The gang’s all here: CCA pioneers Don Wright, Florian Supercynski, Tom Brosh, Bob Lind, Karl Van Etten, and Jim Weedin reunite at a 2013 retirement fete.
“I think it’s far exceeded what people thought, because back then, there was no idea of online education, no thought of Lowry, which was still an Air Force base. I think some of the things that are happening now weren’t even in the dreams of the people back in 1978, ‘79, ‘80 and even before then. I think it’s just been a wonderful natural evolution.”

-- Tom Brosh, who held 13 different titles during his AEC/CCA career (1980-2001)
“It’s the leader of the community college system in Colorado in just about any respect. Academics. Innovation. Like the Center for Simulation, that was a good move, and it’s been that way for a short while. I think it’s wonderful. It’s been a great experience to be involved to the degree that the Foundation Board is involved in lots of things that go on. But it’s up to the community to recognize that we have an outstanding educational institution.”

— Ruth Fountain, an early CCA proponent and longtime Foundation board member

“We were successful in accomplishing much of what we believed in – the decision making process; the way we teach courses; the way we manage people; and so on.”

— Dr. Nai-Kwang Chang, executive director of the Aurora Education Center and first CCA president
“Ollie was also a great informal advisor behind the scenes because of his tenure in the City of Aurora and dealing with public officials and so forth. He knew where a lot of bodies were buried -- I’m talking figuratively. And he couldn’t be more pleased that the bill got passed.”

-- Aurora bank exec Jim Lewien, on Olen Bell’s lengthy role in pursuit of a community college

“When you have a cohesive community working together, you can do anything.”

- Marline McCracken, a founding member of the Aurora Education Center and early proponent of CCA
“It was an exciting time (in the early ‘80s) because we were building something. And I think it was exciting for everyone. I came from the private sector and there were a lot of people in the private sector that had this very, very negative attitude about government employees. They figured they were lazy, didn’t work and spent time talking to their friends. And I brought a little of that with me. But I was amazed, because here were people who were working really hard to develop their programs and they knew, unlike the private sector, if they doubled their program, they wouldn’t get a penny more in compensation. ... It was just a desire to build something. There was very little control in a sense, in a restrictive sense. They weren’t telling you, ‘You can’t do this that or the other thing.’ Pretty much, I went ahead and hired people, developed programs, expanded programs and I was, in a sense, running my own little fiefdom. I wasn’t alone. There were seven of us in our own little areas doing the same thing.”

– Karl Van Etten, former dean of instruction, and CCA employee (1986-2006)

“The CCA legacy is the community college legacy: access. It opened up a whole new part of the city and the state to students, and to students who might not otherwise have been able to go to school.”

– Karen Hewett, director of faculty, staff and organizational development; adjunct (1986-2010)
“In the beginning, we were considered to be a ‘College Without Walls,’ so there was always the discussion about what that meant – no permanent building, or a lot of outreach, that type of thing. But I think our goal was always to have a permanent facility and I’m really not surprised how it’s grown. We had a lot of energetic people back then that were dedicated and constantly worked towards this. It’s a very good college.”

-- Ileta Smith, former CCA employee (1983-99) and ex-director of academic advising

“The demographics supported the establishment of the college, and always did … especially with the projections at that time about how much Aurora was going to grow. I mean, I grew up in Aurora and I remember dove hunting where Aurora Mall sits today. When I graduated from Hinkley, there was nothing south of there. So I felt there was a future – maybe not to the magnitude that it’s become. … I started at the old Police Building. I had an office there. … and it was a very exciting, exhilarating time because you knew you were part of the groundbreaking that was going to have an impact on the city, and more importantly, on people’s lives.”

-- Tom Beyeler, Aurora Education Center employee from 1979-83, who worked under first CCA President Dr. Nai-Kwang Chang

“We were hoping that we would provide an opportunity for people of the community who wanted to attend college classes and maybe begin their college career and have the experience of a few classes, then be able to branch out into something larger, like going to CU, CSU or whatever. So, we envisioned it as a ‘starter’ but it’s become a finished product where people go there to get an education, or to learn a skill in some cases that would prepare them to acquire or advance in a job. … It’s bigger and better than we probably anticipated when we began pushing for it, and I certainly did push for it because at the time, I was a schoolteacher and saw the value of an education. And I look at CCA as one of the highlights of my career.”

-- Former Aurora Mayor (1987-2003) and City Councilman (1979-87) Paul Tauer, who helped the early push to get Community College of Aurora legally formed
"To me it was like a cloud hanging over our heads, having the moniker of Community College of Denver because it sure didn't feel like you belonged to Denver. Nobody in Aurora feels that way. But, to me, it didn't feel like we were really a school until we moved over to 791 Chambers. Then it felt like a school. We had a lot more classrooms over there and we were on a lot of different floors. We finally had a supply room for supplies, and we built a small auditorium in the basement, kind of hand built. It felt like a school for me. The old city hall and fire station thing, I never could get that feeling of a school."

-- longtime purchasing agent Florian Supercynski, who retired in 1999
“I went to the play that the kids did (last) summer as a reaction to the 7/20 (Aurora Theater shooting) tragedy, Glimpses, and it was a very powerful series of vignettes. I loved what the kids did. But that to me was so far beyond our wildest dreams. A theater program? In a theater with technology and kids, and they wrote it and acted in it? And we had bathrooms in the same building and we weren’t in the park somewhere? That, to me, was like “Wow.” And these kids’ lives have been changed because they have an opportunity to have a theater program, of all things. That, to me, represents our wildest dreams. You expect to have classes, teach people, get jobs and transfer to other colleges and do the things that a college ought to do. But that, to me, was beyond.”

-- Molly Markert, member of the state legislature from 1982-1986 that had a hand in the creation of the college and an Aurora city councilwoman since 2003

“People were determined that it not only needed to happen but it was going to happen. And essentially starting something from scratch just because you think it’s necessary is not always easy. So you have ups and downs, trials and tribulations, but you also have great, great successes. And when you tie together those opportunities with people who really care, like the Linda Bowmans and Larry Carters, who didn’t just care about CCA but the city, it created great opportunities for teamwork and getting things done.”

-- Steve Hogan, current Aurora mayor, six-time city councilman and former state legislator
“The growth of the college and the growth of Aurora, you can almost tie them together. We dreamed for years about being further out south. When we added Grandview, there was hope we could do something with Southlands and maybe even have a satellite (campus). But Arapahoe took that. So I think the good and bad of that is are we still the mentality of the college without walls. Do we want to be that? Or are we truly going to be a campus or two campuses that people come to rather than have satellites?”

– Terri Campbell
Caron, an original CCA employee

“We thought it was going to happen. It was just a matter of changing time and changing attitudes. We were getting part-timers from the other campuses and that just didn’t fit well with what Chang wanted to accomplish. He felt he needed control over staff that he was going to offer programs with. So I always felt, and I think Sherrie Kantor, the other full-time instructor, and Walt Schlagel felt it was going to happen in a matter of time …. But we didn’t know how much time.”

– Ron Walters, on his time at the Aurora Education Center, predating CCA, and thoughts of a community college in Aurora at the time
“I have high regard and respect for Chang for doing what he did for Aurora. And if he stepped on some toes, that was part of getting the job done. He wasn’t a glad hander, though we’d go to lunch with whoever happened to be around and have enjoyable times. But usually the lunch would end when he got a napkin out with the next project. So we were always working on something.”

-- Bud Ulrich, right-hand man of first CCA president Dr. Nai-Kwang Chang (1980-84) and CCA’s first dean of student development
“The big thing that sticks out is enrollments. They’re so huge, comparatively. The other thing is the changing demographic, the younger students. And when you talk about concurrent enrollment and some of that stuff, that’s really dramatic. But when you consider when I started, the average age of our students was over 25. I don’t know what that number is now, but I’m guessing it’s significantly lower, and a lot of that has to do with this campus – having a place to go.”

– Larry Steele, former facilities director, and History adjunct (1989-present)

“My role was to come in and run the first capital campaign so the perceptions I received going out in the community and raising funds was that people were pleasantly surprised to hear what was happening at the college. … Custom-tailored training really turned business’ heads to show it was a resource in the community and not just a place for kids to go for a couple years before they go on to a career or four-year school.”

– Susan Miller, former executive director, CCA Foundation (1997-2001)

“What stands out to me is our commitment to the students and to the community, and to the staff. From an HR standpoint I know we always talk about our commitment to students and wanting to see the students grow but the commitment to the staff is palpable too and wanting the employees to feel valued and take risks and take chances to bring their position to the fullest.”

– Debbie Irvine, original CCA employee, 1983-present

“From the beginning it always started out as a very closely knit and family-oriented type of an establishment. It’s still that way today. Sometimes we don’t think that it is. But when we all get together for faculty meetings and things, it’s like seeing your best friend all over again if you haven’t seen him in a couple of years, and it’s a wonderful, wonderful place.”

– Traci Fielden, 22-year employee and a former CCA student
“The best thing for me is that I came back and am working with people that were my teachers and the way they reacted to me was very humbling. I was very much looked at as an equal the minute I walked in the door as a teacher and that took a little while to get used to, because Jim Weedin was one of my teachers. Susan Kirk was one of my teachers. Wayne Gilbert wasn’t my teacher but everybody knew Wayne Gilbert. So to develop that professional relationship as equals among them was something that I value a lot. It was very much a collaborative relationship instead of one based on power. In terms of how I approach students because of that, I always think in the back of my mind that I have to treat them as equals because one of these days they are going to be in positions they never imagined before.”

– James Gray, CCA student from 1990-93, employee in the cashier’s office, former adjunct, and full-time Math instructor and dept. chair since 2004

“I’ll put it like Sen. Allshouse always did when he talked about ‘The University of Aurora.’ He never really meant that -- he meant a two-year college. But I think the goal -- and if Aurora’s going to become as big as Denver by 2040 or 2050 like they think they are -- CCA may well be potentially a four-year school at some point. … I don’t know what the future necessarily holds but I think CCA will advance into the future as far as the city goes.”

-- Jim Weedin, AEC and CCA employee, 1981-present
“The pace and scope and breadth of change is just relentless. … By the 2000s, there was always some huge reorganization or some catastrophe always seemingly around the corner, whereas in the early days it felt like growth and excitement and experimentation. And, in one way, I couldn't be more disappointed, that what we imagined we were making or building isn't like it's there now. On the other hand, and this is the only thing that matters to me, is that place has made a really positive difference in the lives of thousands of people and I was part of that. Nothing can take that away. No presidents. No vice presidents. No directives. No crazy policy from on high can change what we were able to do together in the classroom. And as long as I could get back there, I was always good.”

-- Wayne Gilbert, CCA faculty from 1986-2012

“I couldn’t make a difference if I was up teaching a class of 500 at CU. I can make a difference here. You can work one-on-one with students. I know my students. I can speak with them. I can do things, because I only have 25 or 30 of them that I can't if I have 500 of them. If you’re 1 of 500, you’re mostly on your own. And here our students aren’t on their own. In talking to my colleagues across the state, I would say that’s true of many smaller colleges and universities, because you have smaller classes. But CCA believes that very intensely, and that makes us different than the average small college or university.”

-- Martha Jackson-Carter, CCA Science faculty since 1993 and current chair

CCA is represented at the Cherry Creek Relays in the late 1980s by the likes of Sharon Hostetter, Edna Fielden, Dotty Walters, Terry Campbell, Paul Greer, Anne Greer, Diana Rahl, Marion Smith, Richard Tubbs, Diane West and Jerry Kirk.
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Dr. Larry Carter, at the ribbon-cutting ceremony marking the opening of the CentreTech Student Centre, along with members of the architecture and construction firms responsible for the project.

Members of the Advising staff, including Cynthia Gayles, Leigh Bessey, Mike Gallivan, Cynthia Barnes, Ileta Smith, Mary Jones, Cheryl Blum Garcia and Terry Campbell.

Edna Fielden, in her office, early 1990s.
“Community College of Aurora of 2013 gets high marks for continuation of excellence in the facilitation of learning for a much more diverse group of students than any of the earlier years of its existence.

“The continuation of the Foundation’s growth and effectiveness adds its own element of student diversity and learning of other cultures for the betterment of all.

“Historically, while the college was indeed having great success in building one campus and acquiring another, that same period was being led by a group of dedicated faculty advisors and staff members who were quietly making huge progress in the facilitation of learning which matched the needs of students.

“Learning was also enhanced by the large numbers of part-time faculty from local businesses and industry who were teaching current reality in those fields. One of the main variances of community college enrollees versus those who go to the university is their preference for some mode of learning in addition to lectures. This learning was also enhanced through continuing/community/adult education classes taught by people who were current in their business practices. The faculty development programs have always followed a path of how students best learn.

“High school students who attend community colleges on average have a lower GPA and entrance exam scores than their counterparts who enter universities. The magic of meeting the learning needs of students is that after two years, those same community college students who transfer typically have the same (or higher) GPA during the final two years as the continuing university students.

“And, yes, that magic continues at CCA.”

-- Larry Carter, president, CCA, 1986-2000
“CCA is leaving an important legacy, just because of the fact that it’s an affordable college and a college that accepts and promotes diversity. I’ve seen students that are tall, short, fat, thin, black, brown, straight, gay, and I don’t see an attitude against differences that I see in a lot of places. I’ve talked to people that have come here who have said that this is a much easier place to work than some of the other colleges because it is so family oriented, and that’s a really wonderful thing for myself because I’m a two-time cancer survivor … and it was family.”

-- Mary Westendorf, CCA administrative assistant since 1992
“It’s a source of pride of the community and there’s no other big public facility out there. They’re the only real public college in Aurora. So I think it serves the community and they need that. And if you look at the mix of the students that go there, it reflects the community and may be more heavily minority than the town is. So a lot of the underserved people in Aurora, at least they have a college they can go to. There’s been some good partnerships with the businesses out there. You’ve got Buckley Air Force Base and a lot of those people needed educational services and where else would they be going? And I think that’s true of all community colleges. But in Aurora, you look at the parking lot at night, you can see all these working people coming to school, so it’s convenient for a lot of folks to get an education and try to better themselves. Not that they couldn’t drive somewhere else or take online classes or something. But it’s nice to have it there in your area.”

-- Wes Geary, VP, administrative services, 2001-10
“When I first came to CCA, my first thing was to go and meet with every person who wanted to meet with me in that person’s office to talk and they all almost had personalized their offices so you could tell the pride and sense of home that the college provided for each of them. So being able to build on what was shared … I didn’t have to make any of that up. I really cared about the community immediately. I fell in love with Aurora and really fell in love with the college … and I honestly still will believe that if you are tending the grounds, working on the facilities, writing the articles, teaching the students, counting the money, whatever you do, that we all contribute and are equally important to the students really feeling important and therefore having the confidence to do well.”

- Dr. Linda S. Bowman, CCA president, 2000-2012
“The one word that comes to mind is innovation. They have always seemed to want to do things in a different and a more effective way. You look at the Disaster Management Institute, that’s a pretty incredible, tangible legacy.”

-- Bob Matoba, former interim dean at Lowry and head of Center for Simulation, 2002-09
“You just felt like you were going home finally (when CentreTech opened) and everybody was just so excited about it. It was a beautiful campus. There we were, and because of the little creek that ran behind us there and all the open land, we’d see deer and a lot of wildlife. And you just felt like it was our campus now. And we eventually stopped having classes at different places. They charged a terrible amount to occupy those (outside) classrooms, just a humongous amount, and it was always a bother because somebody was always shaking the canoe, more or less, and getting us in trouble. They’d park wrong or a faculty member would say something to a security person about not being able to get into the classroom, something like that. The day we had no more classes on the outside it was such a relief.”

-- Edna Fielden, clerk and administrative assistant, 1984-98

“Our mission is all about access and considering the types of students we serve and their demographics, this really could be their first, best chance of an education in the U.S. We’re giving them that and I think that, to me, is just great.”

-- Richard Maestas, VP, Administration since 2009
“It was such a battle to get the college in the first place and they fought so hard for it and now to look back thinking where we were then and where we are now is just an amazing thing. When you think about it from an HR perspective, CCA is still in its infancy in terms of its organizational evolution so there’s lots of development and growth still going on. We still don’t have a ton of history. But we’re getting there compared to other colleges. And I think it’s really exciting, because I don’t think it’s even come close to tapping out the market, the penetration in the market, or what it can contribute to the community.”

-- Cindy Hesse, CCA Director of Human Resources (2008-present)

“I’ve never been at a college – and I’ve taught at some other colleges – where we actually get so involved with our students and guide their lives beyond just, ‘Well you’re here to take ‘Criminal Justice’ or ‘English’ or something else,’ or where the students want us to get involved in their lives with life coaching. That is what first attracted me to CCA when I first got a chance to work here. I met teachers that I wanted to be educated by. So, 30 years later, I think CCA still means community. And I’d love us to one day become the ‘City College of Aurora’ offering four-year degrees.”

-- Michael Carter, CCA employee from 1996 to present and current department chair over the Police and Fire Academies and Public Service Social Sciences chair Geoff Hunt and Michael Carter help kick off the opening of the Center for Simulation.
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Former Computer Science faculty Michael Bleacher

Fun and games in the Art and Design Department

Former academic advisor Rebecca Fernandez-Martinez

EMT instructor Kris Andersen

Bud Ulrich and Everett Perkins share a laugh at a retirement celebration.

JoAnne Barnes, administrative assistant in the Lowry testing center

Former academic advisor Rebecca Fernandez-Martinez
“The history of a place and the success or failure of an endeavor is really the story of people. The commitment of legislators, community leaders, business people, educators, and others to the dream of having a community college in Aurora was realized through generous donations of time and money, hard work, difficult conversations, optimism, perseverance, and an unwavering commitment to a shared vision. It is clear to me that this shared passion for the college and our mission is still alive and well, both in the communities we serve and at the college itself. We help diverse learners achieve their dreams through education.

“Our core mission is not likely to change, but the ways in which we seek to fulfill that mission may. CCA has a very thoughtful, creative and courageous faculty and staff who are willing to try new things. We want to do better on behalf of our students so we’ll keep experimenting and assessing and figuring out how to best achieve our desired outcomes. Access to a college education will always define what we do but we also have to renew our commitment to student retention and success, completion, transfer and employment. We need a laser focus on doing all that we can do to help our students achieve their individual goals and we have to work together as a college and with our community partners to make this possible.

“We are in the process now of planning our next five years together. It's both exciting and overwhelming. We are tightly coupled with our community, and as Aurora goes, so goes the college. I suspect that in the future both the college and the community will continue to see growth and the ongoing need for the college to respond to the educational and workforce needs of our very diverse residents.

“I wish I had gotten here earlier. I would sure love to see what the next 30 years will hold. But even if I don’t get to see it all unfold, I am absolutely confident that the Community College of Aurora has a bright future and we will continue to change lives and fulfill dreams.”

-- Dr. Betsy Oudenhoven, VP, Student Affairs, and interim president (2011-present)