



EDITORIALS

He found his way from Malaysia to Modesto; Henry Yong will help students find success

BY THE EDITORIAL BOARD

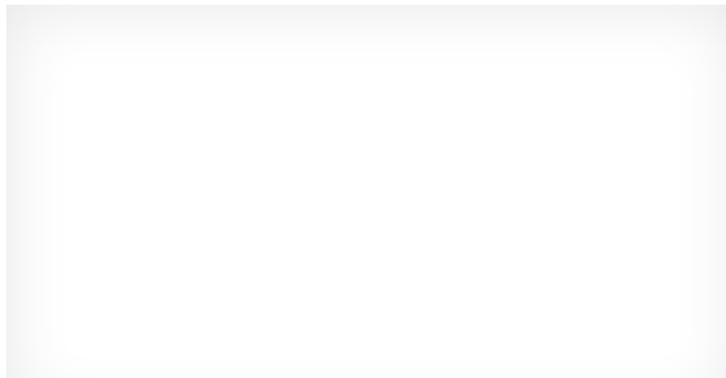
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Some journeys, even metaphorical ones, are longer than others. Henry Yong’s journey began on a farm next to the Malaysian rainforest where his grandfather, father and uncles grew peppercorns. Getting to Modesto, where he has spent the last month learning the duties of Yosemite Community College District’s new chancellor, included some hard traveling.

Those travels, we believe, will make Yong an excellent choice to lead one of the region’s most long-lived and important educational institutions. Not only has he gained a unique perspective, but getting from Malaysia to Modesto demonstrates a certain persistence that could serve Modesto Junior College and Columbia College well.

“Colleges are agents of change,” Yong told The Bee’s editorial board. “They provide pathways forward, regardless of origins.”

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“She told me, ‘Try as hard as you can to get to the United States, to go to school.’”

He followed her advice all the way to Loma Linda University, where he got his bachelor’s and an advanced degree. Soon, he was following that Peace Corps volunteer’s footsteps into teaching.

Gratitude appears central to Yong’s ethos. It took him 15 years, but he finally was able to thank that inspirational Peace Corps volunteer in person. Now, he tells teachers that teaching won’t make them rich, but by teaching they can change lives.

That’s something MJC has been doing that for nearly a century; Columbia College since 1968. Still, each school has its share of road blocks, potholes and detours.

The district has nearly exhausted its Measure E bond money, meaning any significant projects will require creative financing.

In a far-flung district, he’s going to have to innovate. Changes in state rules have made satellite campuses in Patterson and Oakdale less likely; so Yong suggests real-time links with professors in Modesto and Columbia to make instruction more accessible.

Too many students complain they can’t get classes needed to complete their associate degrees or transfer to four-year schools. One solution is better scheduling through technology, said Yong. But part of it is treating part-time instructors better so they’re willing to teach more classes.

Having worked eight years as an adjunct, he knows that most part-time instructors are vastly underpaid and many drive from campus to campus just to get enough classes to make ends meet.

While JC tuition is affordable, books and living expenses can extend the educational journey. Yong wants to create scholarships to fund the “last dollar” for those in need.

Yong is impressed that MJC will offer a bachelor’s degree in respiratory care starting next year, one of only 15 community college campuses chosen to grant bachelor’s degrees.

“We applied at Evergreen Valley, but we were not approved; Modesto was. It speaks to the integrity of the program here,” said the former Evergreen College president.

Providing more healthcare workers – from nurses to therapists – is one of his priorities.

Yong hopes to offer non-traditional education, such as a mother-daughter STEM classes to encourage women to get into the fields of science, technology, engineering and mathematics. And he intends to be personally involved in citizenship classes.

“I would be the first to volunteer to be a teacher; I’ve been through the courses myself.”

The role of a college, Yong said, is to help students create a “roadmap to success.” Someone who has journeyed so far surely knows the value of roadmaps. We think Henry Yong is well suited to act as a guide to YCCD’s future.

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