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Final

The Stars Were Aligned

Pat Oidtman's involvement in Linn State Technical College (LSTC) spans several decades. During the 1980's, Pat served on the R-2 School Board, which at that time, also set policy for Linn Technical College. At the end of the 1980's, Pat became an instructor in the Administrative Office academic degree program at LSTC, serving in that capacity until retiring in May, 2009. During her time at LSTC, Pat was instrumental in the formation of a Medical Office academic degree program. Because of her long association with LSTC, Pat witnessed and was part of many key events in the transformation of the college into the state educational institution it is today.

It was a warm and sunny October day when we visited Pat Oidtman on the family farm where she was raised west of Linn, Missouri. As we pulled into the drive, it was evident that the Oidtman's have a love of unique art. Displayed prominently to the left of the driveway is a twelve foot tall scrap metal bug. In the yard, the centerpiece of one of Pat's flower gardens is a large metal blue heron – a gift from husband, John. The pet project for now is remodeling an old barn with rusted metal salvaged from the ABB building in Jefferson City.

Pat, a tall and trim, neatly-dressed lady, greeted us warmly on the wide front porch of her white, two story farmhouse. After introducing ourselves, Pat escorted us to the living room where we were invited to make ourselves comfortable. As we seated ourselves and prepared to interview Pat, we had a few minutes to study the numerous

antiques that decorate the cozy rooms of her obviously well-loved home. To the front of us was the dining room full of hutches, both old and new. The newest piece, a masterpiece in walnut by John, looks as if it has inserts of smoked glass in the doors. Upon closer inspection, their love of metal art becomes more evident. Instead of smoked glass, the inserts are buffed stainless steel panels cut to reveal intricate designs of animals and plants. It is a lovely and welcoming place to conduct an interview and start a new friendship. Pat sat on the sofa and patiently waited as we began the interview.

When Linn native, Pat Oidtman, graduated from Linn High School in 1959 little did she know that she would have a unique perspective on the evolution of LSTC. In 1961, when Thurman Willett, Superintendent of Osage County R-2 Schools, conceived the idea for a technical school, Pat was a young college student at Central Missouri State University in Warrensburg working towards a degree in Business Education. She obtained that degree in 1963 and promptly looked for work in Columbia where husband, John, was at the University of Missouri. Unable to find work in her field, Pat worked as Secretary to the Director of the Department of Agriculture. When John found employment as the Director of Alumni Publications at Washington University in St. Louis, Pat worked for Monsanto. Following the adoption of their two children in the early 70's, Pat and John eventually found themselves back in Linn on the family farm after Pat's father died.

It's obvious that Pat loves a challenge. "At the same time we were making arrangements to move back to Linn, we heard that Sears was looking to open a catalog store in town. We put in our application and we got it. We opened the Sears Catalog

Store in 1974 and had it until 1989. I worked there part-time when the kids were little. To keep up with evolving technology at the Sears Store, I took a night class at LSTC to learn WordPerfect. The male instructor at the time proclaimed to the class, 'Women over 50 shouldn't even try to use these computers.' That statement motivated me to keep up with technology." The determination to try new experiences would also extend into public service.

"I was on the R-2 School Board from 1982 to 1988," Pat proudly states. "At that time there were two school board meetings per month. One meeting was for the actual R-2 Schools and the other meeting was to conduct the business of LSTC." The decision to purchase the 100 acres of land that now is home to LSTC was made during her tenure on the R-2 Board. All major decisions in a small town are bound to be greeted with some skepticism and this was no different. "It was unfortunate that there was some misunderstanding regarding the purchase of the acreage for the College," Pat softly says. "I remember one individual called and railed against the construction. It was just so unfortunate that there were local misconceptions about what we were trying to achieve for the community." Serving on the R-2 School Board provided a unique vantage point for Pat. "Serving on the School Board peaked my interest in working at LSTC. I admired the work they were doing at the College. It was so exciting that it was something I aspired to become involved in. Knowing how Linn State Technical College started and evolved made me want to work there." The opportunity to join the faculty of LSTC came in 1989 and once again Pat stepped up to the challenge.

"In 1989 we sold the Sears Catalog Store. I knew that Linn Tech had started an academic program geared towards business. I was eager to return to teaching and I

was determined to become part of that program. I started at Linn Tech in 1989 in the Administrative Office – Executive program teaching computer applications, business math, marketing and economics. We worked in the Terrill Building. This building was located behind Linn High School and was not originally built for the college. All business classes were in there and also Industrial Electricity classes. It was very cramped working in the space we had in the Terrill Building. The offices were small and we had three people working in the same office space that also included a copy machine. That experience is a testimonial to the fact that it's not the buildings that make a great school; it's the people that run it." Always interested and willing to keep up with changing times, Pat noticed that there was a need for a Medical Office program.

Pat proudly states, "After about five years of working at Linn Tech, I promoted the idea that there was a need for a Medical Office program. I started the Medical Office program at Linn Tech. I taught myself medical terminology so I was learning as I was teaching. I taught myself medical coding. Students started in the Administrative Office program and then had to make a decision on whether to take the Executive program or the Medical program." With a grin Pat continued, "You don't ever learn something as well as when you have to be prepared to teach it."

The evolution of Linn Tech was already in place and soon most of the classes had moved to the new campus while all the business classes remained at the old campus or West Campus as it was called. That period in her employment at Linn Tech required some adjustment. "When most of the classes moved to the new campus, it changed the Business Department. The Department still functioned well but it wasn't cohesive and I missed the camaraderie with my fellow faculty members in other

departments," Pat quietly said. "The Business classes didn't move to the new campus until 2001 when the ITC building was completed." The new campus is a source of pride for Pat.

Pat's face lights up when she says, "It's been a great joy to see how far we've come to where the school is now. I have a great swelling of pride when I see the new campus. I'm especially proud of the fact that I was a member of the Faculty Senate when the decision to hire Dr. Claycomb was made. He has done a fine job for Linn State Technical College." While Pat enjoyed teaching at Linn State, she also recognized the importance of being there for the students and seeing them as individuals.

"My wish is that I made an impact on the lives of the students while I was at Linn State," Pat says wistfully. "We have very bright students and the ability of the students is very high. I found myself trying to be helpful in so many ways. I felt that if you are an instructor, you are also a counselor. That's one of the things that differentiate Linn State from the bigger schools. The instructors can be more involved in student's lives. I always hoped I made a difference in some way to my students." During her twenty years at LSTC, Pat developed strong relationships with her faculty colleagues.

Pat fondly reminisces, "My favorite memory of working at Linn State Technical College is the camaraderie and respect with other faculty members. I cared a lot about my students but as an instructor you have to keep things on a professional level. I treasure the friendships and working relationships I had with the faculty. I have such a strong belief in our school and in our mission." Pat sees a great potential for Linn State Technical College.

"When Linn Tech received designation as a state college," Pat reflects, "it was almost a miracle. The stars were aligned to make it happen at the right time." She sees no doubt as to the positive impact of Linn State Technical College on the local community. Pat confidently states, "Linn State has impacted the Linn area immeasurably. I think a lot of people do not understand the economic impact that Linn State has had on the area and how it brought a new vitality to the area – a revitalization of the area. Do you think McDonald's would be here without Linn Tech? You have to look at the big picture." Pat continues with her vision of LSTC's future, "I just see a bright future for Linn State. Doctor Claycomb has a vision. The college is structured so that we can continue to offer new and emerging technologies. I really think we have a great reputation and that will continue into the future." Having been involved with LSTC for so many years, it was difficult to leave.

Pat Oidtman retired from LSTC in May, 2009 after twenty years of service. "It was a difficult decision to retire," she says. But for Pat Oidtman, retirement doesn't mean willing away the hours in a rocking chair. She's already accepted the next challenge. Last year, after running for an empty seat on the Board of Directors for Three Rivers Electrical Cooperative, she won the election and is currently serving as the first woman ever elected to the Board.

Our interview of Pat Oidtman not only taught us about the history of Linn State Technical College but also a great deal about one of its retired teachers. Pat Oidtman has a great love of learning and teaching. Even after retiring, she is still helping students. Pat helped us realize the importance of non-traditional students in the classroom, the importance of school pride, and most importantly, how all of us have a

part in LSTC's future. It was truly inspiring and motivating to listen to Pat Oidtman as she described to us her love for education, students, and Linn State Technical College.