

'I am a manager,' he says

'Non-academic' wants OCC's top job

By MICHAEL MATUSZEWSKI

Robert Field Roelofs, one of four finalists in Oakland Community College's (OCC) presidential sweepstakes, is not part of the ivory tower. Even though he is president of Macomb County Community College (MCCC), he is a newcomer to the world of academia. He became president of MCCC in 1975.

Roelofs' roots reach deep into U. S. Steel's Pittsburgh mills, where he began by doing "the dirtiest, lowest jobs." His entire career background is steel—president of Midwest Steel Corp., president of Great Lakes Steel Corp., vice-president of National Steel Corp., executive vice-president of Empire-Detroit Steel Corp.

"I'm a good manager. I've learned a lot about education. I'm a people per-

son," Roelofs said of himself last week at a public interview with OCC's board of trustees.

MANAGEMENT IS Roelofs' strength.

"I try to create a feeling in the staff that they can come up with decisions independently," he said.

"We try to give each person authority consistent with their responsibility. We delegate authority as much as we can."

The hiring of a manager, rather than an academician, would be an abrupt change for the multi-campus, 18,000-student school. Acting President Derek Nunney and his predecessor, the late Joseph Hill, are children of academia. Hill, who designed the college's internationally-known cognitive style approach to learning, might even

qualify as "the theoretician's theoretician."

Roelofs, in contrast, does not have a Ph.D. His master's degree is in metallurgical engineering. He holds a patent on a metallurgical process. Members of OCC's board were visibly impressed when Roelofs brought up the patent.

MANAGEMENT IS NOT the only area where the MCCC president differs from OCC's recent leadership.

Roelofs said he would involve OCC in statewide community college affairs and would run an open administration.

"The president has to try to be a statesman. He has to be able to say 'This looks best for the community college system as a whole.' I can say that this has worked best for Macomb," he said.

This differs radically from Hill's views. Under Hill, OCC shunned membership in the Michigan Community College Association and avoided involvement in regional community college activities.

"No one knows what Oakland Community College needs better than Oak-

land Community College," Hill once said in an interview.

In contrast, Roelofs said, "I'd try to speak for what's good for education and the community college system. I'd say don't look just at the bottom line for a single community college. If it's beneficial for the community college system, it'll probably be beneficial for the school."

UNEXPECTEDLY, Roelofs' age became an issue. At 60, he would be the same age as Hill would have been.

Trustee Barbara Jane Willing said she was afraid the board was wasting its time in the process if it would pick a person who intended to retire in two years.

Roelofs revealed that when he applied for the presidency at MCCC he intended to retire at age 62. "That was contingent to having a financial position to be able to retire," he said.

Since that time, though, he said, a couple of "adverse IRS (Internal Revenue Service) rulings" have made him scrap those retirement plans.

"I've really changed my mind about retiring," he assured the trustees.

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