



# NEBRASKA COLLEGE OF TECHNICAL AGRICULTURE

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## **NCTA serves up an award for the server**

By Mary Crawford, NCTA News

The whole campus knows the friendly, smiling faces behind the counter of Chandie's Castle at the Nebraska College of Technical Agriculture.

One those deli greeters is Jo Popp known for the big and little things she does behind the culinary scene at NCTA.

The campus community and the public frequent the deli for an early-morning latte, tasty wrap at noon, or that delicious soft serve in the afternoon.

Faculty and staff recognized Jo Popp with their 2022 Excellence in Service Award at the end-of-year luncheon.

Administrators hosted the luncheon at a downtown restaurant as the final campus residents moved out on the Friday after graduation. NCTA Food Service Staff got a break in making the noon meal.

However, Jo and her deli co-worker Susan Nutt kept The Castle open an hour later than the announced 11 a.m. closing time because they still had customers showing up for flavored coffees and snacks.

"This is the busiest we have been in weeks!" they exclaimed. Goodbyes from graduates, plus caffeine for the road trips home were in store. So were treats for visitors to campus.

### **Extended family**

Almost 18 months ago, the NCTA Student Senate named Jo as the Faculty/Staff Member of the Month. She told then-freshman Taylor Hendrix that her favorite aspect of being an NCTA employee was the people.

"I just really enjoy interacting with the students; the kids make it special. And I enjoy my co-workers, too."

Jo lost Kelly, her life-mate and spouse of 39 years, unexpectedly last fall. They couple has four adult children, nine grandchildren, one great-grandchild and a large extended family with the many Aggie students who were part of their lives.

Many evenings, stock dog students caravanned out to Popp's farm and corrals to train their livestock dogs on cattle or sheep.

"Lifelong friendships with students is special, they have become extended family. I stay in touch with many of them. We exchange Christmas cards and share messages on Facebook. And they like to come back and visit," Jo again says as she did in her 2020 interview.

### **Motherly advice**

The native of Montana who enjoys gardening, collecting gnomes and raising Corgi dogs, listens to the students and may be known for a bit of motherly monitoring now and then.

"I tell them, no matter what, go to class. No matter how you show up, just make it there."

For nine years, during the school year, Jo Popp has shown up to serve the Aggie students and community.

During summer when Food Service needs are intermittent, she works with the facilities and maintenance team ensuring the campus is spic and span for fall semester and the new crop of Aggies.

Jo's smile will be broad and welcoming when New Student Orientation arrives in late August.

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The Nebraska College of Technical Agriculture recognized Jo Popp with the 2022 Excellence in Service award presented by NCTA Dean Larry Gossen. Jo has worked with Aggie Dining and Food Services for nine years. (Crawford / NCTA Photo)



Jo Popp serves chocolate malts to a young guest and her father at the NCTA Chandie's Castle deli on May 6. (Crawford / NCTA Photo)