

Her name has been synonymous with excellence in health-care education for a generation in this region, but Betty Drees had some unfinished business after stepping out of her role as dean of the School of Medicine at the University of Missouri-Kansas City in 2014.

The latest phase of her contribution to educational administration came last March, when she was named dean of the Graduate School of the Stowers Institute. The academic arm of the Stowers Institute for Medical Research, which focuses intensely on cancer studies. The graduate school was organized in 2011 to offer research-based Ph.D. degrees in biology, officially launched a year later, and has now begun turning out advanced degree holders in demand for their rare skill sets.

She succeeded William Ne-



BETTY DREES
UMKC/GRADUATE SCHOOL
OF STOWERS INSTITUTE

aves, who had previously asked her to serve on the school's board. By the time he moved on, Drees said, "I knew all about the program. It's a wonderful program, and the opportunity to be more involved in a leadership position was very attractive: Our mission is to train

excellent scientists for the future."

The first graduates have moved on to post-doctoral experiences at research venues around the nation, but keeping them in Kansas City was never the point. "People who finish with a PhD still need additional post-doctoral experiences, and you would expect your graduates who come out go on to those—they can choose wherever they go, and they have gone into excellent positions."

It's a healthy sign for Kansas City, she says, "to have this kind of program, training scientists of this caliber. We have an outstanding faculty that's part of the broader contribution of the institute as a whole."

Drees, an endocrinologist by training, came to that role with more than 25 years in clinical practice, research, education, and administration, and for 13 years was dean of

UMKC's medical school, where she remains affiliated.

Her career course has been charted with a value set straight out of south-central Kansas. "My Dad owned a business and did farming, and it was an environment of high integrity, hard work, neighborliness, and people looking out for each other." A career in medicine was something she considered, put on hold exploring the humanities, then came back to because she came to see the two as interconnected.

Among her biggest career achievements were the addition of graduate programs at UMKC, something not just good for health-care consumers, but for Kansas City broadly. "The more we can offer in a region at the highest levels of education," she says, "the better for the whole region."

They didn't use the gold-plated language of today's business consultancies back in Flint, Mich., in the 1970s, but even when he was sacking groceries and working for a caterer, John Jasinski was being exposed to the fundamentals of continuous improvement and performance excellence.

And that became a framework for a career grounded in using systems-based models for organizational improvement, a perspective that has guided him through both entrepreneurship and public service. For the past 10 years, he's been president of Northwest Missouri State University, where academic and success metrics outpace even the Bearcat football team's championship-level performances. To wit:

"Our enrollment is up, we have record-shattering student retention rates, our general-



JOHN JASINSKI
NORTHWEST MISSOURI
STATE UNIVERSITY

education assessment is 14 percent above the state average, our graduation rate is in the 89th percentile of our national peer group, our student-satisfaction levels for both freshman and juniors outperform our regional and national peers, we have the

highest career-placement rate among Missouri public institutions," Jasinski rightly proclaims. All of that, he says, is "testimony to our focus on work-force development and a pathway for lifelong learning and employability."

In short, he says, "we bring it at Northwest." Indeed. As government at nearly all levels sees growth nearly unabated, public universities largely have shouldered a disproportionate share of the belt-tightening the public sector has seen. "We protect our infrastructure and have found innovative methods to renovate and provide new construction to the tune of \$80 million since 2009," Jasinski says. He is most proud of the intense fiscal stewardship at Northwest. "We are in the lower third of our peers on net price; Moody's Investors Service recently reaffirmed a strong credit rating

while providing the higher-education sector a negative outlook; we generated \$76.5 million in cost containment and efficiencies between 2012 and 2018; we cut our debt in half since 2009—doing so through a tumultuous and disruptive time frame and enhancing our infrastructure and protecting our costs," he says.

What he's done for Northwest, and for Maryville, reminds him that there is much to do in American cities like his hometown of Flint, in the news for very wrong reasons over the past decade. "Growing up in Flint was priceless and seminal in nature," he says. "But looking back, it was also like living out a social experiment that, today, seems to be a model that presents some significant challenges. I remain concerned that the Flints of the country and world are forgotten."



BOLD. INNOVATIVE. CONNECTED. ALWAYS A BEARCAT.

Congratulations, Dr. John Jasinski,
a 2019 Icon of Education.

