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FEATURE STORY: DR. VERONICA GARCIA – AIMING HIGHER FOR HIGHER EDUCATION

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Dr. Veronica Garcia

President of Northeast Lakeview College

by Meredith Kay

“A Career Built on Tenacity and a Desire to Transform Community College Systems”

Growing up in Tucson, Arizona, Dr. Veronica Garcia was told by her high school counselor that college was too expensive for someone like her and that she should focus her goals on becoming an administrative assistant. So, she took a few classes in I.T. after high school and worked for several years as an assistant in various industries. It was only when she met with Dr. Mark McCabe, a community college counselor, that she began to imagine that she could achieve more. He convinced her to enroll in her first college class, and from that first class, Dr. Garcia headed for higher education stardom.

She completed her B.S. in Business Administration at the University of Arizona and began her career at the university in the financial aid office. Her work experience in systems management led her to completely redesign and streamline the financial aid process for students. It was Dr. McCabe who also convinced her to apply at Northern Arizona University, where she received her Master of Education in Leadership.

Dr. Garcia became an administrator at Pima Community College, where she started a program to cross-train staff members from different departments, allowing them to handle overflow during enrollment periods. The college President, Dr. Richard Duran, sponsored her to attend a leadership conference where she met Dr. Antonio Perez, President of Borough of Manhattan Community College. Dr. Perez inspired her with his achievements of relocating, and ultimately rebuilding, the college following the collapse of the Twin Towers, where the college was originally located.

Next, she moved to Portland to attend Oregon State University and received her Ph.D. in Higher Education. Her career led her to the Portland Community College system, where she implemented strategic programs and modernized student services for disabled students. She even received an award for this accomplishment in braille. Her next move took her to Paradise Valley Community College, where she created a Veterans Center for students trying to re-enter the community following military service.

In her constant research of higher education success stories, Dr. Garcia had been following the growth of the Alamo Community College District. While in San Antonio for a conference, she visited Northeast Lakeview College, where she asked students about their college experiences, what they liked about the college, and what they would change.

When Dr. Garcia applied for a position at Northeast Lakeview College, she used the knowledge she had gained from talking to the students to offer ideas she would implement as President. Today, she is still using that information in her campus improvement planning. Since 2017, Dr. Garcia has been instrumental in helping Northeast Lakeview College, which was originally a satellite location for St. Philip's College, become an accredited institution. Under her leadership, the college has expanded rapidly and is now designated a Hispanic Serving Institution.

A true advocate for her community, Dr. Garcia works with leaders from surrounding cities, like Live Oak, Universal City, Schertz, Cibolo, and Selma. She values these partnerships and encourages staff members to always “buy local.” She firmly believes, “Northeast Lakeview College has a strong bond with the community because we respect our location, nestled among these dynamic small cities. We are here for them.”