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NKU dean heading south

Kelso accepts new job at Florida university

BY HOWARD MCEWEN | ENQUIRER CONTRIBUTOR

Kent Kelso, Northern Kentucky University's dean of students for the past seven years, will be leaving for the gulf coast of Florida. He has been named the new regional vice chancellor of students at the University of South Florida-St. Petersburg.

Kelso's recent completion of a doctorate in educational administration and leadership from Indiana State University helped spur him toward the new position.

"Having the doctorate and almost seven years as the assistant VP and dean of students, I felt that my ability to compete for these types of positions was possible," said Kelso.

In the new position, Kelso will be responsible for a laundry list of student activities and services ranging from food service to waterfront operations - sailing, scuba diving and snorkeling.

Kelso believes his time at NKU prepared him to face the challenges of the 3,422-student campus.

The Florida campus is beginning to build a new student center - something with which Kelso is familiar. His office spearheaded the new \$37 million student center at NKU.

"My proudest accomplishment is hiring and retaining what may be the finest student-affairs staff I have ever worked with," said Kelso. "These people work hard and enjoy making a difference in students' lives."

Kelso cited examples of how his office tried to improve students' lives at NKU, but he was quick to note that they were collaborative efforts.

"We managed a \$1 million renovation to the fitness center that has increased participation from 800 participants per week to 4,000 per week. Student involvement has been tremendous, with student organizations growing from less than 80 in 2000 to over 180 today. The number of Greek chapters has grown as has the participation in Greek life"

"Understand the word 'we' is throughout this," he said. "All of this was a team effort."

Kelso also has dealt with difficult issues, such as the ethics of designating free-speech areas, dealing with the controversy of a vandalized anti-abortion cross display and his banning of a student from university housing who was charged with rape.

In 2006, Kelso - who served as an Independence city councilman - ran for Kenton County Commissioner. He lost the Republican primary to Sara Voelker. He said he would not be leaving had he won the election.

"I would have definitely stayed and served the community - not raising taxes and not building a jail in Independence," said Kelso. "My career would have been placed on hold for a while as I served the people of Kenton County."

In January 2006, Kelso was reprimanded by Mark Shanley, vice president for student affairs, for using his university office in the campaign.

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