

Dr. Matt Gotschall, President Central Community College

I have heard it said that higher education is a powerful engine driving economic and workforce development in Nebraska and our country. While I can embrace that image, I also ask you to imagine the Nebraska's community colleges as the wheels to get us there! It's where the "rubber hits the road" in terms of recruiting and retaining youth in our service areas and educating them on the careers and quality of life advantages of small and large town living. We embrace our state's immigrants and refugees who come to us to learn English and learn, live, and work under our American system of government and become valuable members of our society. We graduate:

- 1) Diesel mechanics to keep our tractors and combines running,
- 2) Truck drivers to move our livestock to market and retail from coast to coast,
- 3) Nurse aides, practical and registered nurses to keep nursing homes and hospitals open in rural settings,
- 4) Welders and advanced manufacturing technicians to create customized products as well as mass production of items like medical needles, syringes or aeronautical parts,
- 5) Mechanics to keep our cars and trucks running,
- 6) Heavy equipment operators to build our roads, bridges, and dig building foundations,
- 7) Construction workers to build and repair homes,
- 8) Linemen and electricians to power our homes, businesses and agricultural facilities,
- 9) Heating and air technicians to address our Nebraska weather fluctuations,
- 10) Correction, law, and probation officers to respond to emergencies and protect our families.
- 11) Child development providers so parents can work and have peace of mind knowing their children are in safe and educational environments,
- 12) All this in addition to economical and well-articulated transfer education pathways for those with aspirations of a career requiring a four year, masters or doctoral education.

So, I welcome you to talk to any of us across the state on what the community colleges do for you and for the Nebraska workforce and communities we serve. Just be prepared that it may take a while as it is our passion, and something we celebrate each day is our ability to serve and support the ever-changing workforce needs and people of Nebraska.

In general, we are pleased to be supporting several bills this session to promote expanded career and technical education, nursing and early childhood education, opportunity scholarships and bills to incentivizing the modernization of manufacturing, aging infrastructure and housing. We greatly appreciate the leadership of the Governor, state senators and Chamber in working with us on preserving that ability to address workforce challenges and opportunities now and well into the future.

Now is definitely the time to be investing in Nebraska community colleges as we expand our capacities, student pipelines, and programs to directly address the skilled workforce gap throughout the state.