

Sonya Christian

New Bakersfield College president

By Bakersfield Life Magazine

Photos by Casey Christie

In October, Sonya Christian was introduced as the 10th president of Bakersfield College. It was a sort of homecoming for her.

Christian served as BC's math instructor and dean of science, engineering, allied health and mathematics from 1991 to 2003 until leaving for a job at Lane Community College in Eugene, Ore., where she worked as vice president and chief academic officer.

She began her job as the leader of one of the largest community colleges in California on a part-time basis in December. Working full-time since January, Christian shared a bit about her new job with Bakersfield Life.

How do you like being back in Bakersfield? Did you ever think you'd make it back to Bakersfield College?

It is great to be back in Bakersfield. I've missed being able to go to In-N-Out Burger for lunch!

I didn't know what life would bring when I left Bakersfield for my work in ... Oregon. Life certainly has unpredictable twists and turns.

Nearly 50 people applied for your job, and 14 were interviewed. Why do you think you were chosen?

I came to the process with a love of Bakersfield because this is where I started my work. I think my affection for BC and the community was visible from the start.

When interviewing, I said my experience in the educational system, wide range of work responsibilities, and my passion for community college education in general, and Bakersfield College in particular, gives me the background, skills and commitment needed to function effectively as president.

How did you prepare for the president position?

I spent time talking with faculty and staff, getting acquainted with what has taken place at BC since I left, what the current state of the college is, what needs and concerns are pressing, and what kind of teams can be formed to address those needs and concerns.

What is your short-term focus at BC?

In many ways, short-term and long-term plans are tightly connected. Education is facing budget issues nationally, so I am focusing on engaging with the current budget challenges. My primary focus is galvanizing all employees — all 717 of us — to have laser focus on our goals. I am also focusing on building our ties with the community BC serves.

What about your long-term plans for the college?

The fundamentals don't change —



Bakersfield College exists to serve the educational and workforce needs of students and community. But the larger picture of higher education is certainly in flux. Ensuring that BC is well-positioned to address the changing national and international issues and pressures while maintaining our local character and commitment is essential to our long-term success. We are celebrating our centennial year — 1913 was when we opened our doors to students in our community. BC will honor our tradition of excellence and equity while we boldly move into the future creating learning environments of the 21st century.

Why should local students choose Bakersfield College for their college education?

All students find a friendly campus of dedicated professionals who are really here for the students, and who quickly become partners in the student's growth and success, whether that is faculty, counselors, advisers, facilities staff — everyone is focused on the student's success.

There is a sense that when you come to Bakersfield College, the college is really standing there with you.

Tell us a little about yourself, your family, and your life outside of work.

I grew up in Kerala, India, and came to the United States to do graduate work in math. I went to University of



Southern California, and now my daughter, Eisha, is doing her residency in neurosurgery at USC. She graduated from Highland High School, and loved her experience here in Bakersfield.

Outside of work, I enjoy long walks and meeting friends to enjoy the local cuisine at some of my favorite Bakersfield restaurants. I also enjoy movies.

For a full interview with BC President Sonya Christian — including how she prepares for work each day, and why she became involved in education — go to bakersfieldlife.com.

Christian speaks to the crowd during an awards presentation by Congressman Kevin McCarthy in Memorial Stadium for the Renegades football team.



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