Governor Richard Lamm signed into law the bill creating Community College of Aurora on May 20, 1983. The fight for an independent college had been ongoing in fits and starts for more than three decades. From left, people like state Sen. Robert Allshouse, Rep. Molly Markert, Annabelle Dunning (behind Lamm) and Rep. Jack Fenlon helped ensure the bill’s passage. But many trials and tribulations would follow for CCA, including turning a College Without Walls into a real campus in short order.
Things percolated but never seemed to reach a full boil when it came to efforts to get Aurora an independent college.

But the introduction of state Sen. Bob Allshouse to the process raised the temperature a few notches. He'd talked about a “University of Aurora” in the past; had worked his colleagues in chambers on that general premise.

But, in 1982, this was go time. Nai-Kwang Chang, executive director of the Aurora Education Center, had lined up support in the community and amid local politicians. It would be up to the two of them to forge a plan that would sway politicos all the way up to the governor’s chair.

They succeeded. Yet CCA was only just starting to plot its course.

-- Lee Rasizer, CCA Public Relations Coordinator
Allshouse, Aurorans put their foot down

CCA established after 3+ decades

Two events clearly provide a glimpse into the external mindset of the opponents of a community college for Aurora in the late 1970s and early ‘80s.

The first involves Gerard Frank, a well-meaning House Democrat, who tried to carry the issue on his shoulders in the legislature in ’78. He not only was met with negativity but outright derision in seeing his bill killed 7-3 by the education committee, while being called “fiscally irresponsible” in the process. Adding insult, the measure was pushed from first on the calendar to last, leaving Frank precious little time to even state his case. His opponents took a lunch break, then came back to vote him down.

It was pure politics in a heavily Republican climate at the time.

The reception wasn’t much better as supporters of the college carpooled to the State Board of Community College and Occupational Education meetings to make their case. Ironically, one of the strongest proponents of an Aurora college, Ellin Mrachek, was part of a board that wouldn’t even bring in extra chairs into the small hearing rooms so that the extra crush of citizens could get comfortable.

Yet the nabobs of negativity would get overrun, eventually.

“The doers not the naysayers were leading the charge,” recalled Ruth Fountain, a community activist and longtime supporter of the college.

The college’s General Advisory Committee finally began to gain traction, buoyed by a renewed spirit in the community that it was time Aurora landed its long sought after community college.

One of the biggest sea changes in ending that pursuit successfully came with the election of 1982, when a freshman class of legislators including Bill Owens, Jack Fenlon, Molly Markert, David Skaggs, Ben Nighthorse

Political compromise necessitated the college would be a “College Without Walls” or “College Beyond Walls” for five years. It was widely suggested that the word “campus” was not to be uttered for five years.

But Gov. Dick Lamm signed Senate Education Bill 170 “to commemorate the creation of Community College of Aurora” on May 20. The North Central Association of Colleges and Schools initially recommended candidacy status for accreditation, meaning federal education benefits would continue and smooth transfer of student credits to other colleges. But in August, the NCACS ruled against transferring the accreditation the college held when it was associated with CCD as an education center, not a full campus.

The association, in a Denver Post article, said transfer wasn’t possible because the Aurora facility hadn’t received a full accreditation examination when it was an education center.

That November, an open house celebrating the creation of CCA is held at East Park at 791 Chambers Road, with a string quartet from Hinckley HS and color guard from Fitzsimons Army Medical Center on hand.

TIMELINE

1983


Another primary target was Sen. Al Meiklekjohn, the chairman of the Senate Education Committee. As the hearings started there was near-universal opposition at first but Allshouse secured face-to-face meetings on the floor and worked his contacts and colleges. Meiklekjohn said when he started the process he “wouldn’t have give a plug nickel’s change of getting it done” but Allshouse persevered.

The bill creating the East Metropolitan Community College, drafted for the 1983 General Assembly. The bill passed 53-11 in the Senate and moved to the House.

“The General Assembly declares that a two-year college is needed to provide adequate educational opportunities for individuals in the Eastern part of the metropolitan area.”

J. Robert Allshouse, a Republican state senator from Aurora and sponsor of SB 170, on March 28, 1983 said that Aurora has had to put up with jet noise from Stapleton International Airport and toxic waste from the Lowry Landfill and that the community college was “an idea whose time has come.” He added, “This, finally, is a positive for a growing community.”
Senator achieved legacy; city got longstanding wish

Molly Markert, now an Aurora city councilwoman, holds a gold-embossed plaque that shows SB 170 that created Community College of Aurora in 1983. At right, the final page of the signed bill features the signatures of political powerhouses Ted L. Strickland, president of the Senate; Carl B. Bledsoe, speaker of the House of Representatives; Marjorie L. Nielsen, secretary of state; and Gov. Richard D. Lamm.

From wish / Page 4

Campbell and Hank Brown made the issue a priority.

But had it not been for the direction of J. Robert Allshouse, the college may once again have been dismissed out of hand.

"It was Bob Allshouse who said, 'We can do this now,'" recalled Markert, now an Aurora city councilwoman. "He was the eldest of the Aurora stateeman and we looked to him for direction on how to do things. He kind of gave the nod and said, 'It's time now.' And without being organized about, 'You go do this.' Fenhon you get those votes; Markert you get those votes ... We came out of a community in the '70s and knew what we had to do.

It was also a different era in terms of the political climate, she added.

"There was much more open quid pro quo. 'If you support my college ... We used to do this all the time. And pro quo. 'If you support my college ... 'We used to do this all the time. And pro quo. 'If you support my college ..."

"It was from some of those very first discussions among that community college that he went along with it."

It ran deeper than that. Dr. Nai-Kwang Chang described Allshouse's stance as "his duty." But there also was a feeling at the time that the Republican senator hadn't done much to distinguish himself politically. This was an issue he could call in favors, call out detractors and cement a legacy. In one 2 1/2 hour period on January 6, 1983 he swayed 38 legislators to co-sponsor the bill, which impacted the Colorado Commission on Higher Education's stance.

"I think it was just his awareness that Aurora was this growing city and it was at a time, in essence, it ought to have something like a community college here," said Dennis Champine, Aurora's mayor from 1979-87. "And as a state representative he felt maybe it was his responsibility."

The subject of a community college for Aurora had been banded about since the early 1950s but would fade then re-emerge in the spotlight periodically.

"The issue never died," Fountain said. "And it was a very public thing. You could see it coming."

Jim Weedin, a three-decade member of CCA's faculty, recalled sitting around a table with Chang, Allshouse, Marline McCracken – integral in the Aurora Outreach Center in the 1970s, newspaper publisher Olen Bell and Tom Pickens, namesake of Pickens Technical College, in 1982 and talking about what it would take to get this issue across the finish line.

"There was this discussion. Where do you go? How do you start? How do you create a college?" Weedin said. "It was from some of those very first discussions among that community college people, city people, county people, etc., started organizing in groups to make a real run at the legislature.

The idea ran counter to some of the bedrock Republican principles that were against capital construction on higher education projects, particularly in a time of budget crisis. But Allshouse bucked those ideas by creating the college without those extra expenses by forestalling the building of a campus.

State Bill 170 was made official on May 20, 1983. A grinning Allshouse can be seen in the background as Gov. Richard Lamm signed the bill into law. But it wasn't without some tense moments, which was par for the course given the three decades that preceded this failed idea.

On March 29, while Allshouse's pet project was set for a final Senate vote, the gathered body voted the measure down in jest. Allshouse picked up his papers and can be seen in a Denver Post photo snarling as he walks out of chambers for the door. Allshouse was apprised of the prank, and instructed his colleagues to reverse their decision before he'd return.

The legacy Allshouse sought was well on its way to being cemented.

"I think until that time he was afraid to stand up to the Republican 'don't spend money' stance and all the negative things you could stir up about this and I think he was able to scoff off all of that because he wasn't running for anything and he was willing to take a risk he might not be willing to take previously," Markert said. "And he did have a heart and soul for people. He may have been a curmudgeon on a lot of stuff, but with kids, college, he was unbelievable. And we came in on the push of Chang, Ellin and Ruth Fountain."

Aurora Education Center employees celebrated the victory with wine in plastic cups provided by Dr. Chang.

"We thought it was going to happen," said Ron Walters, who was the first full-time faculty at AEC. "It was just a matter of changing time and changing attitudes."

Even Annabelle Dunning, who was a staunch Democrat in a sea of Republicans, during that legislative session, got into the spirit of cooperation.

"I got comfortable with Bob Allshouse's viewpoints. You wouldn't think so," she recalled. "But he had reasons to vote the way he did and the time finally came where there was so much support for this Aurora community college that he went along with it."

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It was jokingly known as the "Home of the Eternal Building Certificate," since East Park Plaza constantly was making cosmetic changes. But for many CCA employees, this was their first home, with the college's name even stamped on a sign outside.

Still, higher learning wasn't all that was happening at 791 Chambers Road. There were lawyers' offices and small businesses. The college generally filled the third through fifth floors.

"The Navy had a recruiting station in there at one time," recalled Karl Van Etten, a business professor and dean of instruction during two decades at the institution beginning in 1986. "We'd see those guys in the halls and sometimes they'd ogle the girls."

Even so, it was a step up from the previous digs at Buckingham Place and the old Municipal Building, which was the main building now turned into a computer science center.

"We took it over bit by bit by bit," Van Etten said of East Park Place. "We had a classroom that went to the hall to the wall and I think there was just one row of tables in it, it was that narrow. It certainly wasn't built for a college."

At the same time, the East Park Place building may be where the greatest sense of camaraderie emerged among employees, staff and administrators. CCA essentially occupied the third through the fifth floors.

"All the secretaries prayed for an office with a window – and our own offices," recalled Edna Fielden, a clerk in academic affairs and administrative assistant from 1984-98. "That never materialized in those days. We had offices in kind of a common area and you couldn't hear the thunder sometimes."

What often could be disseminated were the squeaks and squeals of moving chairs and desks. The permit on the front door was fitting for all of the redesign needed to make CCA's space work more efficiently.

"We could re-do some rooms and make them the correct sizes," longtime faculty Jim Weedin said. "This was still not a college but it was a step up, a nice looking building and much better parking than the old City Hall. But we had a limited number of classrooms, they were filling up, and we were getting complaints from people living around there about cars parking in that area. So it was always meant to be a temporary thing. Even the city knew that. But it was a start."

And nearly the end.

"When we were at East Park, Sherrie Kantor used to do all our PR and our catalogs and schedule," said Terry Campbell Caron, who worked in the Center for the Physically Disadvantaged in the mid-80s. "We used to have our logo, 'Coming to you with class,' and it's a picture of a Rolls-Royce with the hood ornament. Rolls-Royce wrote us a nasty letter to cease and desist. How Rolls-Royce ever did see that I don't know but we had to take the ornament off and stop the whole campaign."

It wasn't as if there weren't issues elsewhere. Ron Walters stayed behind at Buckingham Place at 11111 E. Mississippi to teach in a building designed for offices, not classes. But the facility was much smaller, and much more antiquated.

"Each office had a furnace and when the furnace went off, you almost had to yell in class for the students in the back to hear you," Walters remembered.

Walters would eventually move to East Park Place, which was "the best facility we had to that point" that "served us very well." It was functional, even if outside the classrooms there were small restrooms for a high density of people. Inside the teaching environment, learning was learning.

"You had more like a city college atmosphere," he added.

Dr. Nai-Kwang Chang at East Park had a huge office; so big that when Dr. Larry Carter succeeded him as president, they converted Chang's old office into a classroom.

"People were very friendly there and it was just a different atmosphere than it was when we moved to the actual campus (in 1991)," Fielden said. "You knew everybody. Very often at faculty meetings we'd cater boxed lunches and everybody would laugh and carry on. It was very much like a big family there."
As has become typical in state finance, money was tight for higher education while proponents of a college for CCA were making their final push.

One compromise to get the college approved by the state was the concept of a 'College Without Walls,' a wink and a nod that classes would be held at various facilities around Aurora and that no centralized campus would be built for at least five years.

"Having a 'college without walls' was just a cover-up, really, for the fact that they were going to start out that way but that it wouldn't last," said Anabelle Dunning, the only Democrat elected in Arapahoe County to the state legislature from 1983-85.

In fact, Dr. Nai-Kwang Chang, as far back as October '82, had received a unanimous resolution from the Aurora City Council in favor of giving the state 21 acres of so-called "Bresnahan property" as the site for a community college (later home to CentreTech campus). But legislators weren't interested in the associated costs a campus would entail and it wasn't part of the bill passed to create CCA.

"They said, 'Wait a minute, we don't know anything about this land. You could have all kinds of problems. It could not be buildable and there could be pollution and it could be a real white elephant, so we don't want to touch that,'" recalled Jim Lewien, a bank executive, early college proponent, and part of the CCA's first board of directors. "And then the legislature said, 'We don't have any money to build a campus.' In fact, they said we're not going to build any more campuses because we're over capacity in higher ed from a standpoint of facilities. So we're not going to build a college"

"I really don't know who engineered the compromise," Lewien added, "probably (state senators) Jack Fenlon and Bob Allshouse. But it was we'd be a 'College Without Walls,' which later transformed to a 'College Beyond Walls' by (second CCA president) Dr. Larry Carter."

There was a gentleman's agreement when CCA was created legally that the word 'campus' wouldn't be uttered publicly, though the bill isn't stringent on the matter, saying the State Board for Community Colleges and Occupational Education (SBCCOE) had to develop the comprehensive plan and "the plan shall include estimate of projected capital costs and operating expenses for a period of five years."

“So we never said we wouldn’t do it,” said Molly Markert, a Republican legislator from north Aurora (1982-88) and current City Council member. “We just said we'd take five years to plan it."

In the meantime, CCA seemed to be paying half the rent in the area. There were classes in high schools, on Lowry Air Force Base, at East Park Plaza, and elsewhere.

"During registration you were all over," said Jo Roth, who was the registrar for the college in the mid-1980s and later VP of Student Affairs, adding the saying was akin to the wild, wild West. Chang helped matters by sending a schedule of classes to every home in the city, ensuring that many people went to the main East Park location to pick classes.

"The first night of class we usually tried to have at least one person at all these locations to try to make sure that everything was OK and that the door was open," Roth said. "We often had trouble with the high schools and keys getting in. You could imagine the logistics with all these locations. So everybody was assigned a place, just to make sure everything was OK."

Larry Steele, a longstanding CCA employee, was among a group of site monitors whose job was to do anything needed around town during the College Without Walls days. He later led the group as assistant facilities manager.

“We were the media specialists. We rolled TV carts into classrooms or slide projectors,” he recalled. “We were AV guys. If we were remodeling one of the buildings, we were construction guys. We didn't have groundspeople or custodians but it if there was something in the middle of the day that needed custodial attention, we did that, too. We did security. There were probably 10 or 12 of us.”

And even a College Without Walls could bust at the seams.

In 1982, classrooms were used at Montbello, Smoky Hill and Overland high schools; a childcare center, two office buildings and Aurora Education Center. That only grew as CCA became more established.

As tenants left East Park Plaza, CCA took over the vacated space and there alone occupied about 60,000 square feet.

“It wasn’t the best model,” said Ruth Fountain, a longtime member of the CCA Foundation and early college pioneer. “But this was all we had. We made it work. And we made it work to our advantage.”
Farm system

City comes through with land, but building a structure takes time

For a college that wasn’t supposed to utter the word ‘campus’ for five years, there was considerable whispering that was going on in the mid-1980s.

One of the first trips taken by Dr. Larry Carter when he became president in 1986 was to an undeveloped area near the city building, which was suggested could be built upon as a permanent campus. But Carter suggested in an interview last August that he feared angering legislators “and it might take even longer” to secure a fixed site for CCA. So he passed.

But meetings with the Foundation board, which included prominent commercial developers, made it clear there was little tolerance for wait-and-see and instead promoted ASAP.

Previous attempts had focused on federal land, namely a site covering approximately 90-160 acres on Buckley Air National Guard Base, adjacent to the Aurora Vocational Technical Center. That didn’t fly, either. Nor did a site inspected by selection task force at the Aurora CentreTech Office park, which was deemed too small at just 15 acres.

Yet, in background papers written by the college in Feb. 1985, the limitations of using multiple facilities were spelled out based on experience and stated a case for a central facility that could provide efficiency and effectiveness in administration and management and instruction, while serving the community, and providing an identity for the college.

And in the end, it just kept coming back to 21 acres of land donated by the City Council in Oct. 1982 in the lead-up to the vote on the college as the best bet for Aurora citizens?

The state wasn’t interested at the time the college was legally formed to building any institutions of higher education, free land or not: thus, the ‘College Without Walls’ compromise in 1983 legislation.

But several years later, the land still was vacant and still had issues surrounding it.

“The state wasn’t ready to buy it, nor was the state ready to finance it,” Carter told anthropology faculty Elizabeth Hirsh in an interview from his Maui, Hawaii, home. "It goes back to the, 'Don't even think about a campus for five years.' What happened was these developers knew how to do that and they had the city sell bonds for us. They'd ordinarily be industrial revenue bonds, but it wasn't that because we weren't an industry. But it was the same thing.

"So the dangerous thing, to me, was because the state was not involved, we didn't have to go thorough the state building and planning process, nor did we have state inspectors out there every week and they were known to be really tough and a little picky, you might say. ... So we built the building according to city specs but kept an eye on state specs, too, in case we had to add buildings we wouldn't have to start over or something."

The college courted underwriters from 17th Street in Denver to listen to its case in an attempt to convince them to join the fray and flip the bonds. ‘And 17th Street kind of laughed up its sleeve at Boettcher and Co, taking on the chore of marketing our bonds, but it worked,’ longtime CCA Foundation member Ruth Fountain recalled.

In the end, CentreTech would not only be built on the 21 acres for development of central facilities for the college but reached out to the City Council to either purchase or trade for approximately six acres located adjacent to the east of the site owned by developer Ken Dueck next to the Highline Canal.

Once that occurred, CCA was ready to build, and broke ground in June 1990. "It made a huge difference," Cra-craft said of the gift bestowed to CCA by the city. "I was involved in many, many issues in the eight years that I was a member of the Aurora City Council, but I think that probably the creation of Community College of Aurora was one of my biggest accomplishments. I didn't do it alone. I worked with a group. But the fact that I could play a role and make the land available and be available to advocate for the college and work with the legis-lators, it was a very involved, complex process and I played my part the best I could.

"It turned out to be good for everybody."
TIMELINE

Mid-late 1980s

1984: Dr. Nai-Kwang Chang is appointed president after serving as executive director. Classes begin at Fitzsimons Hospital. The college without walls, now independent of CCD, pledges not to duplicate the services of others and offers open enrollment to anyone 18 and older, even without a high school diploma. At this juncture, 95 percent of the student body is adults attending classes part time. Aurora Technical Center officially becomes the T.H. Pickens Technical Center, which cooperates with CCA and offers degrees in occupational education. CCA filed an institutional self-study report with the NCA and an evaluation team visited the college. The Commission on Institutions of Higher Education granted CCA candidacy status. International Students Programs were approved. John McGuire was hired as Dean of Instruction.

1985: An article in the “Community and Junior College Journal” described the creation of CCA this fashion. “In some ways the Community College of Aurora looks like many other community colleges. The college offers associate degrees in four basic areas – art, science, applied science, and general studies – as well as a number of certificate programs.” The average age of the 2,000-member student body at this point is 33 and there are 92 percent part-time and 66 percent female students. “The features that set apart CCA from other community colleges in state is it’s the only open-campus college in the state system. Operating primarily in one of the many new office buildings in Aurora, classes are also held in various locations throughout the eastern sector of the Denver metropolitan area.” The article recounted other differences from the institutions that surrounded them by talking about CCA buying some purchasing, personnel, accounting, and data processing services from another nearby community college; the non-traditional administrative structure with no persons “designated as heads of instructional departments” but instead “instructor-coordinators appointed from among the faculty to direct curriculum planning, work with advisory committees and make live classroom observations of those faculty colleagues assigned to them”; and, the employment of mainly part-time instructors, who are paid for performing extra duties in the areas of curriculum planning, mentoring, professional development and program coordination.” At the time CCA’s vocational programs were done jointly with a nearby technical school and Aurora Public Library doubled as the community and college library. Meanwhile, the CCA Foundation is created to help support the college.

1986: On Sept. 5, Dr. Chang retired after 30 years working for state of Colorado and was honored at a ceremony at the Aurora Public Library. Put in charge of CCA when it became part of the Community College of Denver system in 1979, the Legislature established it as a separate institution in 1983. Dr. Larry Carter, president of Morgan Community College the last four years, was named his successor. At this time, enrollment for regular spring semester had reached 2,250, which was a record. Telecourses are instituted. In an interview with the Aurora Sentinel, Carter said, “CCA already has a good well-organized staff. But the major need now is for a central facility -- so much of my job emphasis will be outside, selling the school and looking for support.” CCA submitted another self-study report and an NCA evaluation team made a second visit to the college. The Commission on Institutions of Higher Education granted the college continuation of candidacy status. Telecourses began.

1988: North Central Association grants CCA full accreditation for five years. College enrollment hits 3,000.

1989: A March report by ECO Aurora said CCA had a direct economic impact of $8 million, which is absorbed into the city’s economy annually. The college at this point employs 250 part-time and full-time people, most of whom live in Aurora. Some 3,700 students are enrolled in the college's credit and non-credit courses. ECO Aurora's report also stated that the college is assuming a more visible role in assisting with economic development by offering specialized training programs to business prospects and with the implementation of the “CCA Business Industry Connection,” which consists of a variety of programs designed to appeal to the business community. Carter saw the area’s future in CCA's economic development of Aurora. “We’ve been able to adapt our program offerings to serve the community and the city’s economic development needs.” In other news, CCA received the CCHE Program of Excellence Award for its faculty development.

1990: On June 13, CCA holds its groundbreaking ceremony for what is an anticipated $11.4 million project. Bonds were sold by the city. Community College of Aurora Foundation signs a 25-year lease. About 86,700 gross square feet will comprise the central facility. Phase 1 construction assumes the continuing use of satellite sites. The total size of the CCA site is 28 acres. Landscaping around the site is to feature the use of native grasses and a former canal route. Occupancy is anticipated in summer 1991. Enrollment at this juncture stands at 4,500.

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1993: Larry Carter tenure now on the horizon

Playing an integral role in the creation of a college and running its predecessor would appear to suffice as credentials to rubber stamp the presidency of this new institution.

Not at Community College of Aurora. Not with Dr. Nai-Kwang Chang.

Chang, despite his executive director’s role at the Aurora Education Center and political dealings to help secure CCA legislation in 1983, had to go through “one big competition” the following year that he said ran as deep as 160 candidates.

Along the way, he not only had to overcome their credentials and a few enemies, but some sentiment for the woman he’d finally challenge as a finalist, Dr. Mary Davis, who was the college’s dean of instruction when the vote took place in ’84.

“There was a lot of dissension as to whether people wanted Chang there or not,” said Terry Campbell Caron, who has spent three decades affiliated with CCA. “And he had a very well-loved person in Mary Davis competing against him for the spot. A lot of us wanted her to be the president, not Chang. Of course, that didn’t happen.”

Jim Weedin, longtime CCA faculty, recalled meeting over at a city councilman’s business.

As the announcement was made, Weedin was literally caught between two choices.

“I ended up standing between them when the announcement was made that Chang would be president,” he recalled. “Change strongly felt that he deserved the position. Anyway, he got it, and Mary stayed on for awhile as an instructional dean, but I know she told me she felt pressure from the top and that it would be better for instruction if she moved on.”

Chang’s tenure as president lasted only about three years. He left office at age 56 with enrollment at about 2,250 for the regular spring se-
“Aurora Education Center Seeks College Designation,” Denver Post, Dec. 26, 1982: For those wanting to establish a community college in Aurora, the woods are full of enemies, the latest of which is the on-going re-emergence. For all intents and purposes, a community college already exists in Aurora, but the Aurora Education Center, established in 1979, may remain a second-class citizen. Currently, 1,744 students attend … eight locations but for economic, practical and status-related reasons, Aurorans are determined to persuade the state Legislature to provide the center with the community college title.

“Technology bugbear: Educators lash wrong trends,” Aurora Sentinel, Undated, 1982: The emphasis on “technology” and the harping by Aurora boosters on the need to acquire “business skills” boomeranged from the pivot of the Colorado Commission on Higher Education Thursday, when Aurora presented its case for changing the Aurora Education Center into the Aurora Community College. Commissioner A. Edgar Benton, a lawyer and former member of the Denver School Board took up the cudgel and injected some quivers of apprehension as to how he was going to vote. … “In all the discussion today, there was no real reference to education other than the need for advanced business courses, and the need to attract high technology business to Aurora - not one word of the critical education need about developing the student's mind in Aurora and in the world at large. I doubt we will see any significant impact on the quality of education in Aurora.”

College status for Aurora near destiny,” Aurora Sentinel, Dec. 29, 1982: A fateful day of decision is imminent for Aurora's hopes to advance its long-sought quest for a community college. At 2:30 p.m. Thursday, Jan. 6, the Colorado Commission on Higher Education will decide whether to recommend establishment of a community college in Aurora, to the 1983 General Assembly.

“Community college in Aurora suggested,” Rocky Mountain News, Dec. 30, 1982: The staff of the Colorado Commission on Higher Education will recommend next week that a community college be established in Aurora. The recommendation calls for classes to be held in existing public facilities, such as the Aurora Public Library; to avoid the estimated $8.7 million cost of constructing a building.

“School official denies tepid college stand,” Aurora Sentinel, Jan. 5, 1983: Although the Aurora Public School District has been involved in the push to bring a community college to Aurora, the level of the school district's involvement has been the object of minor criticism and surprise from other officials.

“Panel Recommends Community College for Aurora,” Denver Post, Jan. 7, 1983: The Colorado Commission on Higher Education voted unanimously Thursday to recommend the State Legislature create a community college for Aurora. Residents of Colorado's third largest city have been trying to get a community college for 30 years. … The commission accepted a staff recommendation that the college should function as a “school without walls” for five years to see if a community college can function properly without a formal campus.

“Aurora Should Get Its College,” Denver Post, Jan. 12, 1983: Although getting a community college for Aurora has been a 30-year war, it looks like the final skirmishes are going to be a piece of cake. In fact, it looks like the opposing armies may have given up the fight. The forces most likely to oppose turning the Aurora Education Center into a community college – the other community colleges in the Denver area – endorsed the concept during the hearing Thursday before the Colorado Commission on Higher Education.

“Hearing bodes well for college despite hurdle,” Aurora Sentinel, Feb. 9, 1983: It is good and bad news about Aurora's “application” for a community college. The good is that members of the Senate Education Committee generally acted like they were favorably impressed; the bad was that a final decision was postponed until Feb. 17 to see whether further analysis that changing the status of the Aurora Education Center to the Aurora Community College would cost the state.

“Aurora College Bill Passes First Hurdle,” Denver Post, Feb. 18, 1983: After 30 years of unsuccessful attempts, the city of Aurora finally has crossed the first legislative hurdle toward having its own community college, but the city still has a long way to go. The Senate Education Committee Thursday approved SB 170, creating the Community College of Aurora … The bill now must get through the tight-fisted Senate Appropriations Committee.

“Aurora over hurdle on its college quest.” Aurora Sentinel, March 23, 1983: Aurora’s last week passed another milestone on its odyssey for a community college: its bill in the legislature survived passage in the Senate Appropriations Committee and was reported out favorably. That’s not to say Aurora’s quest is now assured. Senate Bill 170 still has to run the gauntlet of a debate on the Senate floor and, if it survives, then go through the maze of the House of Representatives.

“Aurora college bill OK’d,” Denver Post, March 30, 1983: A bill establishing the Aurora Community College was given final approval Tuesday by the Senate. The measure now goes to the House.

“College bill gets buss but needs last embrace,” Aurora Sentinel, April 27, 1983: The Aurora Community College Bill “staggered” through the House Finance Committee Friday, and now awaits its date for second and third readings on the House floor. Despite the Finance Committee victory (6 votes to zero) there was more melanchoia than euphoria displayed at Aurorans’ post-mortem later outside the committee.

“College bill graduates, bright future begins,” Aurora Sentinel, May 11, 1983: Although jubilant over legislative approval of an Aurora Community College, persons who worked towards that goal have no intention of resting on their laurels. Robert Allshouse, R-Aurora, was the prime sponsor of the college measure, Senate Bill 170. It passed the State Senate unanimously and cleared its final legislative hurdle – the House of Representatives May 5 by a 53-11 vote.

“Aurora Finally Gets Community College,” May 20, 1983: Gov. Dick Lamm signed Senate Bill 170 Friday morning, culminating a nearly 30-year effort to get a community college for Aurora. The signing was over in a matter of minutes, none too soon for Sen. Robert Allshouse, prime sponsor of the bill, which passed its final hurdle May 5 with a 53-11 vote in the House. It had already cleared the Senate. “I’d like to say something, but go ahead and sign it first,” Allshouse urged the governor at the signing.

“Ah, the trust we’ve built up over the years,” Lamm joked as he put his name to the bill, converting the Aurora Education Center to the Community College of Aurora.
Do you recognize this (semi) famous man?

He was the first-ever full-time faculty member at the Aurora Education Center, and when his career continued at CCA, thus its inaugural faculty member, too.

His name: Ron Walters.

“I never told many people about that,” he said. “It just happened.”

Walters had been working at Community College of Denver’s North campus when the opportunity arose at AEC.

“One day we were having a conference at the old women’s college out east,” he recalled. “And my wife worked for Aurora Public Schools. So we met at the park near the firehouse and had lunch there. I went inside and talked to Dr. Chang and he asked me about coming over. Before he gave me the OK, he talked to Jim Touratta, who’s a long-time instructor at North campus, about my abilities and then he asked for permission for me to teach in Aurora part time. I’d teach in Aurora usually in the morning, then go to North campus and Front Range later in the in evenings.”

Walter’s part-time gig only lasted one semester. He started full time with AEC as accounting faculty in fall of 1980 and retired from CCA in 1994.

Smoke ‘em if you got ‘em

Don Wright was one of the college’s earliest employees, dating back to the old municipal building as part of the AEC.

In those days, back in the early 1980s, Wright also was a heavy smoker.

The move to the East Park Building was a crimp in that lifestyle. So Wright came up with a creative solution.

“He could smoke outside but not inside because it was a state school,” friend Tom Brosh recalled. “That’s after we became a college in ’83. So Don actually rented, or leased an office in the basement in that building so he could smoke.

“No one really cared,” Brosh added. “I would have walked outside myself.”

The good news is that Wright has been smoke-free for two decades -- and hopefully rent-free.

ART START ...

In the early 1980s, the original CCA logo was designed as part of what was then the Community College of Denver system, comprised of the system headquarters, the downtown Auraria community college, and outreach centers in Thornton, Lakewood and Aurora.

The CCD system logo was thus a half circle with four half circles inside, representing the four outreach centers under the CCD system. Each campus then had its own identifying symbol that mimicked the shape and feel of the others.

When CCA became a standalone institution in May 1983, the college used the system half circle for the first few years. But in 1985 the other CCD system campuses became Red Rocks, Front Range and Denver.

Red Rocks, Front Range and Denver kept their original symbols. But when the CCD system logo was abolished, CCA adapted its own logo representing the rising sun in the eastern plains (shown here). The logo has since undergone several changes over the years.

Public relations taken to the nth degree part of college’s start

One of the first promotional vehicles sent to the public was a trifold entitled, “Community College of Aurora: Launch Your Future”

The literature spoke about legislation enacted in 1983 that gave Colorado its “newest and most innovative institution of higher learning – the Community College of Aurora.”

The description went even further, labeling the institution as, “A college of the 80’s … unique to the Colorado educational system.”

And why was that, exactly? Well, here’s your answer.

“First of all, you won’t find a central CCA campus. CCA is a college without walls, an open campus. In a sense, its campus is the entire eastern portion of the Denver metropolitan area because classes are offered throughout Aurora and its surrounding communities. Classroom facilities include modern office buildings, area high schools and other public buildings.

“CCA is all around you” (With George Orwell’s 1984 likely ringing in people’s heads perhaps not the best slogan.)

“The formation of CCA was the result of one of the most persistent and broadly based community efforts in the state’s educational history.”

The college was sold on the merits of its convenience.

“What sets CCA apart from the rest (is) you may attend classes at more than a half dozen locations including two office complexes and several local high schools.”

As for CCA’s core demographic at the time, “More than one-half of CCA students are working adults, so extensive night schedule and Saturday classes are offered.”

Quote to note

“I think fondly of those times. In a very simplistic way, it was sort of a subsistence living.”

- Larry Steele, a 25-year employee, reflecting on his early days at CCA, which included a 1982 paycheck for 10 dollars “earned” for teaching a course in practical politics that was cancelled due to a lack of students.

If the style of the cake wasn’t a dead giveaway, the wood paneling hinted the era.
Name recognition: 50 who helped CCA spring to life

- **Dr. Nai-Kwang Chang:** Executive director of the Aurora Education Center and first CCA president.
- **Olen Bell:** Aurora Advocate newspaper publisher and original proponent of an independent Aurora college.
- **Roy Van Dyke:** Editor of the Aurora Advocate. Teamed with Olen Bell to produce articles/columns in support of college.
- **William B. Mansfield:** Aurora mayor from 1953-55, part of initial efforts to forge a junior college district with Olen Bell.
- **Bud Ulrich:** First Coordinator of Student Services at AEC.
- **Ellin Mrachek:** Aurora politician with strong roots in education and another early proponent for a Aurora college.
- **Dr. Mary Davis:** Named Director of Academic Affairs in 1982, and served as first CCA Dean of Instruction.
- **Gwen Thayer:** A marketing specialist that joined the 1970s push for increased enrollment at the Aurora Outreach Center.
- **Marline McCracken:** First coordinator of classes at Aurora Outreach Center, beginning in 1972.
- **Edna Fielden:** Worked as a senior secretary for nearly two decades, and retired as Senior Secretary III.
- **Dr. Norine Domenico:** Administrator under presidents Chang and Carter, and later became Division Chair of Arts and Humanities and VP of Instruction.
- **Ron Walters:** First full-time AEC faculty, faculty coordinator in accounting at CCA.
- **Dr. Larry D. Carter:** Second president at CCA, retired in 2000.
- **Florian Superovsky:** Purchasing agent in Business Services, worked at Aurora Education Center prior to CCA.
- **Katie Smolka:** Executive secretary to Dr. Chang, with the pair joining Aurora Outreach Center in 1978.
- **James Lewien:** Bank executive and early participant on the General Advisory Committee, charged with creating CCA; longtime member and former president of CCA Foundation.
- **Tom Brosch:** Had 13 different titles, from 1980-2001, both in teaching and in administration.
- **Jim Weedin:** One of three employees to span all four presidents at CCA.
- **Charles Nelms:** Physics instructor at CCA and Aurora Education Center, beginning in 1982.
- **Arlene Pyle:** Original advisor in Veterans Affairs.
- **Dennis Champine:** Mayor of Aurora when resolution adopted to donate Bresnahan property that became CentreTech to CCA.
- **Terry Campbell Caron:** Worked in Disability Services and Financial aid; one of three employees to span the career of all four CCA presidents.
- **Dr. James Ford:** Faculty member beginning in 1982 at Aurora Education Center.
- **Dr. John McGuire:** Named Dean of Instruction in November 1985.
- **Sherrie Kantor:** Former AEC employee and faculty coordinator in Early Childhood Education at CCA.
- **Molly Link:** VP of Governmental Affairs, board member of Aurora Chamber of Commerce and General Advisory Committee member.
- **Bill Wiggins:** Original member of CCA board of directors and active with Aurora Chamber, in the community.
- **Jo Roth:** Early AEC employee, became registrar of Student Development at CCA and eventually a VP of Student Services.
- **Rella Douglas:** Administrative assistant to Jo Roth dating back to the AEC.
- **Thomas P. Noonan:** A management consultant in early ‘80s, served as Vice Chairman of the General Advisory Committee, charged with getting Aurora its community college.
- **Everett Perkins:** Arranged for science classes at AEC, assistant dean of instruction.
- **Molly Markert:** Assistant dean of instruction.
- **Vel Garner:** A former educator, served on the General Advisory Committee for the AEC, working diligently on passage of CCA legislation.
- **Dick Lamm:** Colorado governor from 1975-87. Signed HB 170 into law, creating CCA.
- **Robert Allhouse:** Republican state senator who sponsored House Bill 170 to create Community College of Aurora in May 1983.
- **David Price:** Former director of Aurora Public Library.
- **Stan Whitaker:** First president of the CCA Foundation Board (1986-94).
IN THE NEXT ISSUE
THE HISTORY OF CCA: A FOUR-PART SERIES

The ‘90s

A busy decade: Larry, Lowry ... and CentreTech
Oudenhoven experiences a sudden role reversal

Dr. Betsy Oudenhoven was discussing the issue of “life balance” with her assistant, Javon Brame, in early July and spoke determinedly about finding the proper formula.

“I put my foot down,” Oudenhoven said.

Two days later, she’d need to re-think that plan, instead jumping with both feet into an unexpected new role as Community College of Aurora’s new interim president in the wake of Alton D. Scales’ sudden resignation July 10.

“Yeah,” Oudenhoven said with a laugh, “It changed up a bit.”

Yet, this could be a change for the better. Her responsibilities now are more varied. But upon further review, this could be just the type of job Oudenhoven coveted all along – even though she wasn’t necessarily aware of it until Dr. Nancy McCallin, president of the Colorado Community College System, offered the position.

“I never really aspired to this, but I never aspired to be a vice president either,” said Oudenhoven, who for the last two years had served successfully as VP of Student Affairs.

“Sometimes the time is right and sometimes you have the opportunity to serve and step up and try to do the best you can do. I really feel like I’m ready (inside the college). And I’m looking forward to making external connections on behalf of the college because I still think we’re kind of the best kept secret in Aurora and beyond.”

Oudenhoven’s temporary term is open-ended at this point. McCallin said she chose Oudenhoven because of her familiarity with the institution, respect she’s engendered and accomplishments.

Among the changes that have taken place in Student Affairs under Oudenhoven include implementation of mandatory new student orientation, a behavioral intervention team to address campus safety and student retention and on-campus counseling services; introduction of software to improve advising and record management; and increased communication within the division, with faculty and across the college.

“She gets things done,” McCallin said. “She clearly communicates. She’s very student-focused and student-centered and that’s key to me.”

The process to identify a permanent president can be a full-fledged search that lasts at least six months or an abbreviated one, or McCallin has the latitude to make a direct appointment or promotion from within. All avenues are being considered, she added.

But McCallin made it clear that CCA can’t “tread water” under an interim setup.

“This institution is a jewel in Aurora and we need to continue to pay attention to student success and build upon the successes you’ve had and really move forward,” McCallin explained. “It’s not going to be a period of sitting still and waiting for the next person to come along.

“You have a strategic plan to move forward on for the HLC. You’ve got a great student body and a lot of initiatives underway and my expectation is that you will continue to move this forward and work for the benefit of the students and community as you’ve always

See change / Page 14

Dr. Betsy Oudenhoven: Career at a Glance

- Vice President for Student Affairs, - Community College of Aurora, August 2011-July 2013: Provided leadership, vision, innovation, direction, coordination, supervision, evaluation, and analysis in such areas as admissions, advising, retention, records, recruiting, student life, accessibility services, testing, TRIO, and large federal grant supervision in a multi-campus environment.

- Vice President of Student Development – Joliet Junior College, September 2007-July 2011: Overall responsibility for the division of student development, including the departments of admissions, financial aid, registration and records, counseling, career services, disability services, academic skills center, TRIO student support services program, dean of students office, student activities, athletics, and multicultural student affairs. The division included over 130 employees and serves over 16,000 students per semester.

- Dean of Counseling and Retention – College of Lake County, May 2006-September 2007: Promotion included Director of Counseling responsibilities as well as supervision of the Office for Students with Disabilities and participation on the Educational Affairs Council.

- Director of Counseling – College of Lake County, August 2001-July 2006. Served as administrator for a community college counseling center which provided academic and transfer advisement, career exploration and personal counseling to a diverse student body of approximately 16,000 at three locations. Supervised over 30 staff including twelve full-time and eight part-time faculty counselors, five specialists, four support staff and several temporary employees. Oversaw all aspects of the Center including counseling services and schedules, classes, grants, orientation programs and the Women’s Center.

- Assistant Director of Academic Advising – Roosevelt University, August 2000-July 2001: Served as advising administrator at the University’s suburban campus with responsibility for the provision of academic advising to new, undecided and at-risk students. Assisted Director with the development of policies, processes and programs, as well as provided direct advising services to a diverse student body.

- Student Services Manager – Oakton Community College, April 1998-August 2000: Served in a newly created and multifaceted position with overall responsibility for the supervision, coordination and organization of academic advisement, personal counseling and transfer information to a diverse student body on two campuses. Coordinated the activities of nine staff members, nine adjunct counselors, thirteen student development faculty, and ten faculty advisors. Provided administrative support to the Dean of Students. Taught a 3-credit college success course.

- Assistant Director of Residence Life and Housing – State University of New York at Oswego, June 1988-July 1997. Served as a member of the central management team for an on-campus population of 3500 and had overall responsibility for a residential area of approximately 800 students. Recipient of the Chancellor’s Award for Excellence in Professional Service (1997).

- Assistant to the Dean of Students – SUNY Oswego, 1984-86, 1987-88. Responsibilities included serving as Greek Student Association advisor, creating a leadership development program, chairing the Personal Safety Task Force, chairing the Alcohol Awareness Week committee, counseling students, and serving as administrative assistant to the Dean.

- Complex Director – Mankato State University, 1981-1984. Served as the administrator for a residential complex of approximately 800 students. Supervised graduate student hall directors. Developed and taught an undergraduate RA class.

New students are highly encouraged to attend a connect session, an additional four-hour block that ostensibly serves as the second phase of orientation. The event provides opportunities to meet faculty in a desired field of study, a chance to learn about CCA resources, provides help finding classes, and discusses the secrets of success in individual programs.

Free T-shirts will be available. Students also can register for a chance to win a book scholarship worth about $300.

The connect sessions are split by campus and by field of study and is as follows:

**Monday, Aug. 19, CentreTech:** 8 a.m. – Languages, Philosophy, Translation and Interpretation; 1 p.m. – General Connection Session.

**Tuesday, Aug. 20, CentreTech:** 8 a.m. – Military and Veterans; 1 p.m. – English as a Second Language.

**Wednesday, Aug. 21, Lowry:** 8 a.m. – School of Business; 1 p.m. – Science and Mathematics.

**Thursday, Aug. 22, CentreTech:** 8 a.m. – Social Sciences; 1 p.m. – Education and Teaching Preparation.

**Friday, Aug. 23 (Location specific to session):**

- **8 a.m., CentreTech:** Communications, Theater, Music and Literature.
- **1 p.m., Lowry:** Criminal Justice, Paralegal, Personal Training, Information Technology, Art and Media Design.

Register today by clicking on the following link: http://www.ccasaurora.edu/connect.

Free food, activities for adults and children, a live concert and door prizes are just some of the attractions that will be found at the CCA Welcome Fest on Aug. 29 at the Lowry campus West Quad.

The three-hour event is a co-production of Student Life, Student Government, Phi Theta Kappa and the Center for Outreach and Recruitment and is designed to connect students, families, faculty and staff to what CCA has to offer as the Fall semester begins.

The grand prize will be a book scholarship worth about $300, in addition to gear from the college bookstore and more. Free T-shirts will be available to the first 300 attendees.

But the main draw to the event figures to be the attractions, which includes a bungee run, a Velcro wall, an obstacle course and hamster ball races.

Providing entertainment: “The Constant Tourists,” a local five-piece band that includes mandolin, bass, percussion and numerous other instruments. The band has toured the West extensively.

“With orientation ending the week before, we wanted something that could kick off the academic year in a positive, fun and engaging way,” said Kyla Doddridge, director of Outreach and Recruitment.

Music begins at 3 p.m.

Joyce Benson-Fox, a longtime employee in the fields of workforce development, education and training, and human service programs, has been hired as the director of the Center for Workforce Development, Executive Director of Grants and Planning Chris Ward announced.

Benson-Fox most recently worked for the Colorado Department of Labor and previously served as training coordinator and program manager of Goodwill Industries of Denver.

The Center for Outreach and Recruitment is seeking help in locating one to two student hires as ambassadors. Details on the program can be found at http://www.ccasaurora.edu/students/getting-started/orientation/student-ambassador-program.

The All-College Meeting has been set for Aug. 19 in the Fine Arts Forum at CentreTech. The event will begin at 7 a.m. with a coffee social, continue with breakfast at 7:30 a.m. and then conclude with the hour-long meeting.

The General Faculty Meeting is slated for Aug. 22 at the Aurora Public Schools Conference Center at 15771 E. 1st Ave., Aurora. That event is tentatively scheduled for 5 p.m.

Career Services and Student Life will be hosting a Part-Time Job, Internship and Free Stuff Fair on Sept. 11 at CentreTech.

Students will have the opportunity to meet employers; receive a CCA discount card that’s only available at this event; and eat lunch at Denver and Aurora food trucks.

These employment opportunities are geared towards students looking to work around their college schedule or to gain experience in their chosen fields.

A shuttle from Lowry campus will be provided.

Anna Pan, broadcast and digital media specialist in the Marketing and Communications Department, has produced an outstanding video that speaks to the advantages of attending community college in today’s real-market conditions.

The three-minute piece, entitled “Did you know? Shift Happens 2013-14 / Higher Education is available for viewing at http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=cZtXxb7jqKk&feature=youtube.be&hd=1.

CCA staff, students and faculty are invited to a special theatre performance fundraiser from the “Us in the Box Workshop” at the Larry D. Carter Theater on Aug. 9-10. Admission is $10; $5 for students.

The event, entitled “Comings and Goings” features former CCA faculty Wayne Gilbert, Theatre Director Stacey D’Angelo and retired Hinkley High school drama teacher Annell Weisenbuehler performing a selection of scenes, monologues and poetry.

An original monologue written by D’Angelo about her personal challenges with her daughter over the last two years will be one of the staged segments.

The college said its goodbyes to Loraine Evans in the Office of Instructional Support in a July 25 get-together and to Academic Enrichment chair Ashley Moorshead at July 30 sendoff.

“I don’t feel this thing is anything to be concerned about because this has been a very stable institution with the longest-tenured president in the state and we just need to move forward on that.”

Oudenhoven expressed surprise and appreciation for her appointment. She spoke with heart-felt emotion about her love for CCA – “a gem,” she called it – and the unique makeup of its workforce.

“I do appreciate that Dr. McCallin said we’re not in a holding pattern. We have so much great stuff going on and we get to continue that momentum and get to continue to move this institution along and I’m here to listen, support and help in whatever way I can. Administrators are here to administer to. It’s our job to make the path clear so we can do the work we need to do for students. And I’m just so confident we can do that together.

“I’m looking forward to doing that, for however long.”

With Oudenhoven taking over as president, Elena Sandoval-Lucero has been named acting VP of student affairs. In another temporary appointment, Janet Brandau will fill in for VP of Academic Affairs Xeturah Woodley while the latter completes her doctoral dissertation in New Mexico.

But Oudenhoven made it clear that living in the community for the last two years, meeting various leaders around Aurora, working at CCA, and going through leadership training for the last 12 months has been an “incredible experience” on which she’d like to build with a potential nod as the college’s fifth full-time leader.

Serving in numerous higher-education roles since 1981 has only served to steel her for that possibility.

“I was telling some folks, you ever see the commercial about the test drive? This is a test drive,” Oudenhoven said with a laugh. “And it might be a long one or a short one, I don’t know. But I’m hoping at the end to take it back to the dealer in good shape.”
CHILD’S PLAY

CFS shows kids the moviemaking ropes

The Colorado Film School hosted a free, two-week “Camp for Kids” in July in conjunction with a community-based arts education program that promotes creative growth for low-income children who reside within a high-risk urban community.

In total, 31 children ranging from ages 8-14 participated, many of them affiliated with the Downtown Aurora Visual Arts Program (DAVA). For the majority of these youths, it’s the first time they’ve been exposed to high-tech filmmaking equipment, top-tier acting coaching, and script development.

Children were broken into five groups to create, film and edit individual short films, with a screening session for parents and friends culminating the camp/community partnership.

“I just think you shouldn’t underestimate kids. It’s amazing what they can come up with and what they can do if you give them a chance and get them out and away from those video games,” said CFS assistant professor Geoffrey Chadwick, who previously has been involved with DAVA summer programs off site on several occasions.

“All they need is the right opportunity. We have all these resources, a great people and equipment, so it’s a really neat thing for these kids to be doing in the summer time.”

The overriding theme for all the groups in crafting their short stories is “maps,” or more generally, finding one’s place and identity in the world.

CCA is helping show one of the possibilities within a professional setting using high-tech equipment.

Some of the participants are from India, Africa, Egypt, South America, Mexico, and Central America. A couple kids only a couple of years ago were in Somalian refugee camps, Chadwick said. There are boys and girls, even part of a local soccer team in attendance.

The diversity doesn’t end there. One film tackles a prison break that culminates in Oz, while another examines an alternate universe. Two more of the short films take place in a haunted school and a Candyland-type setting.

Numerous other filmmaking facets were covered by instructors, such as Steve McKisson and James Shea (moving camera skills), Will Hicks (screenwriting), Lauren Chavez (editing) while Chadwick oversaw a variety of pre- to post-production tasks.

“IT’s wonderful collaboration. Our computer lab is too small, so this is a great opportunity for them to be at Community College of Aurora in really a professional setting for films and really playing with their own stories and work with professional people,” said Luzia Orneles, job training manager at DAVA.

“The whole mission in our organization is to really keep them motivated, working and learning to become leaders, being creative and solving problems. And this allows them to explore even more.”

The Colorado Film School “Camp for Kids” condensed the movie-making experience into a two-week window, all for free.

The overriding theme for all the groups in crafting their short stories is “maps,” or more generally, finding one’s place and identity in the world.
Traci Fielden, the longtime administrative assistant who mans the phones in the Lowry lobby, isn’t sleeping on the job. She’s playing a critically injured patient on July 23 as soldiers from the Idaho National Guard and observers go through extraction, decontamination and medical scenarios.

Traci Fielden is about to die (not really).

Her lungs have filled up with a combustible mix of chemicals, brewed up by the winds of a tornado that has ripped through the Lowry campus and her locale at the time, Building 900 (again, not really).

This near-death experience has been brought to you by the Colorado National Guard, or more specifically, Pony Anderson and her compatriots at the Center for Simulation in conjunction with the military as part of Vigilant Guard ’13.

Thing is, Fielden doesn’t just take calls at Lowry in her long-time position as administrative assistant; she regularly answers casting calls, too.

And as Fielden lies on her back on a blanket as members of the 101st Civil Support Team from Idaho leave the chaos left behind inside 900 to get reinforcements, she tries to stay in character as a woman left in severe medical distress.

But her eyes open and her head suddenly rises from the hard, tile floor.

“Where’s my Sleep Number bed?”

Yet, like a true pro, Fielden goes back to playing near-dead when the sounds of two men in outfits that resemble inflated spacesuits – but are designed to shield from hazardous materials – begin rumbling up to the buildings second floor through strewn-about debris littering hallways, rooms and staircases.

Fielden humor is critical to surviving this hot, 97-degree day. It’s also vital to the soldiers who are preparing for rescue in conditions that mirror a natural disaster as part of a three-day, statewide exercise that includes units from six western states at nine different locales around Colorado, including CCA.

Other sites, including the Pepsi Center, Denver University, Bonfils Blood Center and others tackle not only chemical dispersal trial-runs but also train derailments, elevator trap entrapment and more around the greater metro area.

Anderson, recently named the director for the simulation center and Disaster Management Institute, was part of the initial planning for the exercise that was two years in the making prior to the run through for 200-plus military personnel from July 22-24.

“Anything we can do to be more prepared is important,” Anderson said. “It gives the Guard an opportunity to train with its civilian counterparts, which is always a fantastic opportunity. You don’t want to exchange business cards at an event. The unique thing at this location for some of the Civil Support Teams is going forward with the medical aspect.”

That’s where Fielden and Jeanette Walters, a former EMT instructor at the college, come in as actors.

In the CCA scenario, the building is staged as having been abandoned. Walters alerts authorities that her “friend” is trapped inside and could be alive or dead. Fielden is placed in a room with chemicals that, in the exercise, have mixed to form hydrochloric acid. Fielden has been through moulage, essentially a makeup process, to not only resemble a squatter but to mimic burns on her legs.

The National Guard, which is unaware of the scenario’s details until arriving, have to extricate the “patient” then perform decontamination on the victim. At that point, Fielden bows out and one of the college’s high-tech mannequins becomes the patient. It’s been programmed in this case to have undergone respiratory arrest.

Yet, on this day it’s the soldiers that are struggling. Moving inside Building 900 with their bulky, enclosed suits, the altitude takes a toll on many members of the three teams that also hail from Nevada and New Mexico and have to tap out because of breathing so heavy one would think an asthmatic Darth Vader was approaching.

The commanders overseeing the exercise aren’t necessarily happy with the early exits but since this is not a graded exercise, it’s all part of the learning process – and safety protocol to allow them to peel off their suits and breathe fresh air.

Fielden isn’t doing much better on that count. Insulation litters the floor where she’s supposedly trapped and those particles mesh with the heat quickly to make that Sleep Number bed feel all the more appealing. Not only is Fielden knocked around as those particles match with the heat quickly to make that Sleep Number bed feel all the more appealing.

Vigilant Guard ‘13 taught soldiers in controlled conditions, made overall splash, much to chagrin of one CCA employee

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Vigilant Guard ‘13 planning took 2 years

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to smashing into her face.

This is about the seventh time that Fielden has volunteered in one of these military exercises, so it’s par for the course.

“It’s well worth it,” she said. “What I get out of it is it helps me to understand more what the people who will really come out to help you know how to do. It also gives me a lot more comfort that in a real emergency, if they’re here, they’re going to take care of us as good as they’ve been trained. And helping them get better is my goal.”

Fielden this time around perhaps gleaned too much information. In the afternoon, she’s misidentified as a man; later, she’s described as a “60- to 70-year-old unconscious woman.”

“I almost looked up at said, ‘What are you talking about, 60 to 70 years old? I’m not that old.’

Such are the indignities that have to be endured as an actress.

Still, it wasn’t the biggest. As the first run-through concluded in the afternoon, Fielden, outfitted in a dirty white T-shirt emblazoned with a “salty dog” on her pocket, was transferred from evacuation to decontamination team. She stayed in character as men in blue rubberized suits with oxygen masks sprayed her body with a hose. It actually felt good on the sweltering day after being inside 900 for so long. It felt slightly less refreshing to have her clothes then cut off with scissors.

Fielden came prepared, wearing a swimsuit under her clothes so not to expose her undergarments to dozens of soldiers and onlookers.

Little did she imagine before entering these military exercises that at her well below 60- to 70-year old age she would find a side career as swimsuit model.

“I never thought I could do that with my associates of general studies,” the former CCA student deadpanned.

What happened later in the evening, courtesy of New Mexico’s 64th Civil Support Team, was less a laughing matter. When it came time to go through the contamination process a second time, the soldiers brought out the big guns – not a wimpy sprayer – but five-gallon buckets full of water.

“I just thought they were going to spray me down like they did the first time. They asked Pony twice, ‘Are you sure?’ and she said, ‘Yep, this is patient simulation, do it.’ All of sudden comes this bucket full of cold water.”

Suddenly, the unconscious was alive, especially after she was doused six times.

“They all laughed and said, ‘She’s awake now.’”

Fielden – who in previous exercises has played a maid outside a hoarder home, a scared person after a bomb blast hiding in closet, and a two-time plane crash survivor -- broke character. She was strapped down and couldn’t move but squealed at the ice-cold, wakeup call, perhaps losing the Oscar in the process (although the fact she was performing with a broken foot shouldn’t be discounted).

But the soldiers are the real winners, in the final analysis, under controlled conditions.

“We were contracted not only with Vigilant Guard but outside Vigilant Guard to deliver the medical portion, and that’s really unique,” Anderson said. “These teams don’t get to do their medical skills all that often.

“It’s because of CCAs excellent medical capabilities. (primary EMT instructor) Kelly Cowan wrote the scenarios and did a very good job training these teams up, and then, Gaumard, which manufactures the simulators and is our partner, flew in the mannequins to assist with the training.”

But none of the dummies, despite their capabilities, can match Fielden’s personality.

At one point, she did such a bang-up job lying still on the floor that the investigating soldiers felt for a pulse and pronounced her dead. Seconds later, as the man exits like a scene out of the moon walk landing, Fielden is instructed to moan to demonstrate signs of life. The extrication process then began, though, in real life, it will be harder to tear Fielden away from these periodic weekend exercises that have occurred for her in Loveland, Denver International Airport, and at CCA.

“Traci loves this stuff,” Anderson said. “That girl eats it up.”

On the other hand, the important aspect is that the National Guardsmen enjoy and get educated well from the experience. A member of a military offshoot approaching Anderson later in the day to talk about adding dates for future scenarios is proof something is being done right.

“They did an outstanding job setting up the facility to making it real life,” said Sean Hatchett, incident commander for the CCA exercise and, in his regular job, a civilian firefighter and captain of the hazardous materials team in Jacksonville, Fla.”

I think some of these teams aren’t used to going in and not really having a real-life venue where they have to actually traverse and trip over stuff. We don’t want to hurt anybody, but it’s just enough to make it difficult to maneuver around and it challenged the guys and added a sense of realism to the scenario.

“Everything else has gone really well, too. We’ve already gotten feedback. They’ve learning about the mistakes they’ve made, already talked about them and will learn from them.”

At the same time, Fielden’s earned that good night’s sleep she was dreaming of only hours before.
Clockwise from top: The Center for Outreach and Recruitment, in concert with several on-campus organizations, is building buzz for a Welcome Fest to kick off the fall semester with a creative ad campaign; part of an exhibit by Tammy McKenzie at the Moravec Gallery, which includes a collection of prints from medium-format film printed on metal; Coordinator of Student Life Tim Cali, Administrative Assistant Veronica Russell and Director of the Community ESL Program Stephanie Lawton took advantage of pleasant weather on Bike to Work Day, which included 14 participants on both campuses; a “Conquer the Rockies” event July 9 with Jefferson County Parks and Recreation providing safe ways to explore the mountains and plan adventures.