

Another graduation has come at NCCC and not just any graduation, but a special one for me for several reasons. First, our inaugural cohort of Occupational Therapy Assistant (OTA) students will complete the program! I have a special love for OTA as I was part of the team that wrote the \$2 million Title III grant that got the program up and running at NCCC. To think that program was once just a blinking cursor on my screen. It is now a wonderful Director in the form of Barbara Flett and fantastic faculty member Peggy Carman. It is a state of the art awesomely equipped lab at the Ottawa Campus. And, most importantly, it is 20 graduates all getting jobs and helping people throughout Kansas with many more graduates coming in the future.

The second reason that this is a special graduation is that it is my tenth at the College. I started as the Vice President for Student Learning in 2003. Things were not too good at NCCC back then. We were on probation from the Higher Learning Commission, had leaky roofs and mountains of deferred maintenance with no money to maintain, let alone advance the College.

I remember my first day in Chanute after moving into our house. I was exhausted after driving hundreds of miles from Michigan in a moving van all night. My girls were 1 and 3 at the time and we did the all-night trip so they would sleep through it. It was HOT in late July 2003, over 100 degrees, when we moved in that day and by the end I was pooped. I went into a store here to take care of an important errand when the shop owner asked me what I was doing in town. Mustering up as much excitement as I could after my long ordeal I said, "I'm the new Vice President at the College!" The shopkeeper let out a sarcastic chuckle, rolled his eyes and said, "Good luck." It didn't inspire confidence that I had made the best decision in coming here.

It is ten years later now and I can tell you it was the third best decision I have ever made (right behind asking Jen to marry me and mutually deciding to have kids – I held out for 5 years on that one).

In that ten year period, thanks to an army of employees and community support, NCCC has been revolutionized! We have grown 58% in credit hour production – by far the most in the state! That has moved NCCC from 18 of 19 community colleges in terms of size to 9th in fall of 2012! We have completed millions of dollars in repair and modernization throughout the campus and opened new locations and offered courses in Independence, Lawrence, Emporia, and Pittsburg. We launched our online campus that now makes up about 1/3rd of our total credit hour production and provides access to the college at any time of the day or night from anywhere there is an internet connection.

It has been incredible to watch and participate in the strengthening and growth of the College over those 10 years. We still have a long way to go to become what our Trustees call the "Premier Community College in Kansas" but we are well on our way.

This year we completed a \$1.2 million project revitalizing our athletic programs with new locker rooms, gym floor, bleachers, and Student Union bathrooms. We have built the finest softball field in the Jayhawk Conference and completed a new road and parking from 10th to Allen on our property. No longer will you see cars driving on the sidewalk to get handicapped patrons to the

library. We even began a new underground water loop for future expansion and planted a “celebration tree” on the Chanute Campus.

Enrollment went up a modest .4% but headcount was up 6%. Not bad when you consider that 13 of the 19 community colleges reported drops in enrollment in fall of 2012.

Our students enjoyed some terrific successes in the classroom and out. Our Academic Challenge Team (think Quiz Bowl team) went undefeated in the regionals and finished second in the state, our best showing ever. One of our players was named the MVP for scoring more points than any other player in the tournament. For five years running we have the State Champion Welder, this time in the person of Bridger Keyes. In an upcoming article I’ll talk about what a great year we had in athletics.

Next year looks just as exciting. Over the summer we will be renovating and completing two science labs in Stoltz Hall at Chanute. One of those labs will be the cadaver lab, one of only a few at the community college level in the state. We will be installing two new panther symbols on campus at opposite ends of the property. We will have a new lit Panther sign mounted to the side of the gym courtesy of Everbrite Electronics and a Panther clock on the corner of 10th and Allen thanks in large part to Chanute Manufacturing.

NCCC will open the Eastern Kansas Rural Technology Center in Garnett in the fall located in a building offered to us by USD 365. There we will offer welding thanks in part by Schuff Steel’s donation of equipment. We are also expanding our health care offerings to all of the high schools in our northern service area through our state-of-the-art simulated hospital at Ottawa. Our developmental math program at Emporia State University is set to grow even larger in the fall.

Beyond 2013-2014, the plan is in place to renovate all of Stoltz Hall starting with the remaining two science labs and then continuing through the rest of the 1968 building. It is an exciting time at NCCC!

What a wonderful 10 years I have had as an employee of NCCC and as a community member in Neosho County. My family and I have found a home here. I have watched my girls grow up in a safe, progressive, caring community with great schools and even greater people. Thank you for welcoming us here and making us a part of the community.

And to the shopkeeper who wished me good luck, thanks! It worked!

As always I welcome your comments and questions at binbody@neosho.edu.