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# Ad Astra

*with Michael Shonrock*



## *Expectations*

Last spring I spent a day driving around Kansas with our Dean of the Teachers College, Ken Weaver. We were visiting ESU alumni. These were teachers who'd won our 150th anniversary classroom decorating contest. And this was no leisurely jaunt around the state. We covered 450 miles in one day, making a loop from Emporia to Winfield to Garden Plain on to Tecumseh, and back to Emporia.

When the idea of a classroom decorating contest was first proposed, I thought, great, it's wonderful, we are a teachers college and we have nearly 10,000 alumni teaching in Kansas. What a great way to bring our 150th year celebration to classrooms throughout the state.

I wasn't prepared for the outpouring of classroom entries. They arrived from all grades Kindergarten through senior high and from all four corners of our State. We had Grinnell, Shawnee Mission, Garden Plain, Damar, and lots of cities in between. The enthusiasm far exceeded our expectations for the contest.

Next came the hard part – judging. A thoughtful rubric was created – a matrix to assist judges in selecting the winners. But the creativity, research, and remarkable level of craft left our measuring stick in the dust and our judges with some difficult decisions. We had life-like dioramas of our campus center piece - Wooster Lake, we had complex word walls made up of quotes from ESU graduates, and we even had an elaborate 150th logo completely made of cupcakes. At the end of the day, our teachers far exceeded the judges' expectations.

While Ken and I were gathering coffee and programming the GPS in Emporia, Lindsay Jacob's fourth graders at Irving Elementary in Winfield, were preparing

for a celebration. Just days earlier, Lindsay told her class, "We won, and the President is coming!"

When we arrived at Irving Elementary, the sun was finally up and it looked like a regular day was unfolding at this Kansas elementary school. Then we opened the door and went in – where a gymnasium full of elementary students greeted us with the "Stinger's Up" sign and loud ESU cheers. Even the Winfield Superintendent of Schools was in on the celebration. Here was an entire community of learners coming together to celebrate the accomplishments of one classroom. Wow, did they ever exceed my expectations.

Similar scenes played out at all the schools we visited that day. We were "wowed" by each teacher, by each principal, and by all the students we met. With the sun dipping below the horizon, we drove home, knowing this day held a valuable reminder. I had expected to meet some wonderful students, hand out t-shirts, take photos, and thank them for entering the contest. And while we did all of those things, we were also humbled by how high the bar is set in schools throughout our state.

As we pulled off the turnpike in Emporia, nighttime was fully upon us, but despite a full day and 450 miles, Ken and I were more fired up than ever about education, about Kansas, and about ESU. The students and teachers we met exemplified our vision for Emporia State University – we don't just meet expectations, we exceed them.

***Michael Shonrock is the 16th president of Emporia State University, an undying optimist, and self-described futurist. He welcomes reader comments at [adastra@emporia.edu](mailto:adastra@emporia.edu)***

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