

On July 23<sup>rd</sup>, Jen and I will celebrate 20 years together as man and wife. And it's been the happiest 14 years of my life. That's a little joke, Jen! Remember, you told me that you fell in love with me because I made you laugh. I have to keep trying to make you laugh a second time. We have made it through these past 20 years with some bumps along the way and some tests that we were able to pass with flying colors.

But this big occasion in my life has me thinking about marriage and how it is tested from time to time. They say the true test of any marriage is the first test – putting on a wedding. With so many decisions to make, tight timeline, tight budgets, family politics, emotional investment, etc. a wedding can be a challenge to survive. My wedding to Jennifer was a very simple affair – no money will make it that way – so it was not a lot of stress.

I happen to think the real test of marriage comes not if your relationship survives the wedding, but when you remodel your house, especially while you are living it in. Anyone who has done a major remodel knows what I'm talking about. Doing without normal comforts while putting up with construction and the constant mess tests anyone's relationship.

A few years ago we remodeled our kitchen, taking the room back to studs and rebuilding it. We set up the dining room as the temporary kitchen for three months while the work was done. It was not awesome. We had plastic tubs for a pantry, cooked with the microwave and the George Forman Grill, and did our dishes in the bathroom sink. So stress level does tend to rise a bit. But all in all we made it through with a beautiful kitchen and our marriage intact. (Full disclosure: We ate out – a lot!)

We are renovating parts of the college this summer as well in preparation for another academic year. The plan is to move through each building, bit by bit as we can afford it, to update spaces that have not been updated since they were built in 1968.

Over the past few years we have updated locker rooms, the nursing labs, the lower level of the Chapman Library, the business classrooms and many office spaces. This year we are focusing on Stoltz Hall, and specifically the remaining two science labs that are original to the building. We took those rooms down to studs as well, (they're concrete block, not studs, but you get the idea) reimagining the spaces to make them state of the art and more conducive to learning.

Thanks in large part to some very kind donations from a number of individuals Stoltz Hall will feature a beautiful exhibit area for the college's many animal specimens. NCCC science department has many snakes, a wonderful large tortoise, a hedgehog, and hissing cockroaches. Now they will have a new home where students can interact with them safely.

We have also completed work on the new gym floor. The last one was damaged by a small flood. The new floor will feature our latest Panther symbol. I have to say it turned out great! We have also done some work on the entryway to the Student Union to help keep the flood from happening again, with more work scheduled in the next month. There are water sensors in place now as well that can warn us before it is too late to do anything.

Over in Chapman Hall we are adding some offices to make the library area the “front door” of campus. Those who are coming to enroll or for a campus tour will come to this newly refurbished area which is alive with students working in groups, getting tutoring and using the open computer labs.

You may have read that we are updating our baseball scoreboard as well. It has served us well for many years, but parts are no longer available. We cannot fix it anymore, so it is getting replaced. That should happen later in the fall.

Even our phone system is getting updated. Soon you will be able to call the person you wanted directly, by their own number, instead of our extension system and going through the switchboard. It’s called Direct Inward Dial and we plan to have it ready by the first day of classes as well. Don’t worry. We will still have a “live” switchboard operator to help forward calls during regular hours if you don’t know the direct number.

I am happy to report that the employees are being real troopers through the renovations. The layer of construction dust on everything and everyone has not dampened their spirits. I remind everyone in the Student Union that the lovely smell of floor sealant wafting through the air is really the smell of progress. All of our community members that have visited campus this summer have been very understanding of all of these changes, and I greatly appreciate it. We are in the home-stretch now, with only about a month to go before faculty and students begin to arrive for another academic year. All is on budget and on schedule. (Thanks Ben Smith and Kyle Seufert!)

I think you will be very pleased with all of the updates. It was certainly worth the renovation!

At home, our new kitchen is great and our marriage has never been stronger. Thank you, Jennifer, for a fantastic life. I look forward to the next decades together. I love you.

If you have questions or comments, please let me know at [binbody@neosho.edu](mailto:binbody@neosho.edu).