

2025

NEBRASKA COMMUNITY COLLEGE ASSOCIATION ANNUAL AWARDS CEREMONY

Cornhusker Marriott Hotel
333 South 13th Street
Lincoln, NE



Sunday, November 2

Cornhusker Marriott Hotel

333 South 13th Street

Lincoln, NE

COCKTAIL RECEPTION

4:30 – 5:30 p.m. | Main Level Atrium

Cash Bar

Hors d'oeuvres

NCCA DINNER & AWARDS CEREMONY

5:30 – 7:30 p.m. | Grand Ballroom

Buffet Dinner

NCCA BOARD OF DIRECTORS MEETING

7:30 – 8:30 p.m. | Garrat Room

AFTER-HOURS SOCIAL RECEPTION

7:30 – 10:00 p.m. | Main Level Atrium

Cash Bar



Congrats!

CENTRAL COMMUNITY COLLEGE



Nebraska Community College Association Faculty Member Award

Libby Theoharis | Instructor, Occupational Therapy Assistant Program

Libby Theoharis joined Central Community College in 2015 as an occupational therapy assistant program instructor, bringing experience from the University of Nebraska Medical Center's Munroe-Meyer Institute and GO Physical Therapy in Grand Island. She developed Getting it Write, a comprehensive hands-on level 1 pediatric fieldwork program providing OTA students with direct clinical experience to enhance practical skills and confidence. Theoharis partners with local organizations to establish free pediatric occupational therapy clinics, offering over six hours of community services while giving each OTA student more than 40 hours of practical experience. She was instrumental in the OTA student ideation, \$2.5 million fundraising and implementation of Nebraska's largest inclusive playground in Grand Island, recognized as the 2023 National Park of the Year by Burke Playgrounds. Theoharis earned her occupational therapy degree from Creighton University and bachelor's degrees in psychology and biology from the University of Nebraska-Lincoln.



Nebraska Community College Association Administrators/Staff Award

Alison Feeney | Associate Dean of Career and Technical Sciences

Alison Feeney joined Central Community College in 2021 as Associate Dean for Career and Technical Sciences, supervising more than a dozen programs. She has been instrumental in establishing one of the first Walter Scott Jr. Career Pathway Scholars programs in Nebraska and has supported CCC Foundation campaigns for advanced manufacturing, automotive, and autobody. Feeney spearheaded a manufacturing pathways partnership between the Hastings Area Manufacturing Association, Hastings Economic Development Corporation, area high schools, and CCC. She also assists with campus initiatives including Verizon Innovation Camp, Diesel Technology Days, Automotive Day, the annual car show, and SkillsUSA. In addition, Feeney organizes summer camps, serves on the Hastings Campus Welcome Committee, and volunteers for prospective student and donor visits. She earned her undergraduate degree from Midland University and holds three master's degrees from Hastings College and the University of Nebraska at Kearney.



Nebraska Community College Association Distinguished Alumni

Jon Abegglen

Jon Abegglen attended Platte College (later Central Community College-Columbus) from 1971-1973 before earning a business degree from Kearney State College. His extensive business background includes commercial real estate development and management, and serving as senior vice president of commercial and agribusiness banking at First National Bank of Omaha and First National of Kearney/First Commerce Bankshares. Abegglen joined the Central Community College Foundation Board in 2018 and co-chaired the \$20 million capital campaign for the Kearney Center, raising over \$11 million. He and his wife, Leslie, also co-chaired a successful \$38 million capital campaign for the Museum of Nebraska Art's expansion, preservation, and restoration. Currently, Abegglen is securing support for CCC's growing nursing program and an entrepreneurship and small business development center.



Nebraska Community College Association Governors Award Nominee

J. Thomas (Tom) Pirnie | Member, CCC Board of Governors

J. Thomas (Tom) Pirnie earned a certificate in electronics technology from Central Community College-Hastings in 1974 and was elected to the CCC Board of Governors for the Grand Island district in 1994. He has served as board chairman four times, most recently in 2024, and was successfully reelected for four more years. In 2025, he and his wife, Sue, received CCC Honorary Associate Degrees. As a trucking executive of GI Express and GIX Logistics, Pirnie's expertise helped establish Nebraska's only heavy equipment operator program and expand truck driving and diesel technology programs. He actively supports entrepreneurship development and economic development initiatives statewide. In 2023, Tom and Sue provided the lead gift for the Grand Island Inclusive Playground, the state's largest, which originated from a CCC occupational therapy assistant student project. They also pledged \$1 million toward student housing on the Grand Island Campus, demonstrating their transformative commitment to CCC students and communities across central Nebraska.

Congrats!

MID-PLAINS COMMUNITY COLLEGE



Nebraska Community College Association Faculty Member Award

Susi Bolt | Math Instructor

Susi Bolt doesn't just teach mathematics at Mid-Plains Community College—she transforms students' lives one equation at a time. Since joining MPCC in 1991, first in the Individualized Learning Center and later as faculty in 1994, Bolt has become legendary for her dedication both inside and outside the classroom. Her impact extends far beyond test scores. She's a fixture at athletic and student events, always finding creative ways to connect personally with her students. From running the Student Success Center to teaching full-time mathematics, she learned early that those personal touches make all the difference.



Nebraska Community College Association Administrators/Staff Award

Shawn Aten | Director of Physical Resources

The Aten name has deep roots at Mid-Plains Community College. Shawn Aten, director of physical resources, is grandson of former Mid-Plains Voc-Tech President Kenneth Aten and credits his grandfather for inspiring his career path. After earning a pre-engineering degree from MPCC and finishing at the University of Nebraska at Kearney, Aten worked in construction before returning to MPCC in 2018. He currently oversees campus facilities, manages construction projects, procures resources, and leads a skilled, diverse team. Aten has led numerous campus improvements, but the current electrical technology building stands out. Once completed, it will expand enrollment, strengthen high school partnerships, and create new career exploration opportunities.



Nebraska Community College Association Distinguished Alumni

Rascal Martinez

Rascal Martinez is a musician with a national following who got his start at Mid-Plains Community College. Drawn to MPCC by its strong reputation, affordability, and proximity to home, Martinez balanced his studies in business with his passion for music, DJing proms, and hosting karaoke nights at Applebee's. He credits his MPCC instructors in business, economics, theater, and music for providing the tools he needed to grow and build the foundation for his career. Now performing simply as Rascal, Martinez tours nationally and has a new album on the way. Despite his busy schedule of recording and performing, he remains deeply grateful for the education and experiences that launched his music career at Mid-Plains Community College.

Congrats!

NORTHEAST COMMUNITY COLLEGE



Nebraska Community College Association Faculty Member Award

Bonnie Johnson-Bartee | English Instructor & Visiting Writers Series Coordinator

Bonnie Johnson-Bartee teaches creative writing and literature at Northeast Community College. She began teaching in 2000, becoming a full-time English instructor in 2008. Johnson-Bartee currently coordinates the Visiting Writers Series and edits the annual *Voices Out of Nowhere* literary magazine. An accomplished author, she has published two poetry chapbooks and her full-length collection, *Cord Blood* (Sandhills Press, 2022), won the Nebraska Book Awards Poetry Honor Award. Her work appears in various publications including *Nebraska Life* and *Words Like Rain*. In 2022, Johnson-Bartee revived and co-hosted the Nebraska Poetry Festival, the first such event in the state in over 30 years. She also teaches at Wayne State College.



Nebraska Community College Association Administrators/Staff Award

Faye Kilday | Dean of the Center for Excellence in Teaching and Learning

Faye Kilday serves as Dean of the Center for Excellence in Teaching and Learning at Northeast Community College, where she leads instructional quality initiatives, faculty development, and student success programs. She began her tenure at Northeast in 2010 as an adjunct Criminal Justice instructor and previously served as Dean of Humanities, Arts & Social Sciences. Kilday oversees instructional technology, professional development, course design standards, and Early College, expanding dual credit access throughout the region. Her commitment to student success drives everything she does including providing leadership during the absence of the Chief Academic Officer. Kilday earned her bachelor's degree in Mass Communications with a Criminal Justice minor from the University of Nebraska at Kearney and a master's in security management from Bellevue University.



Nebraska Community College Association Distinguished Alumni

Dr. Kari Jo Wade

Kari Wade, Ed.D., MSN, RN, CNE, laid the foundation for her professional success at Northeast Community College, graduating in 2000 with an associate degree in Nursing. She currently serves as Full Professor at Nebraska Methodist College, coordinating the Doctor of Education – Education and Leadership in Healthcare track and teaching in both the Ed.D. and Doctor of Nursing Practice programs. She co-founded Nebraska Methodist's Ed.D. program alongside her former Northeast faculty member, Dr. Alice Kindschuh. As a Northeast student, she served as a state officer for the Student Nurses Association and received the Officer of the Year Award in 2000. Wade serves as Immediate Past President of the Nebraska Nurses Association and Chair of its Political Action Committee. Recent honors include the Ruth Berggren Elliott Mater Teaching Award (2018), Nebraska Nurse of the Year – Academics (2019), and the Nebraska Nurses Association Distinguished Service Award (2021).



Nebraska Community College Association Governors Award Nominee

Jeff Scherer | Chair, NECC Board of Governors

Jeff Scherer serves as chair of the Northeast Community College Board of Governors, a position he has held since 2024. He joined the board in 2016 and previously served on the Northeast Foundation Board. A CPA with extensive business leadership experience, Scherer served as Chief Financial Officer and Vice President of Finance for Smeal Fire Apparatus from 1992 to 2016, helping manage the company's growth from one plant with 45 employees to four plants in three states with 325 employees and over \$60 million in assets. His commitment to workforce development and economic growth includes service as Nebraska Chamber of Commerce and Industry chairperson (2011) and past chairman of the Northeast Nebraska Economic Development District. Scherer's honors include Co-Volunteer of the Year for the Greater Omaha Chamber (2011), Nebraska Department of Economic Development's Diplomat of the Year (2013), and Outstanding CPA in Business and Industry Award (2014).

Congrats!

SOUTHEAST COMMUNITY COLLEGE



Nebraska Community College Association Faculty Member Award

Trevor Nebesniak | Program Chair, Powersports Technology

Trevor Nebesniak serves as program chair for Powersports Technology at Southeast Community College, bringing a unique perspective as a 1992 SCC graduate who returned to his alma mater in 2012 after a 20-year industry career as a technician and service manager. Known as the “most accommodating instructor” on campus, Nebesniak creates a classroom where every student feels respected and supported. He regularly stays late to help with projects and provides one-on-one instruction, and students from all programs seek him out for assistance. Under his SkillsUSA guidance, students have won state gold three consecutive years and two national gold medals. Nebesniak has also cultivated strong industry partnerships with Kawasaki, Yamaha, Polaris, and Frontier Harley Davidson, securing equipment donations and creating direct employment pathways for students. A member of the Killigans, their version of “The Cornhusker” can be heard at Husker football and volleyball games.



Nebraska Community College Association Administrators/Staff Award

Dr. Bev Cummins | Vice President of Campus Operations and Development

Dr. Bev Cummins serves as Vice President of Campus Operations and Development at Southeast Community College, leading facilities, safety and security, campus operations, and capital planning. Her work focuses on creating safe, modern, student-centered environments across SCC’s campuses. Cummins’ leadership at SCC spans over a decade in senior roles, including Lincoln Campus Director and vice president positions in Student Affairs and Program Development. She guided the campus response to COVID-19 and facilitated new programs including Data Science, Dental Hygiene, and Utility Lineworker. Under her leadership, major projects include the Welding Technology Center, Sandhills Global Technology Center, Lincoln’s first residence hall Woodhaven, and Health Sciences. An SCC alumna, Cummins began in the Radiography program and earned degrees from Bellevue University and the University of Nebraska–Lincoln, including an Ed.D. in 2023.



Nebraska Community College Association Distinguished Alumni

Robert Ernesti

Robert Ernesti graduated from Southeast Community College’s Milford Campus in 1984 with a manufacturing engineering degree. In 1997, he and Doug Swanson co-founded Metalworks Inc., a small steel manufacturing company that has grown into a thriving business with over 150 employees and more than \$35 million in annual sales. Beyond building a successful company, Ernesti built a workplace culture prioritizing respect and employee voice, proving that caring for people drives both morale and profitability. Ernesti credits his SCC education with giving him the confidence and skills to design and manufacture products, and he directs others to SCC whenever possible. He stepped away as president in 2023 to mentor the next generation of leaders, leaving a legacy that demonstrates building a culture of respect is stronger than any metal.



Nebraska Community College Association Governors Award Nominee

Arlyn Uhrmacher | Chair, SCC Board of Governors

Arlyn Uhrmacher serves as chair of the Southeast Community College Board of Governors, a position he has held since 2024. He previously served as vice chair (2023-2024) and secretary (2022-2023). Under his leadership, SCC initiated board self-evaluations and strategic retreats—innovative governance practices now adopted by other regional community colleges. A retired educator, Uhrmacher served in leadership roles with the Lincoln Education Association, Nebraska State Education Association and Greater Lincoln Workforce Development Board. He currently serves on The Career Academy Board and the 6 regions, One Nebraska Infrastructure Committee. As chair of the Nebraska Corvette Association scholarship committee, Uhrmacher has raised over \$69,000 in scholarships for 78+ students in SCC’s GM-ASEP program. He and his wife, Kathie, created the Pearl Myers Bence Memorial endowed scholarship through the SCC Educational Foundation. Uhrmacher has attended four ACCT conferences, served twice as Western Region Caucus delegate and ACCT Senate delegate, and participated in ACCT’s Winter Legislative Summit in Washington, D.C.

Congrats!

WESTERN NEBRASKA COMMUNITY COLLEGE



Nebraska Community College Association Faculty Member Award

Marcene Elwell | Program Director, Surgical Technology

Marcene Elwell serves as Surgical Technology instructor and program director at Western Nebraska Community College, where she has dedicated eight years to ensuring student success through hands-on mentorship and clinical support. She travels extensively to support students during clinicals, visiting locations including Fort Collins, Lincoln, North Platte, Casper, and Douglas. In the past five months alone, Elwell organized and participated in over 15 recruitment events, driving enrollment growth and program visibility. Beyond program-specific duties, she consistently supports broader WNCC student activities, bringing positive energy and enthusiasm to the campus community. Many of Elwell's former students are achieving remarkable success professionally, a testament to her exceptional teaching and leadership.



Nebraska Community College Association Administrators/Staff Award

Pauline Newman | Accounting Services Director

Pauline Newman demonstrates exceptional leadership and dedication as Accounting Services Director at Western Nebraska Community College. Newman seamlessly transitioned into the director role by showing remarkable adaptability and commitment. She consistently maintains high operational standards while motivating and supporting her team by going above and beyond to ensure deadlines are met and systems stay on track. In addition, her attention to detail has been especially valuable in her work with the WNCC Foundation where she successfully managed staff changes and a multi-year switch to a new accounting system. These efforts are culminating in a final audit and reconciliation that promises increased transparency and accountability. Beyond her technical excellence, Newman treats staff and colleagues with respect and compassion, fostering a culture of positivity, open communication and collaboration. Her leadership creates a supportive work environment where people feel valued and empowered.



Nebraska Community College Association Distinguished Alumni

Jodi Ruzicka

Jodi Ruzicka is a lifelong Scottsbluff-Gering resident whose career reflects dedication, perseverance and heart for helping others. A Gering High School graduate, Ruzicka's career began in banking, advancing from secretary to Assistant Vice President in Lending. While working full-time and raising two children, she earned her Associate of Arts degree from Western Nebraska Community College and later completed a Bachelor of Science in Business with an Accounting minor from Chadron State College. In 1998, Ruzicka became a Financial Advisor and now serves clients through Platte Valley Investment Center as a Registered Investment Advisor Representative with Raymond James Financial Services. A dedicated community leader, she serves as Chair of Oregon Trail Days Planning Committee, President of the Legacy of the Plains Museum Board, and WNCC Foundation Board Member.

Friend of Community College

As a Friend of Community Colleges, these organizations have demonstrated through their actions, over a period of time, a commitment to the community colleges, and have significantly advanced the cause of community college education. These organizations have demonstrated support for the entire Nebraska community college system and hold a strong belief in the community college role and mission.

Aksarben Foundation

Suzanne & Walter Scott Foundation

Peter Kiewit Foundation

William and Ruth Scott Family Foundation

Planning Ahead

ANNUAL CONFERENCE, MONDAY NOVEMBER 3 | SCC LINCOLN CAMPUS



8800 O ST, LINCOLN NE

Park in an available stall in any parking lot.

Main entrance is from the south.

SCHEDULE

REGISTRATION | 7:30 – 8 a.m.

WELCOME, BUSINESS MEETING, & KEYNOTE ADDRESS | 8 – 9 a.m.

GENERAL SESSION I: WORKFORCE PELL | 9:15 – 10 a.m.

GENERAL SESSION II: INDUSTRY PARTNERS PANEL | 10:15 – 11 a.m.

NCCA COUNCIL & COMMITTEE BREAKOUTS | 11:15 a.m. – 12:30 p.m.