MOREHEAD TAKING OVER NEW CENTER - SHIFT FROM UK PUTS DISPUTE TO REST

WEST LIBERTY -- Morehead State University got more than just a president when it hired Wayne Andrews in 2004.

The move also appears to have cleared the way for the university to take over a state-of-the-art technology center in West Liberty, putting to rest a long dispute with an influential legislator.

On July 1, the University of Kentucky will turn over the Morgan County Regional Technology Center, which it has operated since it opened in 2003, to Morehead State.

"I think it's a kind of positive move," said John Will Stacy, D-West Liberty, a central figure in both the creation and transfer of the center. "It makes a lot of sense and the people at UK and Morehead are still going to cooperate with each other."

Stacy was an administrator at Morehead, his alma mater, until 2001, when then-President Ron Eaglin declined to renew his contract.

As co-chairman of the influential Joint Budget Review Subcommittee on Education, Stacy helped obtain funding for both a new $5 million classroom building at Morehead's West Liberty campus in 2002 and the $6.6 million tech center, which opened a year later.

But even though it was just across a parking lot from the Morehead State building, UK was asked to run the center.

"We weren't asked to be involved," said Eaglin, who retired Jan. 1, 2005, and now lives in Pawleys Island, S.C.

The three-story tech center blots out a view of the two-story Morehead classroom building from U.S. 460. Some at Morehead State suggest that was not an accident.

When questions were raised about why UK was asked to oversee operations of a building 100 miles from Lexington, Morehead State officials referred them to Stacy.
Officials at both UK and Morehead declined to comment on whether Stacy pressured UK officials to assume control of the tech center and prevent Morehead from becoming involved in its operation.

In 2002, Stacy was criticized for using his clout as chairman of the education budget subcommittee to try to tell the university how to spend some of its money and to prohibit Morehead from offering freshman and sophomore courses in West Liberty. Republicans removed the provisions from the state budget after they had passed the House.

"Our relationship was strained," Eaglin said of Stacy. "We had the same objectives, I think, but sometimes John Will only saw objectives one way."

Without mentioning Eaglin by name, Stacy said, "Well, you know, I think the real deal is the difference between these two guys (Eaglin and Andrews)."

Andrews is "a kind of a go-getter," Stacy said. "Before, Morehead State was not as interested in expanding out into the region, like (Andrews) is. I think this guy really wants to do the right thing for the region."

Eaglin credited Stacy with having a good idea, and said he was pleased to hear Stacy had given Andrews "a pat on the back." He suggested Stacy probably contacted UK instead of Morehead for funding reasons.

"I told our people to be as supportive as we can because eventually it'll wind up being in our hands," Eaglin said.

History of the center

Gene Williams, UK's vice president for technology, said the idea for the center began almost a decade ago, when former UK President Charles Wethington called him "out of the blue" and said he, Stacy and former Morgan Judge-Executive Sid Stewart were discussing the nation's infatuation with technology. They had obtained funding from former Gov. Paul Patton, he said, and UK agreed to help with the construction and design of the center.

After Republicans rejected funding to operate the center, UK spent about $1.5 million of its own money over four years, Williams said. The university hired three or four people to run the center.

"It was never really planned as a long-term relationship and we all pretty much agreed to that," Williams said. "It was never Dr. Wethington's intent to have UK manage that facility."

UK and Morehead officials, along with Morgan Judge-Executive Tim Conley, agree that the technology center has not yet generated the kind of results envisioned for a facility offering high-speed Internet training, business incubation services and office space for new enterprises.

"We've had some successes, but we certainly didn't hit any home runs in attracting new business," said W.
Porter Dailey, who will remain the center's director.

"I think it’s a tremendous opportunity," said John Maxey, technology coordinator for Morgan County schools. "I'm not sure why (high school graduates) are not taking more advantage of it than they are. Everything's state of the art out there."

Stacy said the center was a "futuristic idea" and urged patience. "It takes a while for new ideas to catch on."

**Morehead State's vision**

Details are pending, but Andrews said Morehead has a three-pronged plan for the facility: expand educational offerings, strengthen an "innovation center" in the building to promote small-business development in the area, and use its technology for professional-development classes for businesses and schools served by Morehead.

"We're going to start in education because we have lots of teachers in the region," Andrews said. "We envision broadening that to some of the other professions."

Andrews, a former East Tennessee State administrator who became Morehead's 13th president in 2005, said he was approached about a year ago by Conley and Stacy about taking over the Morgan County center.

UK has been "very gracious" during the transition, he said, while Morgan County magistrates have been enthusiastic about Morehead State's involvement.

"I hope we see more community involvement this time," said Conley, the county judge-executive.

"It's going to be a win for everybody," Andrews said.

News researcher Linda Niemi contributed to this report. Reach Lee Mueller in the Paintsville bureau at (606) 789-4800.

**Caption:**

(1) by PHOTOS BY CHARLES BERTRAM, STAFF - UK's Regional Technology Center in Morgan County has been handed over to **Morehead State University**. (2) - Morehead State's $5 million West Liberty classroom building opened in 2002. The West Liberty Campus recently gained a tech center.