

Distinguished Alumnus Award



Dr. Gary Tollefson

The Yakima Valley Community College Alumni Association is pleased to announce Dr. Gary Tollefson as this year's recipient of the *YVCC Distinguished Alumnus Award*. Tollefson has devoted his life to education. He is currently working as a consultant for the Advancement via Individual Determination (AVID) for Higher Education in Dallas, Texas.

Tollefson grew up in the Yakima Valley and graduated from Toppenish High School. In 1969 he earned his associate's degree from Yakima Valley Community College before transferring to Western Washington University (WWU) where he earned his bachelor's degree in education. While teaching history at Eisenhower High School he worked to complete his master's degree, also from WWU. He then transitioned from teaching to college administration and served as acting associate registrar at WWU from 1975-1976, director of admissions/registrar at Lewis-Clark State College from 1976-1979, and associate director of admissions at Eastern Washington University from 1979-1981.

In 1981 he joined the administrative team at Yakima Valley Community College. During his tenure he served the college through several roles in the student services and instruction divisions. In 1990 he became dean of professional/technical programs followed by appointment as dean of arts and sciences. During this time he also completed his doctoral degree in education from Seattle University. Beginning in 1994 he became vice president of instruction and student services; a position he held until spring 2003. In May 2003 he was appointed president of Skagit Valley College, where he served until his retirement in 2012.

"If ever there was a college that shaped a life, YVCC was that college for me," stated Tollefson. "As a student in the 60's I was able to learn from passionate and compassionate teachers, many of whom have remained lifelong friends. As a YVCC teacher and administrator myself, I felt it was my responsibility to honor those who had helped and mentored me, by doing the same for students I worked with through the years," he continued. "I'm certain many of this year's graduates will look back in a few years and like me, think of YVCC as a cornerstone of their success. Congratulations and best wishes to this year's graduates!" he concluded.

Throughout his career Tollefson served on numerous community organizations and committees including Rotary International – District 5050 Scholarship Committee, Skagit County Economic Development Council, Leadership Skagit Board of Directors, Northwest Washington Workforce Development Council, Northwest Career and Technical Academy board of directors, AVID for Higher Education National Advisory Board, and the 2011 Swinomish Tribal Community Canoe Journey Planning Committee. In addition, he has received honors for his commitment to education including the *Exemplary Leadership Award* from the Leadership Skagit Program, *Champions of Diversity Award* from Skagit Valley College and in honor of his service to Skagit Valley College a plaza and clock tower was named in his honor.