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## Patrick Cate is new president at Lakes Region Community College

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Lakes Region Community College President Patrick Cate points out a photograph in a classroom in Laconia last month, showing a group of culinary students from the college catering to members of the U.S. Senate in Washington. (Chris Johannes/The Laconia Daily Sun photo)

LACONIA — Patrick Cate is transitioning from interim president to president at Lakes Region Community College, and he is looking to foster growth for the Lakes Region and among the students at the college.

“This position gives me an opportunity to make sure that the Lakes Region can be acknowledged as part of that development in New Hampshire. So, that's why I decided to put my hat in the ring,” Cate said.

The Community College System of New Hampshire released a statement about Cate's appointment as LRCC president on April 18.

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“At first, I wasn't sure I wanted to be the president; I really enjoyed being the vice president. As I got into being the interim president, I really saw the impact that this community can do outside of the walls,” Cate said.

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He had been serving as the college's interim president since July 2022.

"I got a different perspective on the impact of community colleges, and specifically LRCC," Cate said, referring to his temporary time in the president's office. "And I look at our communities on the rise out there, you know, a lot of our local communities have really done some great work on community development, economic development, and in some areas of opportunity that weren't there before."

LRCC is one of seven institutions that make up the community college system of New Hampshire.

"I have a joke I do every time I teach a class. I say, 'I graduated in the Top 50 of my high school — because there were 48 of us.' I wasn't the greatest high school student. I didn't really discover my love for education until I went to college. I ended up going to Keene State College after taking a year off and absolutely loved the experience."

Cate has a bachelor's degree from Keene State and a master's degree in education from Plymouth State University.

His professional experience includes more than 20 years in higher education. Cate began his career working several years at Walnut Hill College in Philadelphia, Pennsylvania, and at Rivier University in Nashua. He then went from a residence hall director to dean of student success in his 17 years at Plymouth State University. Throughout his career, Cate has been in the classroom, teaching undergraduate and graduate courses.

"When this opened up here, I started as the associate vice president, and in 2018 I became the vice president of academic and student affairs in 2019, and acted as the vice president until 2022," Cate said.

In addition to his formal qualifications, Cate said he uniquely understands the wariness or uncertainty some potential students and families may have about higher education.

"I grew up in a family that didn't shun higher education, but we didn't think it was for us. My brother and I are the first in my family to go to college, for example," he said. "So, I didn't even realize that college was a good option. And frankly, I didn't necessarily have a good opinion of college."

Amid a national epidemic of federal student loan debt in the United States, Cate raves about the relative affordability of attending and graduating from a community college.

"It's affordable. Less than half of our students graduate with any debt at all. Of those, the last time we did a census, [the graduates] had less than \$8,500, a piece in debt," he said. "So when we talk on the national level of a \$10,000 forgiveness, we don't even get to that for our students.

"So it's an affordable option. We are hearing [from students], 'Do I go to higher education? Or do I take a trade?' You can do both. We want folks out there doing both."

LRCC boasts dozens of associate degree and certificate programs including, but not limited to, fire fighting and paramedics, culinary arts, automotive, nursing, and industrial automation and robotics. These programs not only prepare students to enter the workforce, but provide existing employees in the area with additional skills, qualifications, and certifications all while remaining at their current job.

"So in automotive, we want technicians out there that are really good at servicing customers' vehicle's needs," Cate said. "But also we want them to understand shop culture, and how that can be improved, and be able to critically think through things that we don't even know are problems yet.

"The ability to do a trade education and a general education is an opportunity that really not only helps the community out with really great workers, but also lets our students when they graduate still go on with their education, if they so choose, a lot of our students will start here."

A program called "Early College" allows students in New Hampshire to earn dual credits in accredited courses for high school and college. Students participate in that program either on-site at their high school, at a local community college while still in high school, or online.

"It's a great way to help reduce the cost of education, for not only those families that may go somewhere else in which we're happy to be able to provide some general education, but also folks who want to stay here and be able to finish a degree in a reasonable time at the lowest cost possible, then get right out there and serve their communities," Cate said.

That student growth, development, and accomplishment is what it's all about for Cate as an educator.

He said: "A lot of our students who come, they haven't had a good experience in education. Some of them just didn't feel like they belonged, or they took a long time off. So they're a little worried about coming back. And you have those pre-class jitters. A lot of our students who come to us have been thinking about coming to us for years, and they haven't made that step.

“And when they finally do, it's great to have them here at commencement, you see, not only their pride, but you see their family's pride, their kid's pride. I just love it. You see people who maybe thought they couldn't do it, do something that they now will have for the rest of their life. It is phenomenal.”

LRCC will celebrate graduation this year at the Bank of New Hampshire Pavilion on May 11.