

COMMUNITY VOICES:

Celebrate women's history with BC

- By Jean Fuller
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Before I ever held public office, I was a student at Bakersfield College, earning my associate degree. During my time there, I learned how deeply committed BC was — and still is — to empowering women to become leaders throughout Kern County and our world. I myself am a product of this wonderful institution.

However, women's leadership and empowerment is not a recent endeavor for BC, but deeply rooted in its history, as the college came to be what it is today under the leadership of a woman named Grace Van Dyke Bird. She first came to teach in 1917 and was appointed as college chief executive, the position now known as president, in 1921. She was among the first to suggest using the term "community college" instead of junior college, arguing that community was more descriptive of the institution's role.

A woman of vision, she encouraged instruction in job skills as well as quality education for students transferring to four-year colleges which remains a primary goal and focus of the college. As the first woman to lead a public community college in California, Bird was popular and widely respected as an educator and administrator.

Today, under the leadership of Sonya Christian, Bakersfield College continues to support women's leadership and development throughout the college and the community. Through panels, workshops and advocacy, BC ensures student success and provides a platform for community engagement and mentorship. These efforts contribute to a healthier, stronger and more diverse future for women seeking pivotal leadership roles.

Keeping with that spirit, BC will kick off another Women's History Month with the Jean Fuller Women in Leadership Panel, a namesake I am incredibly honored to receive. I will act as moderator for the panel, and the event will be hosted by BC's President Christian. Maria Wright, one of the event's coordinators shares our excitement about the program and says, "We are thrilled at BC to once again host The Jean Fuller Women in Leadership Panel, which highlights women who are advocates for education, their community, and both personal and professional development."

The panelists are all local women in leadership positions and will discuss their influences, challenges and successes along with words of advice for young women. They include Mary Barlow, a career educator and the current Kern County Superintendent of Schools. Katie Russell will also be in attendance. She serves as the first woman and first African American superintendent of Panama-Buena Vista Union School District. Finally, Nicole Parra will be our third panelist. She is a former assemblywoman, and current manager of California government relations at the Marathon Petroleum Corporation. The event is part of BC's month-long celebration of Women's History Month.

Bakersfield College's Women's History and More committee, in collaboration with the Office of Student Life and Student Government Association will also host journalist and activist Elaine Weiss as part of the college's Distinguished Speaker series on Tuesday, as well as two panels focused on history in the making: COVID-19 and its effects on women.

I personally invite you to attend The Jean Fuller Women in Leadership Panel. You can join by going to Bakersfield College's YouTube Page at <https://www.youtube.com/user/BakersfieldCollege> at 6 p.m. Thursday.

Jean Fuller is a California Senate Republican Leader Emeritus and served in public office from 2006-2018.