

John Massey was smiling.

He knew what was coming.

It was a brilliant, early summer day in downtown Norfolk. The sun arched lazily above the late-morning scene. All the preparations were in place. A temporary stage under a large rented pavilion. Tables under another tent that would later groan with food for guests. A large earth mover in place, prepared to take two ceremonial bites of Norfolk sod later in the day. And a crane in place, ready to hoist the *piece-de-resistance* at the end of the ceremony.

Massey is TCC's Director of Facilities Planning and Development. On this day, June 29, he was smiling and talking with associates in guests after making sure that preparations were in place for the groundbreaking for Norfolk's new student center. The groundbreaking for the pioneering Norfolk Campus Student Center, the first of its kind for community colleges in Virginia, heralds the realization of a long-cherished student dream—a place to go between classes (see related article).

For John Massey, it was another opening, another show. And Massey has been in charge of providing visual grace notes for the show for some time.

And therein lies a tale.

Massey has had two lives at Tidewater Community College. He started as a math instructor at the Chesapeake Campus in 1973, where he later became academic dean. As a rising administrator he was tapped to develop plans for a then-new Norfolk campus in 1992. This required several years of planning and oversight of numerous projects. He was the “founding provost” of the Norfolk Campus until his retirement in 2001.

“Retirement?”

That was his first life at TCC. After enjoying the fruits of retirement for two full weeks, he returned to take the helm of a brand new department of Facilities Planning and Development. Such a department was necessary to manage and oversee the many new capital and construction projects that have marked TCC's rapid growth, in itself driven by a 50 per cent increase in enrollments over the last 10 years. The challenge was irresistible.

Developing the Norfolk project was full of challenges.

It was a startup project with nearly nothing in place. He had to work not only on identifying and preparing building locations, but working with architects, developers, and working through relationships with the City. He also had to work on developing courses of study and curricula. What is the right number of rooms

—both now and for the future? Where are the faculty offices? What courses will be offered? And perhaps most importantly, where is the parking?

Getting Norfolk off the ground required several years of planning and execution.

The biggest challenge?

“So many pieces had to fit together, and there were so many people who had to work together in order to make it happen. So many people within the College united to provide so much support...”

Massey’s self-effacing manner may contribute to his effectiveness. Project management requires the coordination, orchestration of a variety of clients, vendors, contractors, subcontractors and lookers-on, all of whom have an agenda and many of whom are convinced that theirs should be considered first. Massey’s low-key air and calm manner have doubtless helped him reconcile many competing requests.

The groundbreaking for the Student Center for the 57,000 square-foot Norfolk Campus represents another milestone for the “founding provost.” Norfolk represents the first of four such Student centers, one for each of the primary campuses. And as such, represents the delivery on an objective of President DiCroce, who had heard for years that students wanted “a space of their own” to spend time between classes, to study, and to meet.

The Norfolk groundbreaking represents the construction of the first Student center for a community college in Virginia. The planned Center at 300 Granby St., will offer many traditional “student union” services to the more than 12,000 students enrolled at the Norfolk Campus. All four student centers, expected to be operational by 2011-12, will comprehensively serve the college’s 40,000-plus students each year.

June 29. The President, the Mayor, a rep from the Downtown Norfolk Council, the Provost and a student SGA senator have spoken. The assembled crowd, consisting of TCC supporters, staff and students, awaits. Now comes the moment. Massey has orchestrated an interactive audience countdown lead by the assembled community leaders and backed by a hip-hop beat. The countdown is completed, the earthmover takes two giant bites out the lawn, and TCC’s famous logo rose into the air, hoisted by the crane, shimmering in the summer sunlight.

Massey created that as well.

The logo is a well-known feature of special TCC events and dedications. It sprung to life during a trip to New York to see “The Lion King.”

Having been charged by the president to “do something special” with a presentation of the school logo for the opening of the Roper Theatre, John took in a Broadway entertainment and watched how the stage crew revealed the large disk of the sun during a scene.

Borrowing the idea, John constructed a large replica of the logo that would fold up upon itself but reveal itself properly when hoisted. During the opening of the roper, the organist played music from the original opening of the Loew’s Theatre. Other theatrics included a light show, special music and a fog machine. At the planned moment, amidst lights and fog, the giant TCC logo, reflecting light from its glitter-covered surface, seemingly arose from the floor and revealed itself to the assembly.

From all accounts, it was a hit.

Massey later found that the glitter-covered surface did not translate well to outdoor events. It didn’t reflect the light well. It was fragile.

Massey tested a number of other reflective coatings in search of the right reflective surface with little luck. He even tried sequins, although he found he couldn’t purchase enough sequins locally to do the job, let alone attaching all those stones. Mylar was hard to find.

Why not CD’s? Massey bought media in quantity and tested them. Cut in half, they made a highly reflective and durable surface. Some trial and error was involved. CDs crumble when you cut them with a saw. John found that they cut best in a paper cutter and, after more trail-and-error, that the best way to attach them is by using a staple gun.

The next generation of TCC logo took form in Massey’s home garage and took about a week of assembly and construction. He had it ready for the dedication, and it has been a mainstay of building dedications ever since.

All because the show must go on.