

Bellevue University-CCC partnership benefited alumna Tonja Broadwell

Tonja Broadwell's path to a college education and a fulfilling career was not typical, but she has no regrets. "Bellevue University was a perfect fit for me, and the timing could not have been better," said Broadwell, chief operating officer at Kelly Supply Company, an industrial supply wholesaler with operations in Nebraska, Iowa, and Colorado. Broadwell, who moved to the Grand Island area as a fourth grader and has lived most of her life in the area, told her story during a 20th anniversary celebration of the learning partnership between Bellevue University and Central Community College (CCC) held on the College's Grand Island campus June 24. She recounted some of the story for The Insider.



Tonja Broadwell

"I am happy to talk about my CCC + Bellevue University education. When I was a high school student, kids were placed in one of two categories: those who were college-bound and those who were not. I was definitely not in the college-bound group. I did fairly well in school, but due to my family's economic situation, going to college was not feasible for me.

"Going to work was the best path I had, but I did receive a small scholarship to CCC to help pay for one semester there. After that, I worked, and sort of inched my way toward a two-year associate's degree in an information technology related program which took 10 years to complete, usually one class at a time. As a young person in her 20's, I didn't always make education the top priority.

But I was persistent.

"Because it took me so long and technology changed so fast in the 1980's, some of the classes I took early on at CCC were much less relevant by the time I finished, and I ended up with quite a few more additional credits than I needed for an associate's degree. But when I applied to Bellevue University (then Bellevue College), the extra credits were in my favor. I was a member of the third cohort group to take the University's 18-month Bachelor of Science in Management of Human Resources program. The timing was excellent for me. The program catered to my situation as someone working full time. I loved the accelerated format, attending class one evening each week, learning from the other students in the group. It was a perfect fit.

"I graduated in 1991, and the degree set me on a new career path. I had been a programmer, and I liked the work, but I knew I didn't want to do it for the rest of my life. I

wanted to move into management. At that pivotal point in my life, my Bellevue University degree allowed me to do that.

“I wanted to pursue an advanced degree, but at that time Bellevue did not offer master’s degrees. I ended up selecting the Master of Arts in Education and Human Development program at The George Washington University in Washington, DC. I could live and work in Grand Island and complete the program by extension. It complemented my Human Resource degree from Bellevue University very well.

“I completed my master’s degree in 1995 and in 1996 was hired as IT Director/CEO of KDSI, the IT department of Kelly Supply Company. I was promoted to my current position as chief operating officer at Kelly Supply in 2009, and my responsibilities include focusing on all aspects of business operations including workflow, productivity, procedures, training, communication, problem solving, information technology services.

“I was an adjunct faculty member in Bellevue University’s Business Information Systems degree program on the CCC campus from 1999 to 2003. Having colleges such as Bellevue University serving the Grand Island area helps meet a real need among community employers. Sometimes it is difficult to attract employees from elsewhere to move to a rural area. Partnerships like the one with Bellevue University and CCC enable companies and organizations to find the qualified, credentialed employees they need in the local community, people like me who can fill skilled positions.”