

Dean's Column by Ron Rosati, PhD

Saluting founders and veterans

Special people in our lives can make a significant impact to our students and campus community. One of those individuals is Stan Matzke, Jr., who in 1965 helped found the college.

Stan passed away in October in Lincoln, where he and his wife, Dorothy, resided for much of their 63-year life together.

At the 10-year mark in their marriage after first serving at Southeast Community College in Milford, the Matzkes moved to Curtis at the behest of the University of Nebraska for Stan to establish the NU system's first post-secondary school, focused entirely on technical agriculture.

The visionary, bold, and "can-do" leader who had been a four-year letterman of the University of Nebraska-Lincoln basketball team developed and oversaw the beginning of what our institution is today, a cohesive place of learning and development of lifelong friendships.



Aggie Alumni presented Dorothy and Stan Matzke with Honorary Lifetime Memberships in 2016

Matzke didn't start his venture entirely from scratch since this campus on the hill had been a regional high school since 1913.

He aggressively led the University of Nebraska School of Technical Agriculture (UNSTA, a college) as it operated simultaneously here on campus for three years with the University of Nebraska School of Agriculture (UNSA, a high school) before the current Medicine Valley High School was built about 10 blocks to the west.

As the first superintendent "couple", Stan and Dorothy made this their home, with their young children living here in in the same home where I reside with my family. Jerry Huntwork, who still resides in Curtis, was assistant superintendent then until 1997.

The first college's start date was October 6, 1965, and the dedication was Nov. 8, 1965 with Gov. Frank Morrison as keynote speaker.

Matzke designed programs in Agricultural Drafting, Surveying and Soil Science, and Agricultural Machinery Mechanics. The next year Commercial Horticulture and Agricultural Business Technology were added, and then Agricultural Production Technology in the third.

Renovation of the old dairy barn into classrooms, laboratories and procedure rooms for the Veterinary Technology program was well underway in May, 1968 when Matzke was called back to UNL and the College of Agriculture as assistant director of resident instruction. Two months later, Bill Siminoe became UNSTA's second superintendent and served until his retirement in 1995. The alliance of these three men – Matzke, Huntwork and Siminoe built the foundation for the college.

I recall when Stan Matzke called me shortly after I arrived at NCTA in 2013. He offered to help with our 50th anniversary celebration. Plans quickly turned into action for a festive observance on November 13, 2013. Stan, a wonderful keynote speaker, regaled us with stories of our humble beginnings.

Thank you, Stan, for the huge difference you made in the life of the hundreds of graduates who walked the pathways of campus.

This week we also recognize the dedicated military service of so many of our friends, including Mr. Matzke who was an officer in the U.S. Army. To the faculty, staff and students who have served, and to those who have passed from our presence, we say thank you.

May your observance of Veteran's Day hold the significance intended as we pay tribute to the patriotic service of loved ones, colleagues and this community.

The Curtis Rotary Club will host a benefit soup supper Nov. 11 from 5-8 p.m. at the Curtis Community Center for Jeff and Karen Myers, two veterans who have been students at NCTA in recent years. They are active with the Curtis American Legion Post #95. In June, they sustained severe injuries and incurred expenses in an accident. We are grateful for our local community and the fine citizens who support each other.

Thank you for your service to the college and our country, Stan, Jeff and Karen.

#

(Updated from November 6, 2017)

Online link at: <https://go.unl.edu/9r2e>