As President of Wichita Area Technical College, Dr. Tony Kinkel brings a unique blend of teaching, administrative, policy making and leadership experience to higher education. Elected at age 24 to the Minnesota House of Representatives, Dr. Kinkel served from 1986 to 1998 where he was appointed by the Speaker of the House to chair the Higher Education Finance Division. From 1999-2002, Dr. Kinkel served in the Minnesota State Senate and was elected by his peers to serve on Education Commission of the States, a national organization of state policy makers who hold educational leadership positions in their respective states. In addition to serving in the state senate, Dr. Kinkel worked as the Dean of General Education at Northwest Technical College in Minnesota, one of the state’s largest technical colleges with five separate campuses. Prior to being an academic dean, Kinkel taught Political Science at Central Lakes Community College in Minnesota and high school social studies where he was the region’s Farmers Union Teacher of the Year in 1985.

Leaving the legislature in 2002, Dr. Kinkel was chosen in a nation wide search to lead Maryland’s community colleges as state director for the Maryland Association of Community Colleges. While in Maryland, Kinkel led 16 independent community colleges, representing them before the Governor, the Maryland Higher Education Commission and the Maryland General Assembly.

In 2004, Dr. Kinkel was chosen by the University of Arkansas Board of Trustees to serve as Chancellor of the University of Arkansas Community College at Batesville located in rural, north-central Arkansas. While at Arkansas, UACCB increased its academic rigor to the 90th percentile as measured by the Community College Student Survey of Engagement, 2006. In addition, 93.4% of its students ranked their entire educational experience as “excellent or good,” which was 6% above the national average.

In 2007, Kinkel was chosen to lead Colorado’s second largest community college, Pikes Peak Community College, a college consisting of four campuses with 14,000 students and 502 full-time employees. In 2008, Dr. Kinkel was named President of the Year by the Colorado Community College Student Association. In 2009, Kinkel was nominated as 2009 Business Person of the Year by the Colorado Springs Chamber of Commerce for efforts by the college to serve the four military entities in the region and for re-directing the college’s efforts toward workforce development. Kinkel received the Innovator of the Year Award from the University of Colorado at Colorado Springs Center for Limited Government for becoming the first community college in the nation to partner with a charter school to build a joint facility in 2008. Through this joint facility, PPCC became one of nation’s largest providers of higher education to the home school community.
During Kinkel’s career at WATC, the college’s National Center for Aviation Training was selected by the National Association of Manufacturing to develop the national standards in aviation curriculum. WATC has enjoyed explosive growth during Kinkel’s tenure of 15%.

While in Kansas, President Kinkel has been asked by the Kansas Board of Regents to serve on Process and Management Committee of college presidents and the Transfer and Articulation Advisory Council.

Kinkel received his bachelor’s degree in Teaching Social Studies from the University of Minnesota-Duluth, did Master’s work at Bemidji State University and was awarded an Ed.D in Higher Education Administration from the University of Minnesota where he was a member of the Leadership Academy program. Kinkel’s dissertation topic was on indicators of effectiveness of higher education governing boards.
President a believer in two-year colleges

By Bill Wilson
The Wichita Eagle

Keeping up with Tony Kinkel is a challenge. The new president of Wichita Area Technical College and the National Center for Aviation Training walks fast, talks fast and thinks fast — all products of a man chasing a core lifetime goal: to create workplace opportunities for the "have-nots."

That mission is the product of an eclectic career — a civics teacher, basketball coach, 15-year Minnesota legislator and a man with a missionary zeal about the value of the community college system to society.

Kinkel, 50, a rural Minnesota native, comes to Wichita from Pikes Peak Community College in Colorado.

He holds a bachelor's degree in social sciences and a master's and doctorate in higher education administration.

Through it all, Kinkel's still coaching — this time, his team of vocational educators.

"I taught my first year and then I got elected to the Minnesota House when I was 23, and I realized that at some point I wasn't going to be in the Legislature forever," Kinkel said.

"So I had to decide if I wanted to go back into the classroom or do something else. I'd started teaching part-time at a community college, and I absolutely fell in love with the mission of the two-year school. So I wanted to be a part of leading that cause."

Kinkel has been dean of Northwest Technical College in Minnesota, state director of the Maryland community college system, chancellor of the University of Arkansas Community College at Batesville, and president of Pikes Peak Community College in Colorado Springs.

It was during his time in Maryland that Kinkel said the lure of his rural Minnesota roots drew him back to the Midwest.

He was driving to church one Sunday on the beltway, "and it was six lanes driving wall to wall, and you kind of come to the conclusion as a small-town boy that I didn't want to raise my children in that East Coast fast-paced traffic," he said.

Kinkel said he couldn't pass up the chance to help advance planemaking at WATC.

"The only manufacturing left in the United States in which we dominate the world is aviation," he said. "We've lost almost everything else. And so the thrill to be a part of the one industry left where we're still king of the hill — and we need to stay there — proved an irresistible challenge for me professionally."
Kinkel is up-front about one of his biggest challenges: stabilizing WATC's finances, where he said headway is being made.

"We have crippling debt," he said. "Some necessary, some the product of some bad decisions."

The balance sheet, though, cannot detract from the school's commitments, Kinkel said — to educating its students and to the staff members who deliver that education.

Toward that end, Kinkel said he's committed to avoiding the month-long furloughs that hit the school staff last year.

"Does anyone really want to hear that they're not going to be able to pay their mortgage for a month?" he asked.

That broad perspective attracted Sedgwick County Commissioner Tim Norton and WATC board member Lyndon Wells to Kinkel.

"For me, I think Tony brings a fresh look at what we're trying to do, a wealth of experience in academia and also some legislative experience on how to get things done through that system," Norton said.

"The academic system in Kansas is tied to the political system, and we need to understand how to make that work. Tony brings great perspective there."

Wells said Kinkel represents the enthusiasm the school needs.

"The progress made in the school up to this point was significant, and we've needed someone to pick it up and carry it to the next level."

**Tearing down barriers**

Connecting young people, many in their last chance for higher education, with workplace opportunities drives Kinkel.

"The core of what I believe in is I want the have-nots to have the opportunity to have more. Don't give it to them. Help them earn it," Kinkel said.

"Fact is, the haves of the world don't necessarily want the have-nots of the world to have more, and they put up barriers. So the core of what I believe in is tearing down those walls."

It's a core belief that binds Kinkel to his technical college work.

"I am intoxicated, frankly, by taking those lives in this setting, finding out their hopes and dreams and getting them there," he said.

"It's easy to be president of Harvard University. You can't screw that up. But, boy, if you don't have great leadership at these two-year schools, you have so many lives in the palm of your hand.

"If you don't make it here, where else do you go? We have to get it done right here. I want to be a part of those students' lives."

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