

It's my favorite time of year! Christmas at the Inbody's is not a day but a season that lasts quite a while. Before Thanksgiving, music CDs are prepared with carols, lists are compiled of movies we want to watch, and the holiday outdoor display is planned. Speaking of the outdoor display, we have had "Virtual Santa" at our house over on 8th and Evergreen for several years now. You should come by and take a look some evening. This year a little girl slipped a letter to Santa in our mail slot. She included her name and address so we forwarded that note on to the North Pole. I believe she got a letter back from the Jolly Old Elf. I have to say that was really magical.

At Neosho County Community College we celebrate the season with ceremonies, concerts, and giving. With the help of Royster Middle School's Vocal Plus we lit our new campus "Celebration Tree" and held a joint holiday concert with St. Cecilia's. Our Ottawa campus employees have adopted families to help in the area. Each year on the Chanute Campus we have an Angel Tree that supports TFI Family Services (The Farm, Inc.) that helps foster children in the area have a happier Christmas. Each December the College gives its employees a coupon for a ham or turkey. Many employees donate that coupon to the local food banks in Chanute and Ottawa. I thank our employees for support they give to the area during this time.

This is also a time of Christmas lists of wanted presents. My girls made theirs out months ago. My Mother-in-Law has a, let us say, "unusual" quirk when it comes to Christmas lists. If you want something, whatever you do, don't put it on your list. She never selects anything from your Christmas list because there is no surprise in receiving that gift. Yeah, I don't get it either. So your list for her is made up of things you really don't care if you get or not. For items you do want you must engage in a subtle campaign of "hinting," but not be so obvious so as to spoil the "surprise." It's like that scene from A Christmas Story with Ralphie hiding ads for BB Guns in Mom's magazines. Life imitating art, I guess.

The College got a few wonderful presents this year from our list, which we didn't have to hint about, and a lump of coal as well. First the presents.

Just this last month Community College Weekly, a national publication, declared NCCC the 14th fastest growing community college in the nation among colleges our size! Wow! That was an outstanding present! Our residence hall has had a higher occupancy at Chanute than ever before with 294 students (we have started the year with only 235 before). Enrollment increases are meaningless if they aren't successful. Which brings me to another present – out of the 1,132 community colleges in the country, NCCC ranked 31st in student success according to CNN and the National Center for Educational Statistics! Over 62% of our students either graduate or successfully transfer to other institutions to complete a four-year degree. Wow! What a tremendous gift (that we all worked very hard to earn).

We have had many very wonderful individuals come forward and donate to the college this year. In Ottawa, the NCCC Foundation held its most successful Christmas Scholarship Gala in its brief history. Thanks to everyone who participated in that event! Our new softball field and gym renovation has received wonderful gifts, too. Folks from all over the community are giving to the science labs we are planning to renovate in the summer. They are "buying" our tax credits which give them 60% of their donation back on their Kansas taxes. There are some tax credits left, but you have to get them before Baby New Year appears!

Now for the lump of coal. Each year the Kansas Board of Regents puts out a report on the statewide funding formula and how well the State of Kansas supports each of the 19 community and 6 technical colleges. The formula has never been fully funded and you can imagine that with all of the recent downturns the support is dwindling even further. I just got that report last week. NCCC continues its streak of being the lowest state-supported community or technical college in Kansas. That's right – We are the fastest growing, successful, and the lowest state-supported. We receive just 46.77% of what the State's own formula says we are supposed to get. The average State institutional support is 64%. Kansas now provides NCCC with only about 11% of our total budget. Ouch. That's a big dirty chunk of coal right there. With all of the news of the State being perhaps hundreds of millions of dollars underfunded for next year, combined with our growth, this level of support will probably shrink even lower.

Still, I don't let that get me down. We are very grateful for everything we are given and we try to make the most out of every dollar and every day. The State, the communities, and the students receive much from NCCC in the form of education, workforce development, and a better quality of life. Giving and receiving. It's that time of year, all year long.

Merry Christmas, Happy Holidays, and Joyous New Year from the Inbodys, and the entire NCCC family to you and yours!

If you would like to comment or to ask a question about this article, or anything else for that matter, send me an email at binbody@neosho.edu.