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SIUE's Neher has assisted with campus growth



SIUE photo

Kenn Neher.

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Segue/Logan Cameron |

In this week's segment of Segue, SIUE Interim Chancellor Stephen Hansen, PhD, hosts SIUE Vice Chancellor for Administration Kenn Neher.

A segment jam-packed with humor and wit, the chancellor's discussion focuses on Neher's early life, the career path which led him to SIUE, what duties his job has entailed during his time at the University, campus success stories during his tenure, future planning for SIUE's campus, and Neher's personal hobbies and interests.

Hansen and Neher share a multitude of laughs, trading comedic remarks such as, "You didn't have to say that, because I wasn't going to fire you anyway!" from Hansen, and comments like, "Looking at my waistline, I'd probably be better off if I had pedaled a bicycle," from Neher.

Neher's career at SIUE began in August, 1994 following a 27-year career with the U.S. Air Force. Though this was Neher's first experience in higher education, it was not his first time performing responsibilities similar to those expected of vice chancellors of administration. Toward the end of his career with the Air Force, Neher served as base commander of the 50th Combat Support Group stationed in Germany.

“It was like being a mayor,” Neher said. “I was responsible for the facilities, the security, moral, welfare, recreation and services. This included everything from bars to childcare, golf courses to libraries, gymnasiums and more.”

This career experience matched quite well for Neher’s SIUE responsibilities, as he is now accountable for the campus environment, security, facilities, payroll, human resources, financial affairs, environmental emergency planning, administrative services, and parking and traffic services.

Neher further explains the transition process from military to academia, while also emphasizing what a great fit higher education and SIUE have been for his professional life.

“When I came to this campus, it was sort of run-down, worn out and pretty bone ugly,” Neher explained. “The parking lots looked like they had been bombed, and there were major holes in the parking lots that had never been fixed. Weeds were growing up in the grass and the streets and the sidewalks. The buildings were dirty and had not been maintained. I made up my mind that – somehow – I was going to leave the place better off than when I found it.”

Neher has certainly done just that. When he joined the SIUE staff, the first residence hall had just been built. Today, SIUE’s campus is home to four residence halls and has gained national recognition for its natural beauty, landscape and overall infrastructure.

“It’s truly important to provide that quality of life for our students and the people that work here,” Neher said. “It’s extremely important for gathering, recruiting and retaining students. If students get to visit here, they want to come here.”

As for future planning, Neher provides great insight into the exciting projects scheduled for SIUE’s campus. “We have a couple of master plans,” Neher said. “The basis is a land-use plan, which divides the campus into areas for academics, recreation, living, a 360-acre nature preserve, an archeological field school and more.

“Laid on top of that is the new facilities master plan. The plan includes things like space for additional housing (should we ever need it) and space for a third science building (should we ever need it). It’s not necessarily a priority that these things are going to happen at any time, but preserving the options for them.

“It also includes two separate expansions of the engineering building – one that is in process right now, putting a student project space onto the building. The plan also includes reactivating a building for dental medicine in University Park and constructing a health sciences building that would aggregate nursing and the health sciences on campus, so that they can create synergies.

“For the previous master plan, which spanned the previous 10 years, we put more than \$300 million worth of investments into the campus infrastructure – buildings, utilities, maintenance and construction. If you think about that – and we are still the least expensive four-year institution in the state – that’s almost a minor miracle.”

But Neher is not strictly business. His outside interests include singing, playing guitar, advocating for child safety and being an avid motorcycle tourist. He shares, “There’s an entire

world out there that isn't associated with an interstate, and it's just fascinating, the things you can see.”

Tune in to WSIE 88.7 FM every Sunday at 9 a.m. as weekly guests discuss issues on SIUE's campus.

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