

May 1, 2017
By NCTA Dean Ron Rosati

Welcome to NCTA's 2017 Commencement

Commencement and spring semester finals week at the Nebraska College of Technical Agriculture started with a surprise snowstorm on Sunday. Students were delighted to see the first few flakes early that morning but enthusiasm waned as snow piled up, often with the wind howling.

Regardless of the situation outside, we have 200 students on campus who need warmth and sustenance. I appreciate the staff who leave their homes and come to campus to take care of our students during such emergencies. We also appreciate the City of Curtis for providing backup electrical generators when emergencies knock out power.

In addition to caring for campus residents, we feed and care for livestock on the college farm and animals in the veterinary technology complex.

Aggie students are responsible for caring for these animals, with faculty and staff checking in to ensure all is well. A valuable lesson about responsibility is reinforced when students need to leave their warm dorm rooms to trudge through ice and snow to be sure all animals have food, water and appropriate protection. Many students also have their own horses, dogs and animals requiring attention as well at their boarding locations.

During a weather emergency we use government weather and roads resources to assess how to handle the campus situation. The Nebraska 511 website (<http://www.511.nebraska.gov/>) is especially helpful because it provides timely reports and real-time camera views of road and traffic conditions throughout the state.

As is the case for many education administrators, it's always a challenge to determine if we should close campus when a storm hits. Some Aggie students travel home or to a job site on weekends so we are concerned about their safety when they return to campus. Additionally, some of our employees live 30 to 40 miles from campus so we are sensitive to their commutes.

By late-afternoon Sunday, we chose to postpone the next morning's first final exam, starting at 8 a.m. on Monday until 3 p.m. The delay would allow time for roads and sidewalks to be cleared. When we announced the decision, we had a good idea what the next 12 hours of weather would look like. Our goal was to keep everyone safe and prevent unnecessary travel late on Sunday.

When an emergency like this hits campus, we activate the college emergency and communication plan. Students and their parents saw an alert on our college website and on social media such as Facebook, through an internal NCTA text alert system, by email to all faculty and staff, or through an alert to Nebraska radio, TV and news media.

The storm created some stress but also beauty on campus. Snow piled up on flowering trees and landscaping. The campus red buds were in full bloom and they looked spectacular with a frosting of wet snow. The day was windy but not particularly cold. At times, it was a beautiful day for a walk around campus to enjoy a last snowfall of the semester.

Unfortunately, the heavy wet snow broke a number of limbs on the trees in the college arboretum. Late Sunday afternoon you could hear an occasional crack and then a crash as another big limb dropped to the ground. You would also hear Kenny Russell on the job using our large military-surplus articulated loader to try to keep ahead of the snow piling up on the college roads and parking lots.

Monday morning the campus was icy and footing was treacherous but thaw hastened by temperatures in the 60s soon revealed dry sidewalks and green lawns.

The NCTA facilities crew did a great job plowing out the campus and picking up downed limbs. I appreciate their busy days clearing debris before our commencement activities on Wednesday and Thursday.

Please join us for awards night Wednesday at 7 p.m. in the Nebraska Agriculture Industry Education Center. This will be a special celebration of our students and their academic achievements. We will also name the Aggie of the Year that evening.

Commencement is Thursday at 1:30 p.m. in the Curtis Memorial Community Center where the keynote speaker will be Nebraska Department of Agriculture Director Greg Ibach.

We are looking forward to seeing many friends and family members for the graduation events, and welcoming University of Nebraska Regent Bob Phares of North Platte, and University Vice President and IANR Vice Chancellor Michael Boehm, among our special guests.

Please give us a call at 1-800-3CURTIS or see the website, ncta.unl.edu, for more information. We hope to see you on campus very soon!

NCTA Events in May:

- 3 – Phi Theta Kappa initiation, 2 p.m., Ed Center
- 3 – Campus Picnic, 5:30-7 p.m., The Barn
- 3 – NCTA Awards Night, 7 p.m., Ed Center
- 4 – Horticulture Club Plant Sale, 8 a.m.-4 p.m., Greenhouse
- 4 – 2017 Commencement, 1:30 p.m., Curtis Community Center
- 5-6 – NCTA Aggie Rodeo to Dickinson, N.D.

NCTA Mission:

The Nebraska College of Technical Agriculture is devoted to a statewide mission of preparing students for successful careers in agriculture, veterinary technology, food and related industries. The college provides open access to innovative technical education resulting in associate degrees, certificates, diplomas and other credentials.

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