

The quickest way to double your money is fold it in half and put it back in your pocket. That's from fellow Oklahoman and hero Will Rogers. But I had other personal heroes that taught me to save too.

My older brother Scott, once he got his first afterschool job working at a grocery store, never asked Mom for money to buy Christmas gifts. He proudly bought his own through money he had saved. I remember my brother had a large ugly ceramic owl bank where he put all of his pocket change nearly every day. This was before credit or debit cards were as ubiquitous as today and cash was about the only way to buy something when you were 16. You can imagine it was quite a lot of change in a year's time. At Christmas, Scott would dump out that old bank and he and I would count it up. He would buy all of his Christmas presents out of that money. My brother taught me that saving a little here and a little there could add up to some joy if you spent it right.

I had my own bank and used it for years. In fact, I made my best purchase ever with my coin savings one year – I paid for my marriage license with it.

The college is doing its best to save money a little here and there. You may have read in the paper that we have had a few setbacks in the form of rescissions from our state allocation and from county tax issues as well. And with people going back to work in Kansas, which is a wonderful thing, our enrollment among these older, nontraditional students has declined, which also affects revenue. We are excited about this decline in enrollment, however, as those who had come to us for retraining in a new career have now found a job! Just as an example, we have a 99.2% job placement rate for our nursing graduates. Not bad huh?

So all three of our main revenue sources have gone down simultaneously. We have been doing some belt tightening here to adjust to falling revenue, but we have always been looking for ways to be more effective and efficient. The goal is to look for ways to do things better without sacrificing the quality of education provided to our students or the level of service provided to our communities.

Our big news here is that we are finalizing a refinancing of our bonds for the residence hall. With interest rates at historical lows the Trustees were able to take advantage of that and we stand to save about \$1 million over a four-year period. This has come at a good time as we continue to prepare for future uncertainty, but it's not the only way we are saving money.

We have phased out eleven positions, mostly through attrition (people retiring or moving on to other jobs) over the past eighteen months. NCCC employees have been asked to do more in their jobs while not letting our students or community down in the process, and I could not be more proud of how they have stepped up.

Our staff has been hard at work converting ten different paper processes to electronic processes, making offices run faster while cutting down on paper costs. We are adjusting our travel policies to lower college expenditures while still meeting the departmental needs. Instead of hiring outside groups to do item surveys we are designing our own, saving over \$20,000.

Instead of expensive desktop PCs many of our labs now use “thin clients” or virtual desktop computers that cost hundreds of dollars less and work wonderfully for classroom applications. They even use less electricity to operate. Also, our resourceful tech folks have figured out a way to run 22 “virtual computer servers” using only 3 physical servers which saves a lot of money and energy.

Speaking of energy management, we now have sophisticated temperature and light control to shut down unused rooms and save money. The doors even lock themselves on a schedule to save employee time securing the doors each night. Our boilers used to heat the campuses have been reprogrammed to reduce cycle time which avoids wasting fuel at startup. Our next challenge here is to get control of the individual heating and cooling room units in the residence halls. Currently students can set the heat/AC unit to their own comfort level. They seem to like their rooms 85 degrees in the winter and 65 degrees in the summer. I’ve seen them in shorts in January and sleeping under two blankets in August. Expensive and unnecessary.

When NCCC purchases items it looks at state and federal contracts for the best price. We usually get pretty good deals this way. Additionally we have joined the Midwest Higher Education Compact that not only helps us save on insurance but also has group buying power for equipment.

We just switched our cleaning supply company to one that has government pricing available and saved 10%. And we have converted to digital phone service. Not only did this move reduce our costs by about 10%, we now have direct inward dial so students and community members can call us directly without having to go through the switchboard. That’s a win-win!

And all of this savings has occurred without sacrificing quality. For the second straight year, NCCC lead the Kansas community colleges in the highest Student Success Index, or students who either graduated or successfully transferred on to university. We remodeled our science labs to make them state of the art. NCCC even added a new program this year at the Garnett campus, Heating, Ventilation and Air Conditioning (HVAC).

There is another quote on money I love. “A nickel just ain’t worth a dime anymore!” That’s the immortal wisdom of Yogi Berra. There is no doubt that I am tired of saying, “We’ll do more with less.” I would like to try doing more with more for once and see how that works. Other than technical education funds through SB 155 for high school students, NCCC has not seen a significant increase in state aid since 2008. We are in year seven of what I call the “journey through the Desert of No-New-Money.” And I’m not sure when that desert will end either. It just stretches on and on. (I know, stop complaining and get back to work.)

In the meantime we will continue to look for ways large and small to save some money. When we do spent it we will spend it wisely where we can make the most difference to advance our mission of enriching our communities and our students’ lives. It’s always exciting to open the owl bank, see what you earned through savings, and spread some joy!

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