

Early Administrators of Des Moines Area Community College

By Carroll Bennett

In June of 1966 a series of actions were about to take place that would revolutionize higher education and expand opportunities for lowans, similar to the impact the Morrill Act had in stimulating an expansion of colleges and universities in the 1860's. The Iowa Legislature was well aware of the need to expand educational opportunities, especially for students who needed specific occupational training to fill the increasing number of new jobs in the Iowa economy.

In the early 1960's this need was being partially addressed by private trade schools and junior colleges. However, many who needed education would not be able to take advantage because of costs and distance, as well as family obligations. The range of programs to prepare for expansion in health and industrial technologies was limited.

In 1966 the Iowa Legislature passed, and Governor Harold Hughes signed, legislation that permitted counties to form merged areas to create two-year colleges to provide vocational, transfer, adult education and a range of services. The new college would be supported by the state, local taxes and tuition. Each would also be eligible for federal funding for building higher education facilities, as well as dollars for vocational-technical programs.

Accordingly, the school boards in a nine-county area in Central Iowa agreed to merge to form Area XI. There was an election to select the board members who would govern the new organization. Their first order of business was to find a leader and chief executive officer (Superintendent). What follows are brief biographies of the first four administrators who accepted the challenge to build a new college.

Paul J. Lowery was selected to be the first Superintendent of the College after meeting several Area XI board members who were attending an orientation seminar on community colleges at Iowa State University. Lowery, who presented information about two-year technical colleges, was the Director of the DeKalb County Technical College in Georgia. He accepted the offer on June 30, 1966.

Over the next six months Lowery assembled his administrative team: Owen Shadle, Director of Vocational-Technical Education; Leonard Bengtson, Director of Student Services and Philip Langerman, Director of Adult Education. Dale Bellairs was selected as Business Manager.

On a personal note I should add that I began employment in June 1967 as Assistant Director of Vocational-Technical Education. I share this because I was "there at the time" and knew and worked with each of these administrators—who were my role models. I have great admiration for each these early leaders and respect the decisions they made to build an institution that, 50 years later, is considered to be in the top group of community colleges in the United States.

Their biographies follow.

Paul J. Lowery

Paul Lowery was founding Chief Executive Officer of Des Moines Area Community College. Prior to DMACC he served as a vocational director from a post-secondary school in DeKalb County, Georgia. He was appointed by the Board of Directors of Merged Area XI on August 15, 1966 to be the first chief

executive officer of the college (Superintendent), and its first employee. He retired on March 31, 1983. A native of North Carolina, he served as in the US Army Air Force in WW II as a navigator while flying nearly 30 missions in the South Pacific. Near the end of the war he was involved in a crash upon landing in Japan that killed many of the crew. He was hospitalized for almost a year while recovering from his injuries.

He completed his bachelor's and master's degrees in industrial arts and vocational education, respectively, and later his Ph.D. in higher education. His first teaching experiences were in a high school where he taught trade and industrial courses. Later he established a reputation for innovation and success in his role as the Director of the DeKalb Technical College in Clarkson, Georgia.

He caught the attention of several members of the College Board while conducting a summer workshop on the "new" area schools in Iowa at Iowa State University during the summer of 1966. It was reported that the Board was impressed with his knowledge and presentation skills. No doubt his wife, Hila, was surprised when he notified her of his selection, since she assumed he would return to Georgia after the workshop.

Lowery faced numerous challenges as he began the planning and development of the institution. The board minutes verify that many agenda items were presented at each meeting for the first year, since numerous board actions were required in this rapidly growing organization.

Lowery established an administrative structure, including a president's council consisting of his direct reports (primarily the three vice presidents). Each person on the council was responsible for identifying and recruiting staff to accommodate the needs of students and to prepare the organization for anticipated growth. Lowery also served as the chief human resources director for the first two years of operation.

Also challenging was the general lack of knowledge and understanding of the mission and roles of the new college. Consequently, he sought invitations to meet with and make presentations to area chambers of commerce, service clubs, school boards, key administrators and business/industry groups. In these meetings he talked about the potential of the college to provide new educational opportunities in vocational programs that were taught by teachers with industry expertise, as well as experience for full time students and employed workers. The college would also focus on working with local schools, adult education, consulting, promotion and partnering with others.

The first five DMACC employees included a secretary, vocational director, director of ancillary services (student services), director of adult education and a chief financial officer. Once he had this team assembled he moved quickly to begin a detailed plan to gain visibility for the college, since few were aware of its existence or had a concept of the institution's goals and its potential for providing a range of educational services. Each of the three directors had been teachers in a field of vocational education and had bachelor's and masters degrees in this area. None were experienced administrators.

Lowery's knowledge of vocational education, administration and his demonstrated leadership skills quickly earned him the respect of the Board, faculty and staff. His ability to clearly articulate the mission of the college allowed college leaders to focus on outcomes and move quickly to establish the framework for a rapidly growing institution, consistent with the mission outlined in Senate File 500. He had a unique talent to select strong and effective leaders. He delegated work but monitored progress and expected results.

Lowery retired from the college in 1980. He and his wife moved to Phoenix, Arizona where he became an active volunteer in their public school system. He was active in planning and establishing a secondary vocational high school, the East Valley Institute of Technology, where he also served as a member of its original board of directors.

He died on December 13, 2004 in Phoenix, Arizona after a short illness.

Lowery's accomplishments to Des Moines Area Community College were recognized by the DMACC Board of Directors in 2011 when a street on the Ankeny Campus was named Paul J. Lowery Lane.

Owen Shadle

Owen Shadle was the first administrator selected by Superintendent Lowery. He assumed the role of Director, Vocational Technical Education—a key position in a college—on October 15, 1966. Owen had previously served as Director of Vocational Education at Ames High School. His responsibilities included teaching industrial arts and directing the co-op program. He held both a bachelor's and master's degree in vocational education from Iowa State University. He was respected by peers in Ames and state-wide as a leader and teacher. He was also served as an adjunct instructor at Iowa State University.

Shadle was responsible for developing vocational programs, recruiting faculty, establishing advisory committees for each program, conducting in-service instruction for new teachers, developing supplemental courses for employed workers, planning facilities, selecting instructional equipment, developing proposals for state and national funding, promoting and explaining the college and its programs and serving as a member of the president's cabinet.

He was able to articulate his philosophy of vocation education to faculty and other administrators. This was crucial to the success of instruction since faculty always had a strong sense their goals as effective teachers. Since many of the initial vocational faculty members lacked formal college level preparation for teaching, it was important to provide instruction to them in the basics of curriculum development, teaching techniques, classroom and lab management, as well as the philosophy of vocational education. Owen conducted these classes regularly as new teachers were employed. He also assisted Iowa State University in developing unique courses to build skills required for instructors in area community college vocational programs. This was a benefit to each new instructor, and encouraged many to continue taking college courses and to complete bachelor's and master's degrees.

Shadle had the ability to articulate the college mission and communicate long term objectives to faculty. He was highly structured and was able to provide the leadership that was essential for faculty and staff who were learning work skills in roles that were new to them.

He also organized an advisory committee composed of industry personnel who advised on many aspects of the instructional program and were instrumental in helping our first graduates obtain employment.

He resigned from the college on June 30, 1969 to become a professor of vocational education at Central Washington University. He lost his life on February 29, 1980 as the result of an auto accident in Ellensburg, Washington.

Philip Langerman

Philip Langerman was born in Fayette, IA and graduated from Fayette High School. He entered the U.S. Army in October 1953, which included a tour of duty in Germany. He enrolled at Iowa State University, where he completed his bachelor's degree in Agriculture Education. He then went on to complete his Masters in Vocational in Trade and Industrial Education and a Ph.D. in Educational Administration. Between, 1958-1959 he became a vocational agriculture instructor at the Iowa Training School for Boys. During this time, he became vocational director and school principal until July 1965. He then worked as a consultant in adult education for the Iowa Department of Public Instruction between July 1965 and December 1966.

Langerman was chosen to be the Director, Adult and Continuing Education on December 15, 1966. His responsibilities included leadership for the non-credit courses, development courses and programs that included adult basic education, high school completion and English as a second language. He developed a program to coordinate and support the local school adult education programs throughout the merged area. He also developed plans for the college library and media center. He then became the Vice President for Instruction in June 1969, a position he held until 1974.

Langerman's major contributions to DMACC included developing and expanding the adult and continuing education program, including establishing centers for delivering programs and high school equivalency, preparing for taking the GED (general educational development test) and ESL (English as a second language). He also established a cooperative relationship between the numerous local school adult education programs in Area XI which resulted in close relationships with the college. He initiated enhanced programming and publicity for these programs and established communication opportunities for their leaders.

He also was instrumental in writing grants and proposals for external funding. During his time as chief academic officer the college moved to a more defined curriculum and developed academic policies and procedures. He also served on a variety of college committees as well as provided leadership to several community based organizations. During his tenure the college experienced a rapid increase in program and course offerings and student enrollments. He was one of the founders of the Des Moines Area Higher Education Consortium, an organization of three colleges in the Des Moines area (DMACC, Drake and Grand View). This consortium, which is still active, enhanced communication between the three institutions and was also the vehicle for several federal grants in which each institution participated.

Another contribution was his leadership in developing a federal proposal for funding under the Advanced Institutions Development Program (AIDP). This award provided for funds that ultimately resulted in the development of the Urban Campus, establishing a comprehensive data center and system to support college growth and operations and revising the organizational structure of the college.

He left the college to become the Dean of Continuing Education at Drake University on May 31, 1974. He subsequently became the Vice President Academic Affairs Chief Academic Officer at Milwaukee Area Technical College; Senior Vice President, Residential University Upper Iowa University and Executive Vice President, University of Dubuque Education Corporation. He is currently the President of Adam International University in Atlanta, Georgia.

Leonard Bengtson

Leonard Bengtson was named Assistant Superintendent for Student Life on in February 13, 1967. At that time he was an industrial arts instructor at Ames High School. He had been a teacher for 15 years and had a bachelor's degree in industrial arts and a master's degree in vocational education. He also was credentialed as a certified counselor.

At the time of his appointment he had been under contract with the Ames School District for the 1966-67 school year. Through negotiations an arrangement was made for him to work part time in both positions until a full time teacher was contracted for his high school teaching position.

Bengtson was responsible for developing the student services programs, as well as the reporting systems to record student performance and information to the Iowa Department of Education. He focused on student recruitment and met individually with many high school counselors at their local school to explain the programs and services of the college and to meet with prospective students. He also developed a comprehensive program of student services for the college with very limited numbers of staff. Leonard also had responsibility for state reporting on enrollments, which were extremely important to the college since the data was the basis for the major revenue source—state financial aid.

He also developed a strong relationship with individual high school principals and counselors by making personal visits to each of the high schools in the area. This started immediately after he joined the College. It was important that these educators gain knowledge of what was being planned to help their students gain additional education, since the concept of post-secondary vocational and technical programs were unfamiliar. It also provided a contact person for them if they had questions or needed information in their work with students. His early efforts were crucial in establishing long-term relationships.

When admissions counselors were later employed he decided it would be best if each was a certified as a counselor. This credential gave them credibility with the high school counselors throughout the area and increased their comfort level in discussing opportunities for specific students they were assisting with educational planning.

His insights about the educational needs of veterans resulted in having a Veterans Affairs (VA)-approved veteran's counselor assigned to the department by the VA. This aided the processing of approval for student enrollment and reimbursement of benefits. A similar relationship was established with the State of Iowa regarding students in vocational rehabilitation who qualified for state funding.

Bengtson was regarded as one of the most kind, considerate and helpful administrators at the College. His calm demeanor and excellent judgment would often prevail when discussions and decisions were made on key college policy and direction. His management style encouraged staff to accept responsibility for a challenge, work it through and obtain his input and approval. He had trust in those who reported to him and allowed them to have authority to make decisions.

He retired from the college on June 30, 1991.

Dale Bellairs

Dale Bellairs, Purchasing Agent, began work January 1, 1967. He had been in a similar role at the Clarinda Mental Health Institute in Clarinda, Iowa prior to joining the college.

Dale resigned on April 13, 1969 to return to his former position at the Clarinda Mental Health Institute.