



# NEBRASKA COLLEGE OF TECHNICAL AGRICULTURE

June 15, 2021

## **Rural history and NCTA renewal**

Dean's Message by NCTA Dean Larry Gossen, Ph.D.

One year ago, I arrived in Curtis to become the new dean of the Nebraska College of Technical Agriculture.

What a beautiful campus and location for the NCTA Dean's Residence! My wife, Fay, and I feel so very blessed to serve and live at this college.

Huge trees planted around our home and the original structures put NCTA on the map of the Nebraska Statewide Arboretum network.

NCTA and "Curtis Aggies" have quite a history for many alumni and agricultural families in Nebraska.

That's because originally, since the opening in 1913, this campus was truly a home-away-from-home.

It was to be a boarding school to serve the children of families who lived in the western half of the state. Their counties or nearest towns in the large, rural regions did not have high schools.

Legislation passed in 1911 by the State of Nebraska established the Nebraska School of Agriculture. Curtis was selected among heavy competition to become the site for NSA.

The first building constructed was Agriculture Hall in 1912, followed by the Dean's Residence and Learning Resource Center (lab and classroom) in 1914, then the Student Activities Center (gym/auditorium) in 1915.

Students lived with families in the community until the first girls dormitory (and cafeteria) was constructed in 1929. The boys dormitory was completed in 1942. They still stand today, although housing in the first residence hall as they are now called is not available due to lack of fire suppression.

Other campus buildings have been updated and constructed through the decades. However, ongoing maintenance and associated costs are a continual challenge on these structures, all owned by the State of Nebraska.



*The student union, now known as "The Barn" by NCTA students and campus, was built in 1915. (Andela Taylor / NCTA photo)*

## **Reality of deferred maintenance**

Fast forward to 2020, a year not only of global pandemic, but development of the University of Nebraska's biennium budget request for state appropriation considered by the Nebraska Legislature.

My on-boarding training and insights during 2020 focused a sharp lens on priority needs of the NCTA campus programs and physical plant, including deferred maintenance of aging infrastructure.

Central Administration at the University of Nebraska, led by President Ted Carter and Vice President for Agriculture and Natural Resources Mike Boehm, led the process, asking what does NCTA require as highest priorities?

Nebraska taxpayers saw the resulting list in the form of Nebraska Legislative Bill 384, a proposal outlined and spearheaded by Sen. John Stinner of Gering, chair of the Legislature's Appropriation Committee.

The University of Nebraska system includes five campuses at (UNO, UNMC, UNL, UNK and NCTA which is affiliated through UNL), and other state-owned buildings such as research facilities. Leaders needed to address the growing problem of deferred maintenance on aging and problematic infrastructure, estimated to cost \$900 million systemwide.

Sen. Stinner and the Legislature responded by passing legislation which increased funding for a strong state-university partnership, allowing sale of new revenue bonds to be issued by the NU system. Governor Ricketts approved the 40-year plan. The \$400 million bond sale occurred in June, as outlined in statewide reports so I will focus here on the impact for NCTA.

The NCTA plan is to address nearly \$3 million in building improvements for the Library Learning Resource Center, Agricultural Mechanics (welding and irrigation technology), Livestock Teaching Center, the greenhouse and its cooling system, and the Nebraska Agriculture Industry Education Center.

Funds include upgrades for sidewalks, parking, ADA steps, ramps, and handrails, and campus-wide lighting.

Also, landscaping has been designed at Ag Hall and east of Agricultural Mechanics. Some of those projects have started with a new exterior ramp for ADA access to the Gary Hansen Memorial Classroom located on the second floor of the split level, brick building originally constructed in 1935.

I look forward to launching these projects. We owe it to our students, Nebraska taxpayers, alumni and their families to maintain and improve the learning environment for our Curtis Aggies.

### **Aggie Alumni Day June 26**

Please make plans to participate in the Aggie Alumni Day on Saturday, June 26. A luncheon and awards program begins at 11:30 a.m. Register online at <https://ncta.unl.edu/aggie-alumni>.

You are invited to join Fay and I for an open house and tour of our home, the NCTA Dean's Residence. Along with alumni, Curtis-area residents and friends are welcome from 2-4 p.m.

### **NCTA Events:**

June 13-19: NCTA at Collegiate National Finals Rodeo, Casper, Wyo.

June 17-19: NCTA at Nebraska State High School Rodeo Finals, Hastings

June 25: Herding Basics Dog Clinic, 10 a.m., NCTA

June 26: Aggie Alumni Day, 10 a.m., Registration, 11:30 a.m. Luncheon

June 26: NCTA Dean's Residence Open House, 2-4 p.m.

*Part of the University of Nebraska system, the Nebraska College of Technical Agriculture is a two-year institution with a statewide mission of preparing students for successful careers in agriculture, veterinary technology and related industries. NCTA is known for its affordable tuition, high job-placement rate for its graduates, and for the success of student teams in competitive activities including crops judging, ranch horse events, livestock judging, shotgun sports, stock dog trials, and intercollegiate rodeo. The college is consistently ranked as one of the best two-year schools in the nation.*

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Online article: <https://go.unl.edu/thao>