

# Labette Community College / PARSONS, KANSAS



## Labette Community College: *Pathways to the Future*

Parsons, Kansas. Population: 10,000. Median household income: \$42,000 ... *Pathways*.

Labette Community College's (LCC) campaigns for scholarships, programs and facilities would be extraordinary under any circumstances—even if they hadn't taken place in a small, Midwest town where 71% of the College's students are the first in their families to go to college. But to add to this, both campaigns took place during astonishingly difficult economic times ... in 2008 and 2020.

LCC began as Parsons Junior College in 1923. Today, it is a two-year institution offering transfer degrees, professional/technical degrees and certificates, continuing education, customized training for business



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and industry, lifelong learning opportunities and a variety of other programs and services for Southeast Kansas and the surrounding four-state region.

## The Sonny and Sophia Zetmeir Health Science Building

A campaign was initiated in 2007 to build a new \$6-million, 28,000-square-foot health sciences building. The College's nursing program was already stellar, but the facility being used had not been designed for the rapid changes taking place in health science.

Then, in 2008, a subprime mortgage crisis pushed the economy into a tailspin. LCC had a choice to make: pause indefinitely or press forward. The need was still there, so the campaign progressed. Eventually, momentum picked up as supporters shared their commitment with others: "I don't live in Parsons, but the more I worked on the campaign and learned about the services offered at LCC, the more I realized how valuable it is to Labette County. Since 1923, this institution has gone through a depression, recessions, World Wars, thriving economies and everything in between. In spite of it all, LCC has continued to offer an

ever-increasing number of students the opportunity to further their educations." Louise Frame Holmes, *Pathways* steering committee member.

Several gifts arrived early to buoy confidence including gifts from Commercial Bank, Great Southern Bank and John and Barbara Sutherland.

The College also received a \$1-million Kresge Foundation challenge grant; LCC was only the second community college in the United States to receive a grant from Kresge. Once realized, the gift brought the campaign's total to \$5.2 million with less than \$1 million outstanding.

Prior to groundbreaking on August 30, 2012, Lindi Forbes, executive director, LCC Foundation & Alumni Association, shared that, due to the economic downturn, what had been anticipated to take two years took four, yet: "This project and program will attract students from the region and other states. I'm confident, as we continue to tell our story, others will jump in and donate the funds needed to complete the building." And, wow, was she right! When the LCC Board of Trustees decided to move forward on the Sonny and Sophia Zetmeir

**“This project and program will attract students from throughout the region and other states. I’m confident, when construction begins, others will jump in and donate the funds needed to complete the building.”**

Lindi Forbes, executive director, LCC Foundation & Alumni Association

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Health Science Building, funding not only came in for its completion, but the campaign exceeded its goal. A total of \$10.5 million was raised not only for the building, but for programs, deferred maintenance projects and endowed scholarships.

In addition to the nursing program, the state-of-the-art facility houses programs in respiratory therapy, radiography and sonography; and all of the programs benefited greatly from the addition of new equipment and technology.

At the time, the Sonny and Sophia Zetmeir Health Science Building was the largest construction project LCC had undertaken. Ultimately, it was neither the last nor the largest.

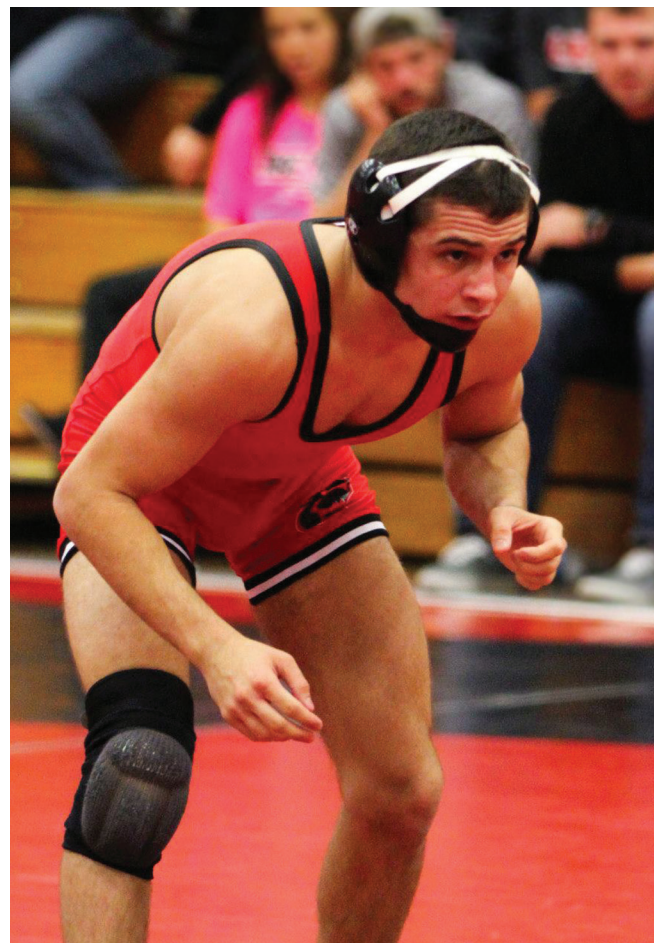
## **The Zetmeir Family Athletics Complex and Mabee Wellness & Education Center**

The successful campaign for a new health science building energized the College and community. "One of the great things about a campaign, besides the money raised for facilities and scholarships, is the way it draws people together with a common cause," said Gary Wall. He and his wife, Shirley, were committed campaign donors and volunteers.

The College's next target was to fund and construct an athletics complex and wellness center. A \$6.8-million campaign was initiated in 2017 with three objectives: to renovate the College's gymnasium and add a major expansion; increase endowed scholarships

by \$1 million; and grow the annual fund. The new center would nearly double the size of the existing facility, bringing it to more than 41,000-square feet.

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A lead gift of \$1 million for the project came from Sophia Zetmeir: “My late husband, Sonny, and I loved living in Parsons for 53 years. Sonny and I always believed in the philosophy that those who can give, should give. I believe in this project, so I gave.”

Said Dr. Mark Watkins, President of LCC, “We wanted this building to be a visual commitment to health and wellness. It’s about athletics and academics; however, it’s also about our community’s health and wellness.”

To combat the community’s many health challenges, designs for the new facility included numerous outlets for fitness, exercise and healthy living activities to improve the well-being of LCC students and community members. Other campaign components included growing the College’s annual fund and increased endowed scholarships.

Many individual and family gifts helped the College move towards its goal. LCC also received a \$500,000 Mabee challenge grant and a \$150,000 grant from The Sunderland Foundation. A \$1-million contribution from the Labette Community College Board of Trustees brought the total to \$5.3 million—just shy of 80% of the total goal. Additional funding, including several corporate gifts—the Walmart Foundation, Pete’s of Erie, Inc., Commercial Bank, Crossland Construction and many others—pushed the campaign forward.

While all campaigns face unexpected challenges, 2020 was unprecedented. Yet, *Pathways* pressed on successfully.

Said Hartsook Executive Vice President Bud Cooper, “Labette Community College most certainly embodies the statement, ‘successful campaigns are the results of great volunteers, terrific leadership, and superior staff.’ After completing one successful campaign, LCC was well in the position of completing a second. Even with the final year of the campaign experiencing a pandemic, Lindi never took her foot off the pedal not only to achieve, but exceed the goal. With the assistance of strong lay leadership, co-chairs Gary Wall and Jody Thompson, along with President Dr. Mark Watkins, they were able to raise more than \$6 million in capital for the new athletic complex and nearly \$1 million pledged towards endowment.”



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Hartsook / P.O. Box 410046 / Kansas City, MO 64141  
866.630.8500 / hartsook.com / info@hartsook.com