

Retiring WCTC president reflects on tenure

‘Keep the student at the center of all your actions,’ says Betzig

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PEWAUKEE — After 31 years in executive and leadership roles within the technical college system, Waukesha County Technical College President Kaylen Betzig is retiring.

Betzig has been at WCTC for 12 years and was at Blackhawk Technical College in Janesville for 19 before that. She joined WCTC as vice president of administrative services in 2008, was named executive vice president in 2010 and became president in 2015. Before joining WCTC, Betzig was vice president of administrative and student support services at Blackhawk, overseeing student services, information technology, marketing and recruitment, facilities, grants and research.

Betzig knew she loved education early in her life. “When I was in grade school (and) high school I wanted to be a superintendent,” she said, adding that her father was on the school board at her K-12 school.

She said regarding technical education in particular, she’s passionate about the hands-on education students receive.

“We want them to be successful and we want them to be able to continue their educational journey, wherever it takes them,” she said. “(WCTC) puts its



Betzig

arms around students and ensure they’re successful.”

Looking ahead, Betzig said WCTC and other educational institutions will have to work through the post-pandemic world and the changes it may bring to students’ expectations in education. “In two weeks, we had faculty turn their homes into their classrooms,” she said, adding that some got particularly creative like virtually using their own garages for automotive class. “I had one instructor that painted his entire (place) with writeable paint so he could move around in his house and write on the wall.”

During her time at WCTC, she’s particularly proud to have seen the college maintain low levels of debt and avoid raising the mill rate for years, emphasizing its commitment to being a steward of the taxpayer.

‘Nothing is done individually’

Betzig said WCTC’s achievements are collective efforts. “Nothing is done individually,” she said. “This is not about what I’ve accomplished, this is about what the college and several people have accomplished... This

wasn’t Kaylen that did it, this was a team of very committed people that put things in motion.”

Betzig’s successor will be Dr. Richard Barnhouse, who will become WCTC president Jan. 5. Barnhouse is currently the vice president of student services and enrollment management at State College of Florida, Manatee-Sarasota, and brings with him nearly 20 years of higher education experience.

For other leaders in education, Betzig advises staying well informed. “I would say, you have to be deliberate in your actions,” she said. “I’m very much one that considers both sides of the equation in the sense of (getting) data from multiple sources before you make a decision.”

Betzig said she was proud of WCTC’s many articulation agreements with local high schools, allowing students to take classes with credits transferable to WCTC. “If you keep the student at the center of all your actions of what you do, you’re never going to go wrong,” she said.

Betzig hasn’t finalized plans for what comes next for her, but she may do some consulting work in the future and will also be spending time with family.

She voiced optimism about the college’s future.

“WCTC is bigger than any one individual,” she said. “It keeps going.”