

On the Road Again

by Chuck Brown

UNMC has a 500-mile wide campus and every year Chancellor Harold M. Maurer, M.D., and his leadership team visit its far corners.

Dr. Maurer began his annual leadership trips through Nebraska five years ago to spread the word about developments at UNMC, meet with alumni and local community members and hear about the health care issues that face rural communities.

This year's two-day trip saw nine members of the UNMC leadership team make information-sharing stops in Lexington, North Platte, Scottsbluff, Alliance, Chadron, Sidney and Ogallala.

"This is one of my favorite trips of the year," Dr. Maurer said. "There is no substitute for face-to-face interaction. We always learn a lot on these trips."

So did I – and I've worked almost two years at the medical center. But, as I sat in Lexington and listened to each medical center leader, I was struck by how much UNMC really does for the state.

As the state's only public academic health science center, UNMC has a \$1.5 billion annual impact on the state's economy and 70 percent of the health professionals practicing in Nebraska are UNMC graduates. The College of Dentistry has delivered more than \$1 million in free dental care to underserved children across the state since 2001.

The Munroe-Meyer Institute has pediatric behavioral health clinics scattered across the state and its services for children with autism, feeding disorders and developmental disabilities continues to grow.

About 800 courses at UNMC have at least some content available through online and distance education technology.

UNMC's student application pool is so strong Vice Chancellor for Academic Affairs Rubens Pamies, M.D., encouraged folks in western Nebraska to start early when urging their youngsters to consider health care careers. "Start when they're still in diapers," he said during one of the stops.

Western Nebraska has played an important role in supporting research at the UNMC Eppley Cancer Center, and rural areas often host major fundraisers, such as the Cattlemen's Ball, which raise money for cancer research.

The trip itinerary resembled a political whistlestop tour with medical center leaders rushing from town to town meeting with local residents and members of the media. Still, we did make time for a little fun when we stopped at a small ice cream hut in Bridgeport, Neb., to satisfy everyone's sweet tooth.

As we headed back to Omaha, UNMC leaders talked about what they heard and saw from Nebraska's western residents: how many people worry about a lack of health care workers, the impressive quality of some health care facilities and the strong community turnout in each town.

They also discussed the role UNMC would play in addressing the issues faced by the communities.

And, as the leadership team's whirlwind tour ended, I realized their work had just begun. ☺



From left: Keith Mueller, Ph.D., interim dean of the College of Public Health, Mike Leibowitz, Ph.D., interim director of the Munroe-Meyer Institute, and Bob Bartee, vice chancellor for external affairs, take a tour of Ogallala Community Hospital.



UNMC Chancellor Harold M. Maurer, M.D., addresses a group in North Platte, where a \$2.1 million gift was donated to UNMC from the estate of Hershey-area rancher John Carothers. The gift will support cancer and cardiology research at UNMC.



Members of the UNMC leadership team recharge their batteries over dinner at a Scottsbluff steak house following a busy first day.



Vice Chancellor for External Affairs Bob Bartee addresses a gathering at Sidney's Memorial Health Center during the second day. Issues such as recruitment and retention of health care workers in rural areas were common discussion topics during this year's tour.