

Allan Thompson's memories— Keeping Lake Region State College afloat

“Merril Berg talked me into the mission to make this college fly,” Allan Thompson says, recalling his decade-long position as President of the Lake Region State College Foundation Office.

As the college's Foundation celebrates its fiftieth anniversary, people like Allan Thompson and former college President Merrill Berg, who made the impossible become possible, are remembered for believing in the college when the rest of North Dakota was interested in seeing its doors shut forever.

Thompson, a long time resident of the Lake Region and an active member of the community, was always determined to make the dream of having a state-funded post-secondary education institution in Devils Lake a reality. And during his time with the college, whether on the Board of Directors or involved with the Foundation, he helped persuade the State Board of Vocational Education to allow Lake Region to be a certified vocational school, along with Bismarck and Williston.

“There was a point in those ten years where I knew the name of every person on the legislature,” Thompson explains. “We were always down there trying to promote the college.” But it was a difficult task, since many other colleges in the state felt threatened by more institutions taking away potential students and revenue. At the time Wahpeton was the only vocational school in the state, and many wanted to keep it that way.

“The Board of Higher Education thought we would take students and money away, and that's why we sought out the State Board of Vocational Education instead,” Thompson says. “We explained that by offering vocational studies in our region we would help keep our stu-

dents in the state. That was a big issue at the time.”

Even with the long, ongoing struggle to keep the college afloat, it wasn't hard to find support in Devils Lake. “The community recognized what an asset it was, even though outside places wanted us out the door and closed down,” Thompson says. “Every bond issue was passed by a large majority.”

The college's goal of becoming a state-funded institution was greatly impacted by Thompson's

involvement, but he still gives a lot of credit to Berg.

“Berg was a visionary, the best visionary I ever knew,” Thompson says. “He pushed the hell out of us to make things happen.”

Thompson remembers one project Berg had where he wanted to bring an old building in Petersburg to Devils Lake to become a convention center. Berg had the Air Force already to move this large building in pieces, but it was eventually voted down by people in the community. Thompson says with a smile, “I was always a buyer of Merrill Berg's dreams.”

Allan Thompson served as the President of the Community College Corporation (now the Community College Foundation) from 1968-77. Now retired, he was the owner/manager of Devils Lake Glass & Paint. He and his wife, Evon, still live in Devils Lake, but spend the winter in Arizona. The family business is now operated by their son, Todd.

