

News Release

Letter from Director of Outreach and Engagement Michelle Christopherson

By Shawn Smith on Monday, November 30, 2020

Greetings from the University of Minnesota Crookston!

Last week, some of our students departed campus, returning home for Thanksgiving. All students will wrap up their fall semester entirely online. Classes will resume in early January in a hybrid/hyflex modality, including campus classes as we did this fall. Basketball practice is just getting started and our hockey team will lace up their skates in preparation for an early January puck drop. These certainly are things we can all look forward to.

The UMN Crookston campus United Way campaign concluded in early November. We reached our goal and raised approximately \$6,050, funds that will support families throughout Polk County.



While COVID remains and presents a variety of challenges for many, everyone is experiencing fatigue of this global pandemic, and we continue to persevere in finding ways to be creative with our time, finances and relationships. Over the last few months I have interviewed more than 150 businesses in northwest Minnesota regarding business resiliency, part of the mission of our campus' Economic Development Administration (EDA) Center. Responses, while varying, are similar in many ways and there are some positive messages gleaned from my visits with local businesses and organizations. A common theme stated by many business owners and representatives? "It's the people." Business owners and managers tell me that their employees are their top priority, and that the health and well-being of their employees and their families remains a constant top priority.

Finding creative ways to keep businesses open and their staff employed remains a priority. The University, too, continues to explore ways to become more efficient and yet offering exceptional services to students. Our campus budget remains a priority, right up there with maintaining quality academics and student services. At the beginning of this fiscal year, we implemented a flexible budget framework designed to address anticipated financial shortfalls due to the COVID-19 pandemic. The COVID-19 adjusted budget relied on assumptions that represented our best forecast, given the uncertainty about the trajectory of the virus and its impact on the University.

UMN Crookston has always been nimble, as I reflect on my 20 years with the campus. From Don Sargeant to Chuck Casey and now Chancellor Mary Holz-Clause, we continue to be entrepreneurial in ways to champion our roots, expand our reach through online degrees and focus on exceptional student experiences. You will remember in the early 2000s we, the Crookston campus, became the Digital Campus Calling Center for the entire U of M System.

The University offered an early retirement incentive option (RIO). Twenty faculty and staff recently took advantage of this. While these faculty and staff have made tremendous contributions to our campus community, they, too, made an impact on thousands of students and hundreds of colleagues over their years. Their departures will impact the campus and our community and while the makeup and number of employees will be reduced their contributions over the years will be treasured. Thank you.

Things are fluid, changing daily and I think we all need to be reminded to think about ourselves every now and then; self-care is important for each of us to stay focused, persevere and forge ahead. So eat more cake, get outside, go for a walk, play a card game, checkers/chess or put a puzzle together. If you need a puzzle, Tricia Sanders can set you up, and don't forget to check in on one another; something as simple as a text or quick call can be a game-changer.

I look forward to 2021 and the creativity the University of Minnesota Crookston will champion as a strong community partner within Crookston and the surrounding communities and state.

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