

We are starting another year at NCCC on August 22, our 86<sup>th</sup> year! While every year is special in its own way this year is extra-special for me. It is the start of my 20<sup>th</sup> year at NCCC.

I came to NCCC in 2003 as the Vice President for Student Learning. The college was a different place back then. We had some significant accreditation issues, leaky roofs, damaged relationships with the public, and little in the way of reserves. I knew the administration, staff, and faculty had our work cut out for us to get things on the right track back then.

On my first day in Chanute I was dropping my U-Haul off in town after a LONG 24 hours of driving from Michigan and unloading our belongings into my first house here. I was exhausted and smelly (it was a July like this one and we had a lot of stuff to unload) but still hopeful. The man who took the keys for the U-Haul asked why I was moving to town. I piped right up and said, "Oh! I'm the new Vice President at the college!" He paused, frowned, and in a low tone said, "Hmm...good luck." That did not inspire confidence.

Well, we got our accreditation issues sorted out, fixed the roofs, repaired those relationships and built up our reserves. And 19+ years later, NCCC is going strong!

This is going to be an outstanding year full of firsts and new things. But before I get you excited about this new year I want to salute a big part of NCCC's past and my past too. This last week Mariam Mih passed away. Mrs. Mih taught social studies at the college for over 50 years! She started at Chanute Junior College in 1944 and retired in 1995 from NCCC. In this day of the Great Resignation the average tenure of an employee has fallen well under 5 years. Some say it will be as low as 1.7 years by the end of 2022. Fifty years is just incredibly rare!

Just think about how many students she taught. The average class size at NCCC is 12 (usually higher in social studies) and instructors usually teach 10 classes a year. That's a total of 6,120 students in 51 years. What an impact she made! But it didn't stop there.

In 1995, Mrs. Mih was elected to the Board of Trustees, a post she would have until 2011. She was one of the trustees that helped us get out of that mess in 2002-2004. She also voted with the others to name me Vice President in 2003. In 2010, her last year on the board, she voted for Resolution 2010-63 that named me the President of NCCC. I will be forever grateful to her and the other members of the board at the time who gave me this awesome opportunity and responsibility.

While we have had many long-term employees of NCCC and many long-term trustees of the college, we have not had anyone who comes close to the devotion of Mariam Mih with a combined 67 years of service to the institution. She was a huge part of the success of our college and helped put us on the path of continued success. The college and I will be forever grateful to her.

Speaking of the future it's going to be a great year this year. Soon we will be opening the Mitchell Career and Technology Center in the industrial park at Chanute! Final preparations are happening now. I would like to invite you to the ribbon cutting on September 23<sup>rd</sup> at 4pm at the Ross Lane facility! We chose that date as that's the Friday of our All-Alumni event that evening and the night before Artist Alley. Hopefully, there might be a few more folks in town to see the building and make the ribbon cutting a have-to event that exciting weekend.

The MCTC will house four technical education programs on opening day, with three more scheduled for fall of 2023 and another planned for fall 2024! You'll see new advancements to that building throughout 2022-2023 including a new parking lot.

We have other projects currently going on that should be completed through these first months of the fall semester. We're fixing up the roofs of the softball field and adding a new refrigerator/freezer building to the Student Union. Later we will be constructing a greenhouse near Stoltz Hall. We are excited for that addition to biology and environmental life science!

Believe it or not our Multipurpose Building that houses wrestling and other sports from time to time has never had air conditioning. This summer has been a brutal reminder of how uncomfortable that can be. We were able to repurpose some AC units and add cooling to this building! It will certainly be safer for our student athletes this August and will allow for more camps in the summer of 2023.

We have renovated the business office in Sanders Hall and updated bathrooms in NeoKan residence hall. You'll see a new mural near the Student Union. Also, you may have heard at Disney parks there are "hidden Mickeys." Well, we now have hidden panthers! But the catch is they only come out when it rains (if it ever does again). You'll have to take a rainy walk on our sidewalks and see if you can find them!

At the Ottawa campus we have added a lab for our newest program, Diagnostic Medical Sonography, which launches officially January, 2023, but folks can get signed up now and begin working on the prerequisite courses. We are also resealing and restriping the parking lot there. Not exciting I know, but it needs to be done and sure makes the lot look better.

As the 2022-2023 year rolls on we will be renovating some public areas on the Chanute campus too. Some areas have not been touched in many years, a few going back to when the buildings opened in the 1960s. New ceiling tiles, dividers in the bathrooms, paint, furniture, etc. will be added. It was just time to freshen the place a bit.

Much of the cost of these new projects are from fundraising! We have donations and grants that have made these projects move forward. In the case of the Mitchell Career and Technology Center, we have now raised in excess of \$5.3 million for that building! The funds for the greenhouse were donated, as were the repairs to the softball roof through our tax credits fund! The sonography lab was created through the Title III grant.

So there are a lot of new and exciting things for my 20<sup>th</sup> year at Neosho County Community College both now and on the horizon. I am excited for our students, employees and community as we bring these new things online. It's going to be a great year!

I believe we have come a long way since 2003. I see the advancements we have made year by year to improve NCCC and it has been fun to be a part of that transformation. Thanks to the gentleman who wished me good luck at the U-Haul place years ago – It worked! With a little luck and a lot of hard work NCCC has become a premier community college in Kansas. But we are not done yet!

If you have any questions about this column or anything else please contact me at [binbody@neosho.edu](mailto:binbody@neosho.edu).