then advise Sen. Hagel about the agency’s history, an accomplishment he still holds as one of his proudest.

The inspiration can strike anywhere. After all, a lot of students put together research, a slideshow. Davis had taken his research, conceptualized it and turned it into “a piece of art.”

Martin said most students put together a slideshow. Davis had taken his research, conceptualized it and turned it into “a piece of art.”

“I accepted a position as a pharmacist with Target following graduation, which I am very excited about,” said Perdomo. “I worked for Target as a pharmacy technician all through undergraduate and pharmacy school, and I am very happy to be working for a company that I like and respect.

“I definitely feel that Collin prepared me not only to go on to a four-year university, but also pharmacy school,” said Perdomo. “The anatomy and physiology and genetics labs gave students access to state-of-the-art equipment that I couldn’t find elsewhere. You really get the best education possible. The coursework is challenging, and the college works hard to provide the latest technology, research and information. You can truly attend any university after going to Collin College and feel like you know how to study and that you have a strong educational foundation.”

For information about Collin College academic programs, visit http://bit.ly/1TQFGmp.

“Collin College class continued from page 6

“We were high enough to be recognized. That’s still a big thing, because it’s like the Super Bowl of screenwriting,” Davis said.

Ultimately, Davis said he would like to see films like “Chasing Shadows” or a feature-length version of “Watch the Skies” make it to the big screen. For now, though, he is still slugging it out in the commercial world. Much of his work is in conceptualizing it and turned it into “a piece of art.”

“Ben did went beyond anything I had ever seen,” Martin said.

She said that as an educator, one of the most important things she can do is to encourage students to find their passions and follow them. Davis had come to her class with a passion for film, and this was one way he could begin to develop it. As for Davis’ dreams of Hollywood, Martin believes he has a future in filmmaking.”I have faith that whatever Ben sets his mind to, he is going to accomplish it,” she said.

For more information about general education core classes offered at Collin College, visit http://bit.ly/1gOykBl.

“2009: NEW CENTRAL PARK CAMPUS LIBRARY AND CAMPUS EXPANSION OPENS

2010: UNIVERSITY CENTER OPENS

2013: NEW SPRING CREEK CAMPUS LIBRARY OPENS

APRIL 6, 2015: THIRD PRESIDENT BEGINS, DR. NEIL MATKIN

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Did you know?

Inside this issue

30th anniversary..................1
Alumni association .................2
Bluebonnet official flower .............2
Alumni salute: Chad Wolf ...........3
Alumni salute: Michael Urie ...........4
Alumni salute: Laura Perdomo ..........5
Alumni salute: Ben Davis .............6
Did you know? .......................8

Annual Return on Investment

Students: $1 = $3.70
For every dollar students invested in education at Collin College, students receive $3.70 in future income.

Taxpayers: $1 = $4.20
Every taxpayer dollar invested yields $4.20 in benefits.

Society: $1 = $13.70
Society benefits by $13.70 per dollar through reduced crime, lower unemployment and increased health and well-being.

Collin College POP QUIZ

How well do you know Collin College? Take this quiz and find out!

1. Who is the Collin College mascot?
2. Which campus opened first?
3. What year was the college founded?
4. Which is the newest campus?
5. What is the school flower?
6. What was the college’s original mascot?

Answers:
1. Collin Cougar
2. Central Park Campus in McKinney
3. 1985
4. Collin Higher Education Center
5. Texas Bluebonnet
6. The Express

Annual Economic Impact

$528.5 million in income to the local economy
Based on operational spending, student spending and alumni salaries/income resulting from education at Collin College.

Source: 2015 Economic Impact Study, Economic Modeling Specialty International

www.collin.edu