

2000 - 2010: Dramatic growth & development

By Nancy Vessell

The turn of the century proved to be a major turning point in the development of Linn State Technical College. It kicked off a decade of dramatic growth on campus, in academic programs and in student enrollment.

The seed for that growth had been planted in the previous decade when the local college became a state institution. The new status stabilized the college's future with a permanent mission as the state's only publicly supported institution devoted solely to granting associate degrees in technical education.

"It was recognized by the state of Missouri that this was a higher education opportunity they wanted to expand on for Missourians," said Dr. Donald Claycomb, president of the college since 1993.

Three impressive new buildings were completed during the decade:

- The Information Technology Center and Engineering Technology Wing opened in October 2001, the first brick building on campus. At a total cost of \$12.9 million, it contained more than 93,000 square feet, including a library, classroom space, academic resource center multimedia center and the network operations center for the college campus.
- The \$8 million Activity Center opened in January 2008 with 71,240 square feet of multipurpose space for students and the community, including three gymnasium floors, indoor track, fitness area, game area, archery range, conference room and emergency tornado shelter.
- The Vehicle and Power Center opened in September 2010. The \$15 million, 84,000-square-foot facility became home to many programs in the college's transportation division.

The new buildings substantially enhanced the landscape, as well as the educational and lifestyle opportunities on campus. During the decade, an airport hangar also was constructed as a community resource, and student housing was expanded. On the Mexico campus, the Advanced Technology Center was enlarged.

Academic offerings also were expanded during that time with 19 new programs and program options, bringing the total to more than 35. Some of the new programs included Electric Power Generation Technology, Business Systems Specialist, Nuclear Technology, Powersports Technology and Welding Technology.

In developing new programs, Linn State continued to rely on its proven strategy of responding to market demand such as Powersports Technology in 2006. The two-year degree program was developed in cooperation with the Missouri Powersports Dealers Association, which expressed the need for skilled technicians to work on increasingly sophisticated motorcycles and ATVs.

Growth was also reflected in student enrollment, which topped 1,000 for the first time. The decade began with 753 students and ended with 1,176 students. Young people increasingly recognized the need for higher education, and Linn State offered programs found at no or few other colleges. Still, Linn State struggled to attract female students, who comprised about 10 percent of the student body. The college increased female role models on the faculty and promoted the significant opportunities the programs offered for women in non-traditional jobs.

The nation fell into a national recession during the last half of the decade, impacting many colleges and their job-seeking graduates. Declining tax revenue chilled state funding for higher education in Missouri.

Linn State weathered the downturn by cutting costs and emphasizing programs that could grow enrollment with minimal additional expense. Industry support of academic programs continued to bolster the college.

On balance, Claycomb said, the decade was healthy for Linn State. “We’ve had some very good things happen to us. The good reputation built by those who came before us made it possible to have the good facilities we have.” By the end of the decade, the college’s annual budget topped \$15 million.

As industries tightened their belts, the typically robust job placement for graduates declined somewhat, but by the end of the decade it was bouncing back and was above 90 percent.

Reflecting its commitment to producing job-ready graduates for industry, Linn State took further steps to make sure its students were well prepared for the workplace even beyond the technical training. An initiative driven by the more than 350 advisory council members, a program known by its AJA@™LSTC acronym encouraged students to become proficient in three areas: academics, job readiness work ethic and attendance. In 2009, Linn State was the first college to develop student transcripts that showed not only academic grades, but also class attendance percentage and a job readiness work ethic score.

In addition, feedback from an advisory council survey prompted the college to research and launch a program in fall 2011 requiring drug screening of all first year students. The primary purpose of the program is to provide a safe, healthy and productive environment for everyone learning and working at the college. It is also one more step in preparing students for the work environment they will be entering. Students whose initial drug screen is positive will not be excluded from the college, but will have a grace period to rescreen and test negative to remain enrolled.

During the decade, Linn State was increasingly recognized nationally for its unique educational opportunities. Its Nuclear Technology program, which trains students for jobs with nuclear reactors and is the only one of its kind in Missouri and one of only a handful in the nation recognized by the Nuclear Regulatory Commission. Many other academic programs have earned accreditations in their fields.

As a new state college, Linn State was mandated to earn accreditation from The North Central Association of the Higher Learning Commission. After the standard intensive review, 10-year accreditation was granted in 2005 without the need for follow-up.

Linn State also stepped up efforts to expand its involvement in the community. With the opening of the new Activity Center in 2008, the college offered memberships to area residents to share the fitness and recreational resources. The college also began hosting state and local sporting events, such as archery and air rifle tournaments, as well as the popular Missouri SkillsUSA Championships for high schools and community colleges.

“Higher education institutions should be an asset to their communities and states beyond just what students spend there,” Claycomb noted. In fact, the total economic impact from Linn State’s operations, student spending and past student productivity was estimated at \$36.2 million in Osage County and \$146.7 million in Missouri, according to a 2008 study.

Campus life was significantly enhanced as the new Activity Center opened up more opportunities for students to become involved in intramural sports, including weight lifting,

volleyball, dodge ball and basketball. The large gymnasium also provided space for the college to hold annual commencement exercises on campus for the first time.

At the same time, more Linn State alumni became involved in their alma mater. Many graduates served on technical advisory committees for academic programs. Others were active in student recruitment. And, as the school matured toward 50 and its alumni began reaching retirement age, more donated monetary support to advance the college.

“They began looking back at what made a difference in their lives and welcomed the opportunity to get involved in their college,” Claycomb noted.

Alumni and friends of Linn State contributed to the construction of a campus monument reviving the eagle mascot. A bronze eagle was sculpted by Missouri artist Sabra Tull Meyer to sit atop a base installed in the campus roundabout. It is to be dedicated in fall 2011 in conjunction with the 50th anniversary of Linn State Technical College.

As the handsome eagle is poised to take flight, the monument inscription honors the college’s 10,000-plus graduates whose futures have taken off from this site:

LSTC Eagles ...

... have attitudes that allow them to soar to the top of their fields.

... are distinguished examples in their professions, communities and personal lives.

... sustain exceptional skills to persevere and flourish.

... are adaptable to diverse locations and environments.

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