As we celebrate the season of Thanksgiving, I am especially proud to have been asked by Arkansas State University Mid-South to guest-write this article in celebration of the 25th Anniversary of the college.

From the beginning of the dream to establish a college in this part of Arkansas, I was honored to play a role chairing the committee of interested citizens who recognized the void in access to higher education and workforce training in this part of the Delta.

We have enjoyed an incredible growth, facility improvements, and regional and national recognition that can be directly attributed to the taxpayers of Crittenden County. I can't imagine where this institution would be today were it not for the community's continued enthusiastic and generous support of our mission.

During this time of giving thanks, allow me to highlight my gratitude:

To former State Representative Lloyd McCuiston and the late State Senator W.K. "Bill" Ingram. It was at their request 40 years ago that we formed a delegation of local legislators and citizens to begin to lay the foundation for development of a vo-tech school in Crittenden County. In the spring of 1979, the Arkansas Legislature approved the establishment of Mid-South Vocational Technical School.

To the late W.L. "Bill" Barbour one of the outstanding civic leaders who championed the cause and became the first chairman of our Foundation Board. We discussed what we could do to improve the education situation in Crittenden County. I remember that Bill said he didn't know how far we might be able to take it, but he knew we could come up with something better than what we had.

*To all the men and women in this area who have served faithfully and tirelessly on the Mid-South Board of Trustees and Foundation Board*s. The success of our institution is primarily attributable to the vision, dedication and commonality of purpose demonstrated by community leaders, our Board of Trustees and our Foundation Board members. Solon Anthony and Mary Toney are two of the original Trustees with whom I've had the privilege to serve since the community college began 25 years ago. Mr. Anthony recently retired from the Board, but his quiet, gracious and effective work for the college will, no doubt, always continue.

To former Governor and U.S. President Bill Clinton. When the state legislature passed the two-year college conversion act in 1991, local leaders moved quickly. But when the list of Arkansas technical schools slated for conversion to colleges was released, Mid-South was not on the list. Our group met and didn't let disappointment overcome us. The Governor was going to be in attendance at a legislative reception in Little Rock that very evening. So I told the group, "I'm headed to see the Governor." I was able to corner him at the reception and told him Mid-South needed to be on the list. The Governor challenged me, asking how much millage I thought the county would support. I told him I thought we could support 2 mills (we eventually would raise 4 mill) and he said if you can do that you're on the list. I am thankful for a Governor who was accessible and believed in what our local citizens could do to transform this part of Eastern Arkansas.

No one knew exactly what to expect when the Board of Higher Education approved the school's application for community college conversion in October of 1992. We really didn't have any direction; we just started talking up the college and getting people to listen. Community and education leaders understood that only through conversion to a full-service community college could the institution maximize its potential.

To the local leaders who took their dreams to the voters in an effort to get a major millage issue passed. The hard work paid off on February 16, 1993, when Crittenden County overwhelming voiced its support of higher education. I am thankful for all who led that campaign, and there were many. And I'm especially thankful to the voters, who made a selfless commitment that day to provide quality educational opportunity for future generations of Crittenden County citizens

To the Donald W. Reynolds Foundation. With the funding issue settled, MSCC shifted into high gear. During the 1990s, Mid-South received recognition as the nation's 13th fastest growing community college in student enrollment. The Donald W. Reynolds Foundation liked what it saw in West Memphis and contributed $8 toward construction of a student services center. Now the hallmark of our campus, the Reynolds Center houses the Sandra Goldsby Library, the Dr. Barbara Baxter Learning Success Center, the Café Grill, enrollment

services, the Registrar's office, the campus bookstore, and other offices and classrooms.

To Dr. Glen Fenter who became the college's first and only president in 1992. This institution has come a long way, because Glen came to the college with a business plan. He planned to be in the business of changing lives through education. He led the college from its infancy, quickly becoming a competitive and innovative institution offering general education and workforce training at a level no one thought we could reach in just 25 years. Together with Executive Vice President Dr. Barbara Baxter, Mid-South Community College made a tremendous mark on this region – economically, socially, aesthetically, and even psychologically as the college has improved the quality of life here in this area.

To everyone associated with the college – the faculty, staff and administration who not only serve our students, but also serve this community. And if the next 25 years are anything like the last 25 years, we haven't even scratched the surface of what can be accomplished in this county and region.

To all who have donated to the college. From the Goldsby family to the Magruders to Leonard and Ruby Warden to Joe Jenkins to Southland Park Gaming & Racing, to all those who have given gifts of time, donations, goods or a voice. Whether or not a building bears your name, the efforts of your heart and generosity are throughout the corridors of this institution.

And lastly and most importantly, *to all the students who have walked the halls of this fine institution in the past 25 years.* You are who we had in mind as we met and worked and dreamed about changing the educational opportunities in this region. Watching and hearing of your successes throughout these two and half decades, well it just makes it all worthwhile. I feel kind of like a proud parent and am so thankful for each of you.

We're certainly thrilled about the educational strides that have been made over the past years, but we're even more excited about what the future holds.

In the model of Dr. Fenter, a model that Dr. Debra West continues to embrace today: We are in the business of changing lives. I can't think of a more rewarding situation for all of Crittenden County and I am thankful to have been a small part of its evolution.

-Alex Coulter