

In 1996 I bought my first new car. It was a 1997 Pontiac Formula Firebird. It had T-tops and a V-8 engine that could get me to the speed limit very quickly (ok, maybe a little past the speed limit from time to time). It sported something new at the time, a twelve CD changer in the trunk. I drove from Miami, Oklahoma to Chicago and did not hear the same song twice. Most of all, I loved its look. It had blue-green "chameleon" paint (think Sprite can) that changed color based on how the light hit it. My baby turned from green in the sunlight to almost purple at night. As you probably guessed, I loved that car.

A few very happy years later I sold it to buy...*heavy sigh*...a minivan. Yeah, I know. Turns out infant car seats don't fit very well in what passed for a backseat in my beloved Firebird. Having my first baby was a wonderful moment, but it wasn't without a slightly painful change. It was a bittersweet moment.

Life is filled with bittersweet moments of change, when we say a reluctant farewell to the past and look forward to an exciting future. At NCCC a lot of change is happening at this time of year, some bittersweet, others just sweet.

The biggest bittersweet change right now is graduation. Hundreds of students earned their degrees and certificates from NCCC this academic year and we celebrated them with Commencement exercises on May 12th. It is an exciting ceremony watching proud students, now graduates, cross the stage. I get one of the best jobs, shaking their hands and being one of the first to congratulate them. But with the sweetness comes the bitterness in knowing that these students whom we watch grow from scared freshmen to college graduates and get quite attached to, are leaving us. More than a few tears of joy mixed with sadness are shed.

At the College some very sweet changes are on the way this summer. We will be putting the finishing touches on our new fountain located near Chapman Learning Center and visitor parking. I will be excited to see it in action! The fountain has three separate waterfalls with many lights to enjoy it in the evenings. There are park benches graciously donated by The Rotary Club of Chanute in commemoration with their 100th Anniversary in town, the NCCC Student Body Government, and from the Kiwanis Club of Chanute. There will also be many plantings as well. During Artist Alley in the fall we will be dedicating the fountain in conjunction with our Alumni Celebration.

Also this summer, thanks to a very generous gift from the Sunderland Foundation, we will be resurfacing all of the parking lots at the Chanute Campus! The work will begin in June and continue for much of the summer. Don't be surprised if you come to campus and a lot is closed as the crew rotates from one area to the next.

One of the sweetest things may be on the horizon this summer. NCCC is considering an Energy Performance Contract that will replace all of the 1968 heating and cooling units with modern systems that are much more energy efficient. We would also be replacing the lighting instruments with LED lights as well as some of the plumbing fixtures to save on water. I am awaiting a final report from a company doing an Investment Grade Energy Audit, but on initial data NCCC stands to save upwards of \$200,000 per year in energy usage and fewer repairs! The comfort level in the classrooms and offices should be much improved. The cost of the modernization should be somewhere around \$3.5 million dollars and will be partially funded by those savings. After almost 50 years with our two-pipe heating and cooling system, I think we got our money's worth out of it. It springs numerous leaks each year and

we do get complaints about the temperature, the noise of units, and the cost of running it. It will be very sweet to see it go away!

Another sweet change will be a new president's office. If you have never been in my office, let me set the stage for you. It looks just like a finished basement in the 1970s. It has wood paneling, green shag (stained) carpet, and a very noisy heater/air conditioner that I have to turn off during conference calls so I can be heard. If the calls go too long, I get a little chilly. All it needs to complete the scene is a lava lamp, a ping-pong table with a ripped net, a painting of Dogs Playing Poker and maybe a Velvet Elvis under a black light. You get the picture - it's been a while since it has been renovated. So work has begun there. If you come to campus to find me, I'm in one of the study rooms at the Chapman Learning Center for the summer. It is somewhat bitter to be out of office for a few months, but the new office will be sweet, a proper place for visitors that is indicative of the quality of your College.

It is also a time when we say goodbye to some of our wonderful faculty and staff, several of whom are retiring this year. Brad Wilkinson, our Art Instructor for 23 years, Larry Anderson our Psychology Instructor of 18 years, Beverly Roush, the Assistant Director of Nursing with 29 years of experience, and Wayne Petterson, our Wrestling Head Coach for 12 years are all retiring this year. It is very bitter to say goodbye to these NCCC Family members who have touched so many student lives over the many years. But it is sweet to see these folks earn their reward of retirement. We will greatly miss them.

And there is one more retiring too. It's my Administrative Assistant and Board Clerk, Denise Gilmore, who has worked for the College for 24 years, and has been with me for the last 10. She will be leaving in October. I am so happy for her to begin a new chapter in her life in retirement. But for me, it's more than just bitter. Have you ever had to disconnect your right arm? That is what is going to feel like. She has enabled me to be a much better President than I ever thought I could be. Her worth is beyond measure. She is collaborator, friend, colleague, and surrogate family member. Thank you Denise for all you have done for me and for NCCC.

Do I miss my Firebird? Oh yes. But I sure love my girls and would give it up again in a second for them. Sometimes you have to take the bitter with the sweet. Of course my girls are older and have their own cars now. Maybe it's time to have a sweet car again!

If you have any questions about this or anything else about NCCC please email me at binbody@neosho.edu.