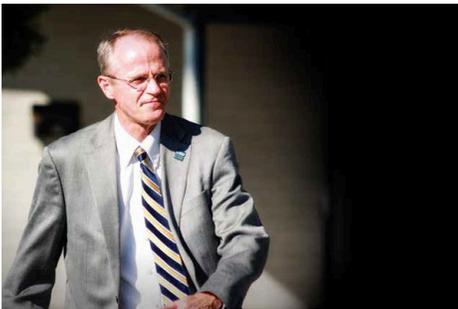


## 5 Years In

### USU Eastern Magazine

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## 5 Years In - CEU-USU Bond Remains Strong and True



Chancellor Joe Peterson

My how the time has flown since that little party in March of 2010 at the Utah State Capitol. That modest gala came complete with cake and Aggie Ice Cream in honor of the legislative vote declaring the official pairing of the College of Eastern Utah with Utah State University. The union was consummated four months later.

If you think of it as a marriage, it might be compared to a coal miner's daughter hitching up with a strapping farmer nearly 50 years her elder. Okay, that last part seems creepy, but neither were exactly spring chickens when they decided to tie the knot. She was 73 and he was 122! But who's counting? Age doesn't matter unless you are Aggie cheese, paraphrasing Luis Bunuel.

But to be completely honest about this union, it was more a prearranged marriage than it was a love-at-first-sight thing. Something along the line of: You two are going to do this; now make it work!"

So how's that going?

"I think we are in a state of compassionate love where life is easier because of the other," says Joe Peterson, USU Eastern chancellor. "We know what to expect; we collaborate well. We are able to rely on the other for meeting practical needs."

This glowing assessment appears to be shared by others in the community as well.

Jae Potter, Carbon County commissioner, says he gives the marriage high marks, overall. "There were struggles and naysayers, but I think it's been very, very good for us," he says.

The frustrations and doubts heard early on from constituents have subsided. People now are asking the commissioner about what is going on at the college more than wondering whether the college itself will go on. It is a credit to CEU and USU, Potter says, for turning what could have been an annulment waiting to happen to truly working things out.

"I have stopped hearing frustrations and doubts," he says. "I think the university has taken major steps in recruiting, as well as their community involvement and civic responsibility — all those things speak volumes."

The recruitment challenges are what has kept Greg Dart up at night over the years. He has had to stare down the double barrel of change since the day he was first hired by USU Eastern to head up the college's recruitment efforts shortly after the merger. Despite a new role as vice-chancellor over enrollment management and student life, he remains closely connected to the college's recruitment efforts. He also remains keenly aware of the college's ambitious goal to double the number of students under Peterson's Four-in-Four initiative.

While he expressed no doubt that the merger was the right way to go, he is not blissfully oblivious to how challenging it has been to recruit students since the merger. It spawned a school of questions about what, exactly, has emerged. Is it a new institution? Is it USU? Is it CEU? Or is it some kind of strange hybrid? The Utah Legislature defined it as a "comprehensive regional college." That sounds very official, but also a bit mysterious. What, exactly, is a comprehensive regional college?

Early on the pressures centered on the identity that the College of Eastern Utah painstakingly had developed over the years. "Everyone knew Utah State University as a beacon for all and they knew what a great place it was, but the question locally was: 'can we be part of Utah State University and maintain our identity that resonates so well in the community, with alumni and with employees?' and that, I think, has been positively answered," Dart says.

Peterson recalls that at the time of the merger, the college knew that its well-being relied upon enrollment and so, understandably, it was reluctant to give up control over it. Consequently, the college chose to continue to recruit students separately from the university — a concerted

effort by and for the college, but not necessarily for the university. "And because of that, we would go out on a thing called the high school tour and stand in front of all high school juniors and seniors around the state in a venue where every university and college had one recruiter, except USU, which had two," he says. "The problem is that students would look at that and see Weber has a recruiter, the University of Utah has a recruiter, Dixie has a recruiter, USU has a recruiter and then there's this other recruiter from USU Eastern. That must mean that USU Eastern is not USU!"

In hindsight, that was probably not the best approach to take since it created an unnecessary disconnect between the college and the university. "And we did that to ourselves for five years," he says. "And that is not good .... It's taken us until now to get to the point where we are comfortable with letting that go."

This mode shift from independent to co-dependent began to gel early in 2015 and marks, in Peterson's estimation, one of the most significant changes to date as a result of the merger. That says a lot when you consider the bevy of other changes that have occurred over the past half-decade across both Price and Blanding campuses, including a major revamping and upscaling of the college's library in Price, new four-year degree programs, a new \$21 million classroom building in Price and new administration and residential buildings in Blanding.

This fresh centralized approach channels all recruitment efforts through one office based in Logan with recruitment specialists promoting all campuses in the Utah State University system. The idea is that each campus has its own set of strengths and so matching student needs with the best campus offerings for a particular student is the goal, and not necessarily trying to get that student to go to Logan.

With a new approach of combining scholarships system-wide, along with USU Eastern's attractive distinctions such as its stunning scenery, small campus personalization, open enrollment and tuition nearly half the cost of Logan, the college is now in a position of being a truly attractive choice within USU's rich menu of campus options, Peterson predicts.

The USU Eastern option on this menu offers tuition waivers to prospective students who otherwise will pay the university's full tuition rate. This comparison will likely turn the heads of a significant portion of the university's new student recruits — perhaps as many as six or seven out of 10, Peterson observes.

He says when he first heard about the planned integrated recruitment from James Morales, USU vice president for Student Services, he thought Morales was perhaps being "self-destructively generous." He says he then had a serious conversation with Morales and asked: "'Are you sure you want to do this James?' And he said, 'Yeah,' and I said, 'then I accept this proposition on these terms.'"

In reality, it also proves to be good for USU because it means, despite being tapped out by record enrollment numbers in Logan, the university does not have to turn students away, including under-prepared students. They have this other option to still be admitted to USU, but in a more personalized, rudimentary settings uniquely available in Price and Blanding. And, since they are already USU students, many will eventually end up in Logan anyway for four-year and advanced degrees: a win-win.

"The level of intimidation in Price and Blanding is very low," Peterson says. "It's embracing and inviting and so students who, because of financial and other reasons, would not go to college can and do go to college because of USU Eastern."

Guy Denton, vice-chancellor over the Blanding Campus, says his campus is thriving as a result of the merger because it gives them the chance to be flexible in their offerings while being able to offer much more than they could before.

"I think the great thing about how USU Eastern is set up is that we can still be nimble in meeting community needs because of our integrated approach in workforce and offering credit and non-credit degrees," Denton says. "It allows us to build programs quickly in meeting needs and demands. I think it will continue to be a benefit." A benefit for both institutions, says USU's chief academic officer Provost Noelle Cockett.

"I think the merger is beyond great," she says. "Far more than what I would have thought. In some sense at the beginning it seemed a little bit more like reaching out and maybe a second chance for what was CEU, but as this merger has become more concrete, I realize it's beyond just helping CEU stay afloat ... there is actually great benefits moving in the other direction as well."

Most notably the opportunity for the university to expand core offerings in career, technical education and applied technology at Price, Blanding and USU campuses statewide.

Peterson said this opportunity was initially viewed as a significant challenge for the university because it went from having only a handful of technical offerings to suddenly inheriting 15-such programs at the time of the merger, programs that employed one-third of USU Eastern faculty.

“At first the university was like, ‘wow, what are these, what do we do with them?’” he says. “There were White Papers at the time of the merger that really show the university scratching its head.”

He says that despite having more questions than answers, some great wisdom was shown early on in the eventual decision to combine all the college’s career and technical education programs (CTE) into a single department under USU’s Applied Sciences, Technology and Education (ASTE). David Woolstenhulme, out-going president of Uintah Basin Applied Technology College, was hired by USU to help the university incorporate CTE. As well, Gary Straquadine, vice provost and ASTE associate department head, is now based fulltime on the Price campus specifically to help grow the programs statewide.

Peterson says the days of head scratching are over. It is clear now to most that these programs are going to become one of the principle frontiers of expansion for the university. Workforce projections indicate a demand for workers with some technical expertise, some post-secondary career training and technical skills, but not necessarily a baccalaureate.

“That’s where the demand for jobs are, and the university is looking at it is something that USU Eastern has 75-plus years of experience in. We’re contributing in the university’s forward development.”

And to be able to look forward, more than anything else, is one of the great gifts the merger brought to the college and the community. Mike King, interim president at the time of the merger, says he got awfully tired of hearing legislative threats about funding that might necessitate shutting down CEU.

“I don’t know if it would have gone that far, but it sure did ease our minds when the merger happened,” he says. “It gave us the assurance that we were going to be around. The assurance that we would still be here and functioning and serving Southeast Utah. To me, that’s one of the great things. We’re still here and still viable and still providing a valuable service for this part of the state.”

Services like helping to fuel the economy, not only by attracting new businesses in support of students, faculty and staff, but also in creating new businesses through research and innovation, such as at the Carbon Energy Innovation Center, in Price Canyon.

USU owns a patented, clean-coke-production process and is partnering with private and government entities at the center in developing ways to produce clean energy sources from waste coals. Success in this endeavor could help to reinvigorate energy development in the region, Potter says.

“This is a facility that can do the bench testing or larger testing,” he says. “It’s one thing to prove in a lab, it’s another thing to prove on a larger scale. The potential is that it could be applied to almost any coal or any energy type. It would utilize clean technology for additional uses of coal and petroleum extracts.”

In September, USU Eastern and Bowie Resource Partners, announced a \$300,000 donation from BRP to advance the university’s clean coke technology and commercialization efforts. This partnership, which allows the university to upgrade research equipment, signals a new level of commitment by commercial entities in energy development technology, not only to the university, but also to the region.

Potter says he fully expects to see a plant built in Price with a potential of employing 60 to 80 workers once this clean coke technology becomes commercially viable. Best of all, he says, this could very well happen within the next year or less.

“I often tell people ‘you know you have a lot to smile about being here and so put on your happy face because coal is not dead,’” he says. “And then you turn on a light like the university and see what they’re doing. There are a lot of reasons that it’s here at this time and in this place. It signals progression.”

During a lunch interview five years ago with Erroll Holt, Price Financial Center Manager and Zions Bank vice president, he spoke about the role the college has played in the community. He listed a Who’s Who among the college’s alumni: doctors, scientists, successful entrepreneurs. He wondered what the community would have been like without the college. He talked about how the college, for a brief time, was under the University of Utah in the 1960s, a suitable suitor, he infers. As he talked, it almost felt like an interview session a father gives the soon-to-be groom of his beloved daughter. Yes, it was that intense.

You knew, after a brief hour with him, just how much the college meant to him and to the community. It's THEIR college and anybody thinking of hitching up with it had better be worthy. It is a local institution that deserves respect, autonomy, nurturing and, above all else, faithfulness. Don't even think of abandonment!

And so it is with some relief that Holt's assessment of this arrangement, five years in, begins with: "The institutions are both better off because of the merger."

He points to how the university's wide profile and model is enhanced by bringing in the "Eastern side of Utah" with its industry and cultural diversity, while CEU's merger with USU allowed its students to take full advantage of the university's array of academic offerings while still enjoying a small campus.

"There was a time in the beginning where there was some resistance, from a local perspective, due to a long independent tenure as CEU and the feel of local control," he observes in an e-mail response to several follow-up questions about the merger. And then to the one who has very much been the face of the new USU Eastern, he heaped praise.

"I feel personally that USU has engaged exceptional leadership in Joe Peterson who has been able to move the transition forward making sometimes difficult decisions while at the same time implementing programs, procedures and changes necessary for success," he writes. "The campus infrastructure improvements are visual and obvious, the more subtle and challenging improvements of employee restructuring, programs adjustment and vision implementation are bright spots that will affect the success of the university for years to come and will ultimately prove to be the foundation of a successful transition and merger."

Did you note the future tense wording? Yup, no coasting in this union.

~ John DeVilbiss