

My birthday is coming up soon and I'll be 49 years old for the first time. I'm expecting to be 49 for about 5 or more years, but this will be the first time. My wife Jennifer will ask me for a list of items of possible birthday presents, a common occurrence in any relationship. But then it gets a bit weird if you ask me. Here begins the irony and the debate.

Jen does not like getting me anything on my list as that would, "ruin the surprise." That's the ironic part. If I really want something for my birthday, I better not put it on the list, because I'm not going to get it. So I must drop hints like Ralphie in A Christmas Story, hiding advertisements in the pages of her Sudoku books and romance novels.

Next comes the debate. If she finally decides to consider an item on the list she will say, "On your list I see you wanted a new electric carving knife. What's wrong with the old one?"

Great grandma brought it over from The Old Country. It nearly pre-dates electricity. There's a crank on the side to get it going. The blades have been known to fly out while I'm carving.

"But you don't even use it anymore." Right, because the blades fly out when I'm carving. (I might have exaggerated in this spouse debate, but if watching Presidential debates have taught me anything, it is totally fine to make up "facts" to support your case.)

Jen is frugal and doesn't like spending money on things that do not get used often. I appreciate that about her, except when she applies this character trait to my birthday list.

What if I told you that NCCC spends \$120,000 each year on something that we hope does not get used at all. You might think that is not very frugal, and would not pass the Jen Birthday List Test. So why do we do it?

That's what NCCC spends each year on safety and security at our Ottawa and Chanute campuses. Our Trustees have made it clear that safety is a top priority at our college and we do everything we can within our resources to keep our students, visitors and employees safe. We do a lot of preparations for events we hope never happen.

Our investment in safety goes well beyond our Safety Officers and extends to new technologies and employee training.

We employ several new technologies designed to help us keep everyone safe. There are many systems that I could mention, but I'll focus on four here.

The college has over 250 cameras on our two campuses that allow us to see what is going on from any location where there is internet access. Each year we add another 5-10 cameras to the system and improve the quality with high resolution and low light cameras in critical areas.

We have added smart card access to many doors throughout campus. With these electronic locks we can schedule a building to open itself in the morning without having to pay personnel to do it. No more keys are needed in many areas so no more risk of a lost key and the need to "re-core" all of the affected doors, saving thousands. But most importantly, with a single action we can lock all of the exterior and many interior doors in the case of an emergency. Each year we add more and more interior doors to the system as the budget allows.

Statistically speaking, the biggest threat that faces our students is severe weather. You may already know that NCCC is one of a handful of community colleges in the country that the National Weather Service has deemed "StormReady." With our redundant notification systems and our yearly drills we are as ready as we can be for what Mother Nature can send our way. But to this formidable system we now have added an automatic lightning detection system that constantly scans for lightning strikes near our campuses and informs students that they should move inside. Just a few months ago lightning struck a tree near the baseball field. It was summer and the team was not there, but had it happened now our students would have left the field in plenty of time, thanks to the warning system.

Students can now download a special app for their smartphones called LiveSafe. This app allows them to communicate directly to our Safety Officers giving them tips on issues. It also allows for electronic "safe walks" where the student can request that someone monitor them when they, say, go out for an evening walk. The Safety Officer or another student could watch on their own smart phone as that student goes on that evening walk to make sure they get to where they said they were going safely.

As good as some of the new technologies are the real defense for safety and security comes from proper training of employees and students. When we train new employees at NCCC we often tell them they may have been hired to work in a particular office or to teach a particular subject, but they are all in the business of safety and security.

We train on what to do for severe weather. We run drills for possible fires. We train on health emergencies and other incidents.

We train for cyber-attacks. Yes, cyber-attacks. We have had several attacks this year in the form of "spear phishing" where an employee gets an email that looks like it comes from me the President, asking them to wire transfer money to an account, or send a copy of everyone's W-2 forms to an email address. They are very convincing emails, but luckily we have trained for this and avoided it!

And, yes, we have trained for active killers too. We use a training protocol known as ALICE that empowers a person to do whatever it takes to survive. It is an impressive training session, one that most people who complete tell me gives them a heightened sense of security.

Special thanks goes to Ben Smith, VP for Operations, Kerry Ranabargar, Dean of Operations and their staff for setting up these new technologies and for training the employees and students. They do a wonderful job keeping us safe!

My birthday is around the corner and it is always a mystery as to what I am going to get. Rest assured I'm going to use it or I'm in big trouble if I don't, believe me!

Let's hope we never have to use our safety equipment and training to their potential.

If you have any questions about this column or anything else about the college, please feel free to write me (with a non-spear phishing email) at binbody@neosho.edu.