

Another academic year is complete for Neosho County Community College and what a year it has been! We had our “once-a-decade” visit from our accrediting body, the Higher Learning Commission (HLC) and it went very well. It went so well that NCCC was invited to present at the HLC annual meeting as a “best practice” to other colleges about to go through the same re-accreditation process. Those of you who are familiar with our history know that this is quite a turn-around from HLC action of the past. I could not have been more proud!

We conducted our 78th commencement this last week. Watching our graduates cross the stage to enter the world of work and/or to transfer remains a very moving experience for me and the employees of NCCC. We are very proud of what our students accomplish!

This time of year is also a time when we honor our employees that have served NCCC for years. We give out awards for 5, 10, 15, 20 and so on years of service to the college. In a time when the average stay at a position in the U.S. is 4.4 years, winners of these awards are becoming more and more rare. They say this new generation, the “Millennials” – those born between 1980 and 2000 – will lower that average rate even further as they hop from job to job looking for a better deal. Some suggest that this group will have as many as 15 different positions during their working life. Me, I’m on #5, but I’m a Generation X member.

That is why I truly appreciate when a college employee receives one of our service awards. Their experience to the college is often invaluable. That is also why, when someone retires from NCCC after a long career, I am so moved. They have given so much to our college to advance the mission for years and years. That is why they deserve to be honored.

This year two of our most wonderful employees will retire at the end of June. Paul Smith has been with NCCC for 24 years. Paul is our maintenance supervisor and is in charge of keeping the Chanute campus up and running. Much of our equipment here is old and we are in the process of updating it, but, just like your home, you probably don’t have the funds to update everything all at once. Some of our heating and air systems are original to the 1968 buildings. Paul and his crew have kept that legacy system and many others like it going through good times and bad. Paul and I have joked, that in bad times he kept the place together with bailing wire, and sometimes we couldn’t afford the bailing wire. He knows where every pipe goes, every wire has been run and every wall stud is located on our campus. We owe a great deal to Paul Smith.

This is also the last fulltime semester for Joan LaRue, one of our nursing instructors. Joan has been with the college for 37 years. It seems like she has been with NCCC forever, that NCCC started out with Joan standing in an empty corn field and then they built the campus around her. She was with the college when we added the RN program to the one year certificate, and she has taught every Chanute RN nursing student since. Some of her students have gone on to be instructors themselves. Think about how many nurses she has had a hand in creating, and how many patients those former LaRue students have treated. Joan has had an important role in shaping nursing in Kansas and beyond. We are certainly going to miss her.

I am so proud of all of our long-term employees and what they have done for NCCC. This year we honored Brad Wilkinson, the Chanute Art Instructor, with his 20 year plaque. Brad has done and will continue to impact his students with his love of art and his incredible talent.

But I'm also proud of our newer employees that have done so well advancing the mission of Neosho County Community College – Instructors such as Emily Kasprzak, the Theatre Instructor who wrote and directed a very successful play about the history of Chanute and who won Employee of the Year from the student body. Another recent addition, Tina Oelke, Ottawa Psychology Instructor, won the Student Service Award as voted by her fellow employees. Both instructors are relatively new, especially by Brad and Joan's standards, but have already made a huge impact on the college and our students. The campus will be in good hands under Kyle Seufert who will be promoted on July 1 to the head of maintenance. Kyle has also won a service award from the employees.

I have often said the College is eternal, the employees are all temps. We all play a role for a short or long time at our jobs, then move on for the next generation to take over. It has been this way since Chanute Junior College opened its doors in 1936.

This fall will be the first in 25 years without Paul Smith, and the first in 38 years without Joan LaRue there on opening day. Thank you both for your service.

Although they will be greatly missed, there are new wonderful employees that are stepping in to move the college ever forward, to further enrich our communities and our students' lives.

If you have any questions or comments, please feel free to contact me at binbody@neosho.edu.