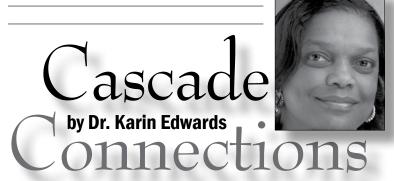
Community Colleges is How We Bridge the Gap



privilege, were able to make goals. choices, to exert a level of control over their lives that seemed beyond what was possible for hood. There was even a phys- al continuum with the fewest ical barrier -- the Harlem River barriers to entry. Tuition and - that seemed to emphasize the fees are very low in compardifference between us.

though, in middle school, standardized test requirements that river. when I received a scholarship for admission, no expensive to attend Columbia Grammar fees; we take people as they and Preparatory School, a are, where they are, in good the river in midtown Manhat- And – as the name suggests – side-by-side with the sons and most people, located close to daughters of privilege, people home. whose career goals and aspithey made.

I was grateful for the opone's life. This realization was covered there, too. so profound that I decided to make education my career.

I understood: This – commuthey want.

The fact is, if we didn't al-

When I was a little girl grow- with fulfilling careers, with mentioned another barrier, ing up in the Bronx, in New living-wage incomes, with the York City, my borough may next stage in their educational have well as been a million journeys, if that's the way they miles away from the glittering want to go. Community colskyscrapers and townhouses of leges are how we bridge the Manhattan. The people there, gap between people's current by virtue of their position and circumstances and their life black girl, and the life I want-

> The reason that community this is because they're the seg-

rations were limited only by a community college campus, their ambition and the choices though, will not magically install you in the career or your dreams, or instantly grant you portunity afforded to me, and the life you want. Make no determined not to let it go to mistake – anything worth havwaste. But more importantly, ing is worth working for; and I realized that education was if you go to college, you have you're a person of color, if the key to opening up one's to do the work. Fortunately, future, to exerting control over community college has you dent, if you're queer or an im-

For example – at the Cascade Campus of Portland do belong at community col-But I also realized that not Community College, where lege. You do deserve the caeverybody gets a chance to I am the campus president, reer and the life that you want. go to a Columbia Prep. When there is a whole range of ser- There are people at communimy career path took me to a vices and programs designed ty college who look like you, job at a community college, to help you make the right who have shared experiences the pieces fell into place and decisions to reach your educational goals, and to support struggled with that same feelnity college – is how people you along the way. There are ing of being on the outside everywhere can live the lives advisors to help you plan your choice of classes. There are tutors, both students and faculty, ready have community col- who can help you to master leges, we would need to invent your coursework. There is cutthem. They are the best way ting-edge technology in our ident of Portland Community we have to connect people workforce training programs College's Cascade Campus.

to ensure you're ready to hit the ground running in your new career. There are opportunities to serve your community and develop your skills as a leader. And when times are challenging, there are counselors to help you find your way.

There's another reason, too, that community colleges are an essential component of American life. Earlier, I the Harlem River, and how it came to symbolize far more than just the physical separation between my neighborhood and midtown Manhattan - and between me, a young ed for myself.

Here it is: Community colcolleges are so successful at leges are the engine that can lift people of color and memmost folks in my neighbor- ment of the higher education- bers of other underserved populations from the cycle of intergenerational poverty that has kept too many of us down ison with virtually any four- for too long. Community col-Things changed for me, year institution. There are no leges are how you can cross

Students from underrepresented backgrounds can often be the first members of their prestigious institution across faith and without judgment. families to go to college, and are thus unfamiliar with camtan. Suddenly, I was studying community colleges are, for pus life and all that it entails. Many may never have considered college to be a possibili-Simply stepping foot onto ty, and as a result can feel like an impostor, like they don't belong. Many aren't aware of the support systems available to them, and are vulnerable to dropping out during times of

> So let me be very clear: If you're a first-generation stumigrant or differently abled – you are not an impostor. You similar to yours, who have looking in – and they are waiting to welcome you and help you succeed.

What are you waiting for? Dr. Karin Edwards is pres-

