

By Russ Pankonin, The Imperial Republican Co-Publisher

Who would ever have thought that a person can get a college degree without hardly having to leave Imperial? That's a reality today through the extended campus of Mid-Plains Community College located right here in Imperial.

Last week, officials with Mid-Plains came to Imperial to celebrate the opening of a new facility housing the extended campus here. The former pharmacy building at 1324 Broadway has been transformed into a state-of-the-art learning facility.

Classrooms with the latest in distance learning technology will allow a student to complete a bachelor's degree without ever having to leave home.

And now, Mid-Plains can offer bachelor's degrees from either Chadron State College or Bellevue University.

My daughter, Brooke Lutz, proved to be an example of how someone living here can get a degree from Chadron State with almost never setting foot on the campus.

This school year also marks the first full implementation of the Career Academy, a joint effort between Mid-Plains and Chase County Schools.

To get the most benefit from the program, it should be started in a student's junior year.

During the last two years of high school, a student can take upper level courses that are dual-credit classes. This means a student can take one class with it counting both towards high school graduation and an associate's degree through Mid-Plains.

After graduation, the student finishes a fifth year of school at Mid-Plains' extended campus here to complete their associate's degree.

The student can then step right into the new bachelor's degree program offered by Bellevue University. If they worked extra hard to accumulate more hours from MPCC, they could be finished with their bachelor's degree in 12-14 months.

Having the extended campus available in Imperial benefits this region greatly.

By attending Mid-Plains, a student will be better able to afford college, as community colleges offer tuition rates far lower than their four-year counterparts.

In addition, travel can be reduced, which is a big factor for students who want to start college while maintaining a regular job.

Plus, having the campus here means that people don't have to leave the area to pursue higher education. That in itself could help stem some of the loss of kids who go away to school and never come back.

The campus truly aids the economic development activities of Imperial and region by creating a higher level of education available here.

In fact, the citizen's advisory council for the economic development funds generated by the city sales tax thought this project was a good investment for economic development here. That's why they recommended and the city council approved putting \$25,000 towards the renovation effort.

If anyone has a desire to pursue a college degree but thinks it's not possible, they need to investigate the opportunity offered by Mid-Plains and its four-year partners. Making that degree possible is what Mid-Plains' mission is all about.