

DMACC - The Beginning Story

It used to be a cornfield. Before that mounted guards patrolled the area. Even prior to that era it was a part of the Fitch farm - a show place in the community. And if one goes way back, it likely was a favorite camp site or hunting grounds for the Fox or Sac Indians, because today's youths remember it as a place to search for arrowheads. But the good hunting and the cornfields at the south edge of Ankeny have given way to concrete pillars and walls of brick, tools of learning and the echo of footsteps from early morning until late at night as thousands seek a better way of life within those walls.

Its founding that goes back to 1965, and even then its founders saw a college that was destined to become recognized in the community college movement in the nation. One of its founders, Polk County Superintendent Ralph Norris muses "We never doubted that such an institution here would be less than a leader in its field, but we did miss our projections.

We could see that the college would be serving 10,000 persons by 1976. Now the facts reveal that the college served close to 20,000 during the school year, 1969-1970, just two years after the doors were opened to students." And Norris was right. The July, 1970, enrollment report revealed that 19,712 persons were served by the college in some way during the preceding year.

But back to the early days - the pioneer days for community colleges in Iowa. The 61st General Assembly made it all possible in 1965. That was the go ahead and the County Superintendents of Boone, Dallas, Guthrie, Jasper, Madison, Marion, Polk, Story, and Warren lost no time (Carroll and Audubon Counties merged in July, 1970). They asked Dr. Ray Bryan and Dr. Trevor Howe of Iowa State University to conduct a study. Pulling together were all segments of the citizenry of the nine counties-members of the county and local boards of education, school superintendents, community leaders, representatives of business, industry and labor, and lay persons. They were all involved, and on September 9, 1965, a proposal was submitted to the State Board of Public Instruction.

Approval was granted on March 18, 1966, and the official name of the institution was designated as Area XI Community College. By May of that year a Board of Directors was elected and organized. They settled into their task, and with Attorney James Maggert of Ankeny as their president, faced the gigantic task of "making" a college.

Ankeny has been a focal point for the college since those early days. Superintendent Paul Lowery and a skeleton staff established temporary offices in the old Ankeny post office building.

Everything was temporary back then. A former grocery store was leased in West Des Moines, and it was converted into college classrooms and laboratories.

It was about this time that the board, after a great deal of consideration of sites for a permanent campus, zeroed in on a site in the Ankeny area. Ideally, it was a natural. It was the approximate center of the district, an important point because the college was destined to be primarily a commuter's college as the legislature intended it to be.

By late November, 1966, Iowa State University expressed willingness to negotiate the sale of 240 acres of their experimental farm located at the south edge of Ankeny. And, in January, 1967, Emery Prall & Associates of Des Moines were retained as architects for the first phase of the building program.

An offer was made to Iowa State University in February to buy the 240 acres, and an option was sought on 80 adjacent acres. A contract for both was signed in April. In the meantime, 27 students began study in 5 vocational technical education programs in West Des Moines in February of that year, and it was soon apparent that more space would be needed by fall.

At that time, the Board and Superintendent Lowery realized that it would be a constant race to provide facilities to handle increasing enrollment.

A temporary stop-gap was the leasing of the roller skating rink at 2020 Grand, West Des Moines, and in September, 1967, the enrollment soared to nearly 300. But, there seemed to be no possible way to find already existing facilities that would lend themselves to the needs of the college. So another look was taken at the permanent campus site. Plans for the first of a three phase projected building program were on the drawing board but it would be a couple of years before facilities could be ready for occupancy. There had to be an answer, and after more deliberation, the Board directed Mr. Lowery to proceed with "temporary" facilities on the Ankeny campus.

Five "demountable" buildings were erected to be leased by the college, and occupancy was taken in late winter, 1968. Moved to the facilities were the administrative offices, the students who had been attending classes in the First United Methodist Church in Ankeny since the fall quarter, and some from the Grand Avenue Center in West Des Moines. Ground was broken that spring for the permanent campus and contracts were let for five buildings, including an Educational Media Center of 63,000 square feet. Total cost would be some \$5 million. How would they be financed? A federal grant under the Higher Education Facilities Act, \$1,152,403, to be matched by funds received from the 3/4 mill levy approved for capital outlay by voters in the district, and state aid for capital outlay in the amount of \$1,800,000.

Two more buildings were constructed and leased on the phasing campus for use during the 1969/1970 school year, and enrollment took another leap.

In the meantime, things were happening in other areas. The number of staff members grew. The Des Moines Skill Center (Manpower Development Training Act facility) became a part of the college as did Boone Junior College. A contract was entered into with the City of Des Moines for the educational component of the Concentrated Employment Program, the National Alliance of Businessmen, New and Expanding Industries, Work Incentive Program, Model Cities, and other agencies to raise the level of the educationally disadvantaged. Adult and continuing education became a far-reaching and vital arm of the college, and education was taken to the people.

Thousands of persons earned adult high school diplomas. Other thousands were studying adult basic education. In mid-October, 1970, two of the permanent buildings (Industrial Trades and Medical) were opened to classes with the Data Processing building following suit in December. The Media Center with its automatic book retriever and the Food Services building opened in August of 1971.

What has this done for Ankeny?

With a total staff of more than 300 (170 of which are located on the Ankeny campus) it boosts the economy of the community in the amount of more than \$175,000, without considering what students spend, the benefits of construction activity, and other related areas.

Plans for the future include more cultural opportunities for the community. School officials forecast that it will be a center of the community school concept—a flexible and much needed facet of good education.

Superintendent Lowery vows that costs will be kept as low as possible to insure that quality education will stay within the reach of anyone who desires it. A study of student characteristics reveal that there are those from the age of 18 through the 50's enrolled.

Further study shows that a large percentage remain in the area for employment after graduation. And with this statement from the Office of Health, Education and Welfare, "The number of jobs which the unskilled can fill is declining rapidly, and the number requiring a four-year liberal arts college degree, while growing, is increasing far less rapidly than the number demanding a vocational or technical skill. In the 1980's, it will still be true that fewer than 20 percent of the job opportunities will require a college degree.

The height of potential is not measured by the color of the collar.

"The community college seems a sure bet to remain an integral part of and valuable asset to the Ankeny community."