

President has been big asset to college

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people don't think he'll be able to keep his hands out of college business if he continues to live in Goodland.

"People ask me two things when they hear I am retiring," he said. "Are you leaving Goodland?" and, "What are you going to do when you retire?"

His answer to the first question is, "No," and to the second, "Lots of fishing, gardening, traveling and visiting grandchildren."

"I don't think I'm going to have any trouble finding something to do," he said.

Keirns, an Atchison County native, came from Emporia fresh out of college to Goodland in August 1960. He said when he and Etta Mae first moved here, both taking teaching jobs with the school district, they didn't think they'd stay long. But, he said, the town has grown on them.

"We said at the time that we may not be here too long," Keirns said, "but here it is 41 years later and Goodland is home to us. We have a love of the community and the people here."

Keirns admits that people have mixed feelings about him.

He said some may not appreciate the way he has managed the campus and faculty — demanding his vision of perfection from both. But, he said, he had to be aggressive in his position, and you can't expect everyone to like it.

"I've been cussed out," he said, "and commended. I've never been punched in the nose."

Etta Mae, who married Keirns in 1959 while they were both living in Emporia, said her husband has never been the type to sit around watching television and drinking beer.

"I can't imagine him sitting around watching soap operas and Oprah," she said. "He's very motivated, so I think he'll go about retirement the same way he went about his job."

That means he'll have an idea of what he wants, and he'll work hard to make sure that's what he gets.

Paul Chaffin, who taught carpentry for four years before becoming the college's vocational counselor 19 years ago, said Keirns is an excellent business manager and good at getting other people to see things his way — but that doesn't mean he was always easy to work for.

"Larry is an individual who had a vision for the school," Chaffin said. "Over the years, he has worked diligently to make it happen, to see it develop. The school's growth is all a direct result of him."

The campus has grown from two buildings to 24, from 105 students to 593 and from eight programs to 13.

"He's a very, very good business manager," Chaffin added, "and good at communicating what he wants done. Good at getting people to buy into what his vision is."

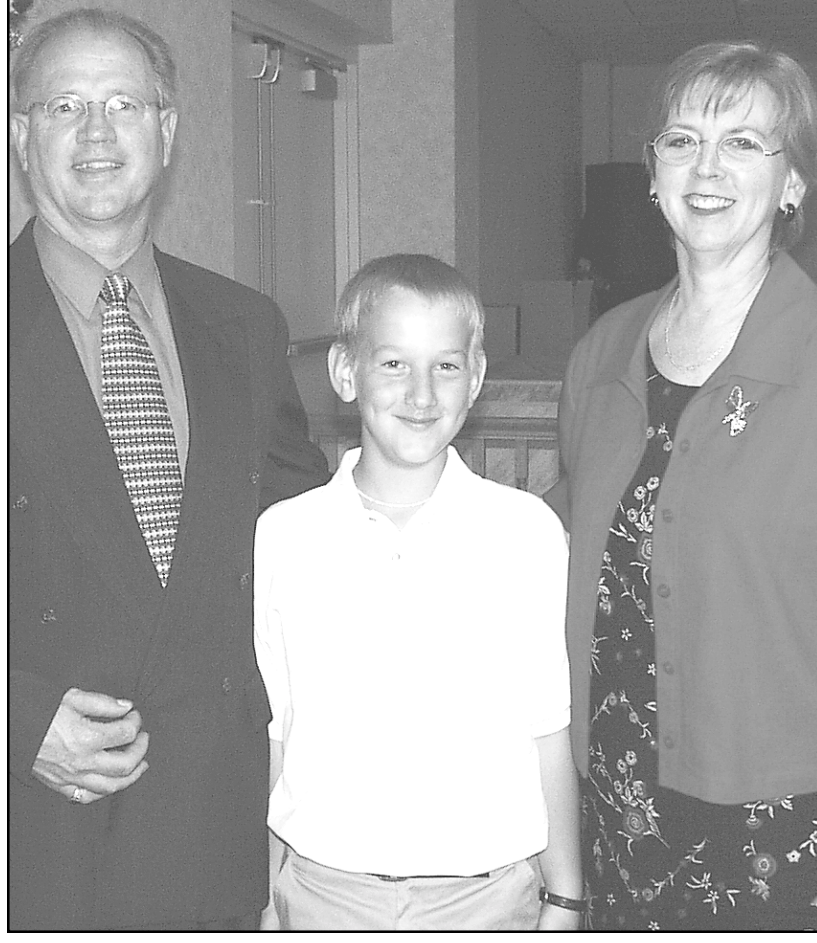
But, he said, because Keirns is demanding and wants things done his way, it can sometimes be a challenge working for him.

"If he makes a decision," Chaffin said, "you know it's a firm decision. There's no waffling. There were times when we had a difference of opinion, but we were working towards the same



Larry Keirns, who retired on Friday as president of the Northwest Kansas Technical College, in front of the college's sign, made by carpentry students. The state granted the former vocational-technical school college status earlier this year.

Photos by Rachel Miscall/The Goodland Daily News



Ken Clouse, who took over as president of the Northwest Kansas Technical College today, with his wife JoAnn and son Brennen, 10. JoAnn will run the college bookstore.

goal.

"At times it had to be done his way, but we've always been able to find common ground to work from. I feel like he has been fair with me in the responsibilities he has given me."

That's another word many people would use to characterize Keirns: fair. Sharp said the reason he and Keirns worked so well together was because there was a mutual respect.

"I always knew where I stood with Larry," he said. "We had the respect of each other. He had the respect of me and I had the respect of him."

Also, Sharp said, he accepted Keirns for who he is, a person who demands the best and isn't willing to settle for less.

"If he takes a walk on campus," Sharp said, "he's not looking at the birds and bees. He's asking himself, 'Is there paper on the ground? Is there a spot that needs painting?' He's out there, he's seeing the details. There aren't places that are unkempt."

"I think as long as you work for Larry and you understand that, you'll do fine. If you can't accept that, then you'll have a difficult time working for him."

Sharp said he left the technical college four years ago for professional, not personal, reasons. Richard Hoffman took his place and will continue working as assistant director under Clouse.

Sharp said his health was deteriorating and diabetes was taking its toll on

his kidneys and pancreas. A successful kidney and pancreas transplant in 1996 restored his health, he said, and he realized God had given him a second chance at life.

"It was a professional thing," he said. "I needed a different environment. I wouldn't trade my years at the vo-tech school for anything."

Sharp said the most enjoyable times he remembers happened outside the office, when he and Keirns would travel to vocational education conferences.

One of the more memorable trips, he said, was in the late 1960s, when he, Keirns and their wives drove in the school's station wagon to an American Vocational Association conference in New Orleans.

On the way back, Sharp said, the group spent the night in McGalvin, Texas, where Keirns had friends who owned an orchard.

"We picked oranges and grapefruit," he said. "When we looked out the bedroom window in the morning there were tangerines hanging outside the window. It was just a fun trip that I'll always remember."

Sharp said another trip in the mid-1970s to a conference in Atlanta sticks out in his mind, because it was during the airplane ride back that he and Keirns started talking about changing the structure of the school year.

He said they got the idea at the conference to switch from a nine-month to a 12-month school year and lengthen the school days, packing what was two years worth of instruction into one.

"We kind of discussed the possibility," Sharp said, adding that they wanted to cover more material in a shorter time because students, especially those in the automotive technology and truck and tractor diesel mechanics departments, were taking job offers before they graduated.

That conversation, he said, led to the first curriculum changes in 1977. Today, many of the college's 13 programs run year-around.

"I remember moments when something really different happened," Sharp

Enrollment and campus expanded

COLLEGE, from Page 1

and has attended more than 400 board meetings.

The college raised \$124,000 to build a student union in 1972, Keirns said, and received \$250,000 from the late Carl Murray, a Sherman County farmer and rancher, to build the Murray Center in 1997. He said the institution raised \$86,000 to put up student housing in 1975 and 1977, remodeled and equipped the computer center in 1992 and expanded the communications technology program in 1988.

The number of programs offered has grown from eight to 13, Keirns said, noting that the college has added and dropped classes according to demand. He said the institution wasn't afraid to experiment with new programs, though some failed quickly.

In the 1970s, he said, the administration decided to start a lumberyard sales and management program because lumberyard managers were calling to say they needed help. The program fizzled out in a year.

"We found out that no one wanted to work at a lumberyard," Keirns said.

The college offered a plumbing program for 10 to 12 years, he said, but demand dropped and it slowly died. The former president speculated that students see plumbing as demeaning, though it typically involves much more than just unclogging toilets.

Keirns said the past year has been one of his best professionally, as the state made the former vocational-technical school a college, the insti-

tution received national accreditation as a technical college and the "Larry Keirns Fitness Center" opened on the south side of the campus.

The fitness center ensures Keirns' name will always be a part of the college's history, which began in April 1963, when the Goodland School District approved building the Max Jones Fieldhouse and a vocational-technical school for a total of \$810,000.

The school board decided they didn't want to run the new institution, so before opening day, the Area Board of Control was created, comprising 24 members representing northwest Kansas school districts.

Keirns, who moved to Goodland in 1960 to teach the DECA, or distributive education, class, said the school opened in August 1964 and he taught business classes there for the first year.

The second year, he said, he worked under the director George Lyon, traveling around the state and country to promote the school and recruit students.

Keirns, who has a bachelor's and master's in business education from the old Kansas State Teachers College, now Emporia State University, said Lyon left the next year to take a job with the Colorado Department of Vocational Education, and offered him the job.

At 28, Keirns said, he was scared that he wouldn't be able to handle it. "I was scared that I would never be able to live up to what we were trying to do," he said. "I thought I was too young and all that."

He proved himself wrong.

said.

Whatever people's personal feelings about Keirns are, most say he's been the best thing that could have happened to the technical college. Smith, the board chairman, said Keirns has always made sure that the college is on the forefront of vocational education.

"He's always been a star in vocational education in Kansas," said Smith, who has represented Greeley County on the board for 23 years. "His progressive ideas have made the school a success."

Smith said the technical school here was the first in the state to pair up with another college to offer its students two-year associate degrees, instead of the certificate they would receive at graduation.

He said the school and Colby Community College agreed to work together about 15 years ago, influencing other technical schools to do the same. With college status, the school can now award its own associate degrees, though students must take courses through Colby or another college.

While Smith said the college has been Keirns' life, Etta Mae, who no doubt knows him the best, said his family has always come first.

"As a husband," she said, "his first concern is for his family."

She said he's proud of their two

grown sons, Brad, a middle-school principal in Rose Hill, and Greg, an accountant for a newspaper in Colorado Springs, and is a considerate and caring father, husband and grandfather. The Keirnses have four grandchildren.

"It's a 50-50 thing at home," she said. "I'm not saying we don't fight, don't get mad, but we get through it by being considerate of each other."

Keirns sees it a little differently, saying at times he did allow his job to come before the family.

He said the day after his son Greg was born on June 4, 1966, he moved to Fort Collins, where he spent the summer completing administrative courses. Keirns took over the director's job that fall, as the former director, George Lyon, left for another job in Colorado.

But, Keirns said, he doesn't have any regrets, and he definitely won't spend his retired years lamenting about what he could have done.

"I've gotten a lot of self-satisfaction," he said, "out of helping to make this place what it is today."

While his brain is still swimming with ideas for the college's future, Keirns said, it won't be hard to hand it all over to Clouse.

"I already sense that he's got ideas that are different than mine," he said, "and better."

Scientists dispute popular global warming views

LAWRENCE (AP) — Two scientists at the Kansas Geological Survey are disputing popular views on global warming.

"Human influence in natural processes is probably pretty minimal," said Lee Gerhard, principal geologist at KGS.

Gerhard and William Harrison, deputy director at KGS, have edited a book that says increased use of fossil fuels has little effect on climactic changes.

That view, in "Geological Perspectives of Global Climate Change," places Gerhard and his colleagues in opposition to many scientists and environmentalists.

An article by Gerhard and Harrison in the book says that global climates were shaped over millions of years by the positioning of the earth, the variation of solar energy received by the planet and the movement of land and water masses.

Compared with these forces, the increased use of fossil fuels over the past century has had little effect on the earth's temperature, they say.

"Our climate changes all the time and in both directions," Gerhard said. "A thousand years ago, we were a lot warmer."

Mark Helm, spokesman for Friends of the Earth, a national environmental organization, laughed when asked to respond to the book.

He said most leading scientists believe greenhouse gases, such as carbon dioxide from burned fossil fuels, are trapping heat inside the Earth's atmosphere and are changing the planet's climate.

Helm said the geologists' conclusions were meant to support the petroleum industry, which has spent billions of dollars trying to debunk theories about global warming and dampen enthusiasm for alternative fuel sources.

The book was published by the American Association of Petroleum Geologists, based in Tulsa, Okla.

"They started out to prove what they wanted to prove," Helm said.

Gerhard and Harrison deny any conflict of interest.

In the preface of the book, they write: "The editors and individual authors were not financially supported by any industrial or similar organizations. None of the contributing authors is currently a practicing petroleum geologist, although several have had broad and successful experience in that profession."

In an interview, Gerhard said, "It's our moral obligation to bring real science to the people."

Gerhard also weighs in on the recent

Kyoto Protocol, which called on nations heavily reliant on fossil fuels, especially the United States, to cut back.

President Bush rejected U.S. participation in the Kyoto Protocol, saying it was too expensive and was unfair because developing countries did not have to comply with it.

And the U.S. Senate voted 95-0 in 1997 that it would not accept a treaty that does not bind China, India and other developing nations to reduce greenhouse gases.

Gerhard agreed, saying that Kyoto would have forced the United States to replace billions of dollars in taxes on fossil fuel consumption. "It would have wrecked the American economy," he said.

Official says murder priority

LAWRENCE (AP) — A Costa Rican official says solving the murder of a University of Kansas student is a "top priority" for his government.

Jaime Daramblum, the Costa Rican ambassador to the United States, told the Lawrence Journal-World on Friday that official concern about the stabbing death of Shannon Martin is "extremely high."

"We attach top priority to solving homicide cases in Costa Rica,"

Daramblum said.

Martin, 23, was killed May 13 in Golfito, Costa Rica, where she was completing biological research a few days before she was scheduled to graduate from Kansas.

No arrests have been made, but several suspects have been questioned and had hair samples taken. Officials apparently seek a match to hair believed to be from her assailant, which was found clutched in Martin's hand.

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