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Another viewpoint: Clay Campbell

Times are changing, and higher education is vital

Tuesday, January 14, 2014

(Editor's note: Clay Campbell of Henry County is president of Martinsville Speedway. He has served as past president and a board member on many organizations in the area for economic development, tourism and education. He wrote this column on behalf of the Rural Horseshoe Initiative of the Virginia Community College System. Its goal is to increase the level of post-secondary education and degree attainment for rural Virginians. The program gets its name from the horseshoe-shaped arc that begins on the Eastern Shore, stretches down to Southside and Southwest Virginia, and goes back up to the tip of the state.)

By CLAY CAMPBELL

Racing is in my blood — I was born in the business.

I've been fortunate that I've always known what I wanted to do with my life, and I knew what I needed to do in order to achieve my life's goals.

The Martinsville Speedway was founded by my grandfather H. Clay Earles nearly 70 years ago. I started working there as a young boy. I picked up trash, cut grass with a swing blade, and I did whatever else that needed to be done.

I started working full-time in the maintenance department after I graduated from Drewry Mason High School in 1978. I knew all about hard work. I worked with concessions, souvenirs — virtually every department — before becoming vice president and assistant general manager to president in 1988.

I received my education on the race track, but times are changing.

It's hard for people without adequate training, experience or education to have a successful career. When I was starting in the business, we didn't have the same educational opportunities for a career in racing. Now, there are many programs springing up across the country, like the motorsports technology program at Patrick Henry Community College. It's a different world out there with education that's readily available and waiting.

And it's a different world within the racing business. With the creation of so many new technologies, it's a different landscape on the track. The cars are extremely advanced technologically, and well-trained engineers and technicians are needed to build them and fix them if something goes wrong.

We live in a world now where education is vital to our success. The Virginia Horseshoe Initiative is working to help encourage Virginians to finish high school, earn their GED certificate, and enroll in community college to pursue a skill, trade or start on the path to a four-year degree.

I'm doing what I love. It's my hope that more people in Virginia will find their passions and pursue a career they love.

(For more about the Rural Horseshoe Initiative, visit www.vccs.edu/Foundation.)





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