

My Mother, Judy Cox, completed an incredible milestone this year. She has worked for Collinsville (OK) Public Schools for 50 years. She took a few years off to have my brother and me and two years off when she lived in Independence for a short time, but has remained at the school district for half a century. She was hired by the district the day she graduated high school in 1959 as a secretary in the principal's office and assisted in handing out the diplomas to her classmates. Over the years she helped hand out many of the diplomas since then, including the ones to my brother and me.

I knew how hard she worked at that job. In the days before computers, Mom was in charge of the daily attendance rosters, checking absence slips every hour from all the teachers to see who wasn't there and who might have skipped fourth hour after lunch. For me, that meant that if I tried to skip school the first person who would realize it would be my mother. So, no, I didn't skip school.

She kept the daily attendance ledgers for the State, ran thousands of mimeographs (those were photocopies before the photocopier), made handbooks, and called substitutes. That last duty paid off for me. Much later, my Mom would call a young recent college graduate named Jennifer Howard to sub. She liked her and one day asked, "Would you like to meet my son?" That was about 24 years ago. Jen and I are quite happily married thanks to an introduction by my Mom, who, by the way, never lets me forget it. "I picked her out!" is what I hear about once a month. Geez, Mom, give it a rest.

So watching as a boy, and to this day in my role as President of NCCC, I know how hard support people at an institution work day after day. I have written many times about how great our wonderful faculty are – and they are! I tell the employees that the most important relationship at the college is the one between the faculty and the student. It is the center of our solar system to which all others orbit. But I would like to take a moment and thank the many people at Neosho County Community College who keep things running to allow that faculty-student relationship to happen.

Without the folks in admissions we would not attract students. They log hundreds of miles on the road every year to get the word out about our college. They walk miles on campus giving tours and answer a million questions. Our advising staff listens to students and turns their dreams and aspirations into an academic plan, helping them pick the classes that will get them where they need to go, while making it as simple as possible to get there. The registration department keeps all of the student's records straight, making sure students get the section they asked for and generates report after report for our many constituencies.

Financial Aid employees help students navigate the bureaucracies of the US Department of Education, locates resources,

and gets them applied. Without financial aid most students would never be able to attend college. The Pell grant system is wonderful in its mission, but sometimes difficult in its processes and our folks do an excellent job getting students through it. Student loans, scholarships, work-study -- there are many tools in the toolbox to help, but it takes a master craftsman to use them correctly.

Our business office staff help folks with bills, payment plans and understanding the many aspects of the billing process. The bookstore staff works with faculty to make sure they have the right edition of the book and in the right number to satisfy the student need. We rent our books so we touch every book at least twice a semester, as it goes out then comes back in. Some classes have multiple books. It's a large task as you can imagine, with editions changing often.

Our custodial staff keep the place looking great day after day. Our maintenance staff goes beyond just fixing things and keeping the grounds looking great. They are constantly improving the college too. The staff built that beautiful fountain on the Chanute campus themselves. Right now they are renovating 11 classrooms and turning a house NCCC purchased into a place for five more students -- something much needed by the college.

Our Learning Center staff works hard finding the right tutors to help the students at the times most convenient to them. They also help students find the information they need through library services, interlibrary book loan, and the many databases we have. Recently we have added counseling services, who can help both with personal issues as well as with career counseling.

NCCC has an amazing amount of technology. From the many computers in labs, classrooms, and offices, to the incredible wired and wireless network, to the Learning Management System that runs the online campus, to the Student Information System that runs practically everything else. We rely heavily on our technology. Our Tech Service Department and online campus staff keep all of these many systems up and running so that people get the information they need 24 hours a day.

The college does a tremendous amount of reporting each year. Without our IR department this could never happen. LuAnn Hauser does the majority of coordinating this function and has been with NCCC for 35 years. Congratulations LuAnn!

To the folks on the switchboard, to the receptionists, to the employees who run the copy center, to the payroll department, to the HR Director who keeps track of our benefits, to the folks in Outreach and Workforce Development, to the safety officers, to the administrative assistants who support people like me every day -- I thank you. These folks are not directly involved in

teaching and learning, but they work hard to keep the college moving forward, to give faculty what they need so that the students are successful. They are just as much a part of student success as anyone else at the college.

My Mom will be returning to her job in the fall, now as a secretary at the elementary school, for her 51st year. She is actually talking about retirement now. I'll believe it when I see it. Mom is the type of person that must always be doing something. She only sits down for a few minutes then it's up to do housework, make a cake for someone just to say thanks, or take dinner to a sick friend. Hard work is just a part of who she is.

One day she will retire and the district will adjust. I have often said the college is forever, the employees are just temps. The important thing is to make a difference in people's lives in the limited time you are there. That difference can be eternal. Thank you so much to the support staff for making a difference every day.

If you have any questions or comments about this or anything else at the College, please email me at binbody@neosho.edu.