

Having a vision to see something not yet there is difficult for some folks. Realtors often say that it is harder to sell an empty house than one that is currently occupied. Empty houses are sometimes depressing to look at- lonely, abandoned, blank and sad. Some potential buyers just can't visualize seeing their art on the wall, their furniture in the room, and their kids' drawings up on the refrigerator. An occupied house though is easier to see as a home, rather than a space to be filled.

But let's say you have a vision for what you want. The next challenge is trying to make what's in your mind happen in reality. Ever have a project in your mind or an end result you were looking for, then went about making that project only to have that project not turn out the way you were hoping? There is a series of photos on the internet of those who tried to recreate a beautifully created cake or other dish. They post a split picture of the wonderful artistic cake on one side of the frame, and their sad, almost horrific attempt to recreate it on the other side. Imagine a perfect cake representation of, say, The Cookie Monster, next to a photo of a blue deformed, nightmare cake that John Carpenter would be proud to use as a prop in one of his horror movies. Often times the photo has the sarcastic exclamation of success, "Nailed It!"

First, let me set the stage for what would become one of the most incredible building projects I have been a part of that both fulfilled our vision and actually turned out better and much faster than we could have hoped.

We had several space needs at the college. We needed a home for two of our Federal grants, Upward Bound and Educational Talent Search. If we could find them a new home then we could accomplish other goals on the Chanute main campus, such as expansion of our dining hall.

We also had no indoor practice facility for our outdoor sports. When it rained or got too cold to be outside baseball, softball, and men's and women's soccer moved to the gym on campus. But its only one gym and we have 10 sports. So not ideal at all.

We were very much out of storage space at the college. We go through a lot of "stuff" at NCCC. Occasionally we have an auction to get rid of it all, but in between auctions we have to put it somewhere. We also have stuff we use only during various seasons or on special occasions. We also need to store items for projects that have to be bought in advance and must wait for the proper time to utilize them.

And we had a strategic plan to expand career and technical education for the area. While the programs we had like welding and construction were popular and producing wonderful graduates that were getting great jobs, we had requests for more choices. Those included electrical, heating, and air conditioning technician, industrial maintenance technology, and aerostructures. All these programs were needed in the area for locally available jobs, but we just didn't have the space or resources to add them without going into significant debt.

In March of 2018 the college purchased an old factory in the Chanute industrial park. We got a great deal on it, \$275,000 for 64,000 square feet. The Trustees had set aside about \$275,000 in a fee account to build a 10,000 square foot storage facility so we just used that money to buy this much larger space.

The factory, while very spacious, was old and was in need of repair. The roof leaked in places. There was rust on the metal walls. It looked like a real "fixer-upper." So it took a lot of vision to see that factory not for what it was, but rather, what it could be. And we set to work.

Within a very short time we received a donation to turn what was the former shipping and receiving area of the factory into the indoor practice facility. We put in netting and artificial turf, and our maintenance folks fixed up the area with improved walls and benches. The loading docks became the batting cages. And within a few months students were using the space! The facility continues to get improvements including an awesome donated floor in the entrance walkway. (I know, how awesome can a floor be? Take it from me and those who have seen it. It is amazing!) And recently we added beautiful graphic art down the walls of that hallway of photos by Ben Smith of student athletes in action. That turned out beautifully as well!

The office area at the old factory was next. Other than a few facelift items and another leak to fix, this area was in pretty good shape. With some paint, carpeting, some shelves and other furniture, as well as new IT infrastructure, we were able to turn that area around fairly quickly. That allowed us to move those grants from the Student Union to the new facility, which in turn, allowed us to expand the dining hall on main campus with the new Cleaver Family Community Room. The grants have more spacious offices, their own conference room, storage room, and even a small meeting space. The students on main campus got a renovated dining hall and the community got a new room to use in the Student Union for public events. Everybody won on that deal.

Of course we began storing things at the factory almost immediately. Have you every moved from a smaller house to a bigger one and thought to yourself, "This space should hold us for a while." Then later you are shocked by how fast it fills up? Yeah, that happened. But we are containing it now. We had a lot of stuff in there from the construction projects. So as those spaces were completed those items got moved out and utilized.

But after all these accomplishments, we still had the majority of the building empty. It was quite cavernous even after we built a wall separating the storage section from the empty space. It was just as you might imagine a very old factory whose useful days were drawing to a close might look. Rusty, dark, and dirty. Stray items were left behind when the owners moved. It was a bit surreal as part of the building looked like a Chuck E. Cheese. I'm not kidding. One of the things the company made there were booths for restaurants, including the family restaurant. They had used left over booths to make their break room. So it looked like a post-apocalyptic factory with a Chuck E. Cheese at its center.

The Trustees wanted the new career and technical education programs and now had the space to provide them. I did not want the college to enter into any more debt, so I stated, "We will move at the speed of resources" to add these new programs. And wow! Did we move! What started with a small USDA grant for two labs eventually became \$5.4 million in private donations, private foundation grants, local gifts, and state and federal grants!

We set out to create the Mitchell Career and Technology Center. I told the architect, "Make career and technical education cool." I didn't want it to be the forgotten building behind the high school that I had when I was in school. I wanted it to be a showplace. And it is! We want these students to feel as valued as the students using our other buildings. You should come to the open house we are having on Oct. 25th at 5:30pm to 6:30pm at 4101 Ross Lane in Chanute to see for yourself.

We now have four programs at the MCTC, with three more on the way for fall 2023- including our newest program (hopefully soon to be approved by the State) plumbing! And we have funding to build

an 8<sup>th</sup> program there for fall 2024. That one is secret for now. There is still more work to be done. Soon you'll see a new parking lot there as well as completion of the roof project.

We host Kansas Works at that facility too, creating a one-stop-shop for those who need help finding a job, and a place to get training for jobs that are open.

We took a look at an old, rusty building and with the Trustees' vision turned it into an incredible asset for so many areas of the college. We did it quickly, without adding any debt and with almost no resources from our general fund or our local tax dollars. Even the \$275,000 to buy the building was from student fee accounts. It was a true partnership of wonderful donors, government assistance, and college effort and vision.

Without sarcasm, I can say we truly Nailed It!

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