

I am so proud and happy to have been named the President of Neosho County Community College. I've been on the job for six weeks now and everywhere I go in Neosho County I have heard wonderful comments from people about my promotion. I wanted to thank you all for the very positive support I have received thus far. No one was happier about my promotion to President than my Jennifer and my two girls Abrielle and Alayna. We are happy to be home.

About seven years ago we were living in Dowagiac, Michigan, the Snow Capital of the World. OK, it is not really the snow capital, but with average of 99 inches of snow annually, it sure felt like it. We had started our family then, the girls were 3 and 1 at the time. I was working as a Dean at a rural community college there. One day, after a three-week period without sunlight when it snowed every day (no kidding), my wife took out a map of the United States. She drew a circle around Southeast Kansas and said, "Anywhere in here will be fine." Message received. One statement I have heard in life that I truly believe in is, "When Mama ain't happy, ain't nobody happy." I started looking for my next opportunity, and, hopefully for my sake, one would arise in Southeast Kansas.

As fate would have it there was an opening for Vice President for Student Learning at NCCC in Chanute, KS under a new President. Some of you may remember the college was not in great shape then. NCCC was out of money, it was on probation from its accrediting body, and it had an almost complete turn-over in administration. If I took the job, I would be the 12th vice president in 16 years. It was risky, to say the least. But when I met the wonderful people who work here, the faculty and staff, and talked with the new president, I knew this college could be fixed. There was tremendous potential here. It took a bit of a leap of faith but I accepted the position and we moved to Kansas.

Jen was ecstatic! She was born and raised a Fredonia Yellow Jacket. Her Mom and Dad still live on the farm there. Her Dad, Calvin Howard III, worked for KDOT here in Chanute for nearly 20 years as District IV Shop Supervisor, so we have always had a Chanute connection. My parents are from Collinsville, OK, just a few miles down Highway 169. Those of you with grandchildren could probably relate to how both sets of our parents felt having the granddaughters move from 800 miles away to close to home.

Jen and I immediately felt invited into Neosho County and Chanute. We bought a home on Evergreen, better known around here as, "Oh, Mary Barr's house! I learned to swim in her pool!" Jen finished her Masters through PSU and was hired as the counselor at Royster Middle School. We found a church with Shelly Holle and the Presbyterians. Jen rings the bells with the bell choir and the girls are acolytes.

It is seven years later and we love Southeast Kansas, Chanute and the people here. We truly feel that this city has adopted us. Here was the moment we knew we were home -

Three years ago, Jennifer and I felt the whole city behind us. Some of you may recall that our then 7 year old daughter Abrielle was diagnosed with a brain tumor. She was given a 33% chance to live 5 years. A massive prayer army was activated in Chanute, people who didn't even know the name of the girl they were praying for sprang into action. The tumor was removed successfully and was not

cancerous! Abrielle continues to make a full recovery. Jen and I remain eternally grateful. We won't forget that support we felt.

Everyone we have met in this wonderful community make it such a special place. Our girls are growing up in one of the best cities anywhere. We could think of living anywhere else.

In the coming months I will take the opportunity of the column to talk about the college. I'll tell you about the great successes we have had in grant writing, how our students are learning and finding jobs, how our enrollment is up, the great faculty and staff at the college, about new programs coming to Chanute, and about our new building in Ottawa. I just wanted to spend this first column saying thank you. Thank you, Neosho County and Chanute, for allowing us to make our home here and for making this such a wonderful place to live. I'm glad I took that risk. Thank you for the support many of you have given me as the new President of NCCC. If you have any questions or comments, please email me a binbody@neosho.edu or give me a call.