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NEWS RELEASE

July 31, 2009

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INTERIM DIRECTOR HIRED FOR BITTERROOT COLLEGE PROGRAM

MISSOULA -

Darby resident Victoria Clark has been hired to head the Bitterroot College Program of The University of Montana for the next year. As interim director she will oversee the long-term planning for a permanent entity to deliver adult and higher education in the Bitterroot Valley.

Clark will report to UM Provost Royce Engstrom and work closely with a steering committee composed of Bitterroot Valley residents and representatives from UM, Flathead Valley Community College, and the Office of the Commissioner of Higher Education, among others.

"Victoria has demonstrated a passion for providing education to residents of the Bitterroot Valley," Engstrom said. "Her background in education, her commitment to the community and her energetic approach combine to make her the best person for the position."

"It's taken time and effort, but I think we now have a great opportunity to bring substantive adult and higher education to valley residents," Clark said. "I am very much looking forward to my year ahead with UM. Our community's partnership with UM and state higher education professionals is critical to the success of postsecondary programming in Ravalli County."

"This is an exciting time for adult learning services in the Bitterroot Valley," she said, "and I am proud to have been selected to be part of the leadership team as we move forward."

Clark has directed Darby Adult Education since 2001. The program offers courses for work force development and personal enrichment. She also is a student enrollment and records specialist for Literacy Bitterroot, which offers Adult Basic Education and General Education Development preparation services.

Clark also worked as a project archaeologist for the Navajo Nation Archaeology Department in Flagstaff, Ariz., from 1991 to 1997. From 1987 to 1998, she was a staff archaeologist for various other projects, as well as a student teacher and substitute K-12 teacher.

She holds a master's degree in adult and postsecondary education from the University of Wyoming, a postbaccalaureate secondary teaching certification in history/social studies from Northern Arizona University and a bachelor's degree in European studies from Amherst College in Massachusetts.

During the past four years, Clark was a principal spokesperson for the Bitterroot Valley Community College effort that was considered by the Legislature but not approved. The state Board of Regents, which oversees the Montana University System, subsequently authorized UM to work with Bitterroot Valley residents to deliver higher education services to the people there.

"I am confident that with Victoria as interim director we will all work together to design and implement an outstanding educational program that will meet the needs of students and the community in the Bitterroot Valley," Engstrom said.

In the fall semester, the Bitterroot College Program will offer eight courses selected to prepare students for college-level work and to help them get a start on college, including courses in math, writing, business, biology and psychology. Many online courses also are available. Courses will be held in the Carriage House this fall, and plans are to hold instruction in the new Ravalli County Economic Development Center after that. Future course offerings will be determined through a needs analysis that Clark will oversee.

“This is an important moment for the Bitterroot Valley, but an equally important moment for Montana as a whole,” said Mary Sheehy Moe, deputy commissioner of two-year education with the Office of the Commissioner of Higher Education. “We are hoping that with Interim Director Clark’s leadership, the university system will develop a highly responsive, very innovative approach to expanding access to higher education in communities without a local college presence.”

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