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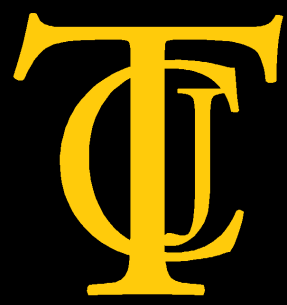
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Tyler, Texas



Heroes & Friends

By Kevin Eltife

I suppose it is human nature, but sometimes we don't appreciate all the things we have to be thankful for, right in our own back yard. I feel that way about East Texas and particularly when it comes to higher education.

We are fortunate to have so many quality institutions of higher learning, including those right here in Tyler: Texas College, The University of Texas at Tyler and Tyler Junior College.

Tyler Junior College has meant so much to me and my entire family for years. Some of my first memories of TJC were driving out Fifth Street when I was a young boy, going to my great aunt's house. Back then, it was like driving an eternity, all the way from our house over on South Kennedy Street. Every time we passed TJC, my mother would tell me the story of when she attended there. I would look at the sprawling campus, always with a perfectly maintained landscape, and think 'what an awesome campus.' I was probably about five or six years old, and the tales my mother would tell and the campus both seemed bigger than life.

My father died when I was a year and half old, leaving my mother to raise me and my brother – who was nine at the time – and my sister, who was five. My mother dedicated the rest of her life to raising the three of us and the one thing she preached to us over and over is the value of getting a good education. She always reminded us of the opportunities we had right here in Tyler. She made clear we would get an education and she pushed all three of us to take advantage of Tyler Junior College.

My brother, sister and I all took advantage in some form or fashion of the educational

opportunities provided by Tyler Junior College. Community colleges are on the front lines of providing higher education at an affordable price in our state. So many families have been priced out and cannot afford to send their kids away to four



year universities. I know from first-hand experience what having a local community college can mean to a family trying to make ends meet. My mother knew value when she saw it and she for sure knew the value of the education provided by Tyler Junior College.

Our mother and our education are without doubt the reason for the success of my brother, sister and I. As an elected official, I constantly think of families today that struggle to provide a good education for their kids. During hard economic times, especially, institutions like TJC are so important. Community colleges are colleges of opportunity, providing hope for anyone to achieve great things, regardless of socio-economic status. I will continue to support proper state funding for our community colleges so that in turn those institutions can provide the most affordable education possible for our citizens.

To this day, when I drive by Tyler Junior College, I think about those drives as a young boy with my mom and the principles she instilled in us as children, our faith in God, our love of family and the need to get a good education. For certain, she knew best and she knew the value of our very own Tyler Junior College, right here in our own back yard.

TJC Hero and Friend Sen. Kevin Eltife has received numerous honors including "Legislator of the Year" from the Texas Municipal League, the "Freedom to Teach" award from the Association of Texas Educators and recognition from Texas Monthly for being "tough, pragmatic, independent...(and) a problem solver." Previously, he has served on the Texas Higher Education Coordinating Board, and served three terms on the Tyler City Council as well as three terms as Mayor of Tyler.