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MONDAY'S MAN

Powell uses farm, education lessons in life

By BECCA OWSLEY THE NEWS-ENTERPRISE

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Darrin Powell stands in front of Elizabethtown Community and Technical College where he serves as interim chief academic officer.

Submitted photos

Getting to know Darrin Powell

Hobbies: Farming, riding his motorcycle, turning wood pens and camping.

Favorite food: Mexican and Asian food.

Pet: Cows and a dog named, Abby.

Favorite TV shows: "NCIS" and cop dramas.

Favorite activities: He likes to attend tractor pulls and traveling.

Darrin Powell has brought education and farming together to shape his career.

He's currently the interim chief academic officer at Elizabethtown Community and Technical College, working in various roles at the school for 22 years.

"I like working on a variety of things and interacting with many different folks across campus and in our region," he said. "Being able to work with all the different programs the college offers and assist various sectors of our community in meeting their needs gives me pride in what I do. Assisting to make our region a better place for our future and that of our kids energizes me try to do my part in making that better future a reality."

Powell, 48, grew up on a family farm in Hardin Springs. He said he's moved five times in his life — all in the same ½-mile radius of the farm he grew up on and the farm he owns across the road.

He married his high school sweetheart, Penny, who lived on a neighboring farm. Both are educators and enjoy living in their hometown. They have two sons, Craig, 24, and Blake, 22.

Powell actually began at ECTC when he was a senior in high school, but as a student attending classes there. At the time, he was working toward a career as a machinist. While there, he changed his focus to teaching mathematics. He got his teacher certification in mathematics and computer programming at Western Kentucky University.

He began his teaching career at Meade County High School and began teaching at ECTC as an adjunct professor in the evenings. After two years of teaching high school, he began teaching full time at the college level.

“Education has been a big influencer in my life and as the first person in my family to attend college at the urging of my parents and I feel blessed to have had the opportunity,” he said, adding he earned a bachelor and masters degree from WKU and currently is seeking a doctorate from Murray State. “Education for me is about expanding yourself, we learn new things in classes, but more than that, we develop the ability to continue to develop as a person.”

He’s been able to accomplish a variety of things while at ECTC. He was a part of the merging of the workforce development groups when ECC and the technical college merged into ECTC, becoming the technical skills training coordinator for the office.

“It allowed me to work with many industries across ECTC’s service region and I developed training plans for the business and industrial clients ranging from computer training to technical skills such as welding and electricity,” he said. “While doing this I often wrote grant applications for Bluegrass State Skills funding and KYWINS to help cover the costs of training employees at the companies.”

He has also developed apprenticeship programs as well as learned a variety of programs and develop skills in a variety of areas at the college while working in corporate training, Powell said.

“Mr. Powell has continuously led ECTC forward by exhibiting a strong awareness of and respect for the institution’s past, as well as the contributions of the many people who have come before him,” said Mike Hazzard, Dean of Workforce Solutions and Technical Division Chair.

He called him honest, consistent and fair.

“As Interim Chief Academic Officer, Mr. Powell is constantly faced with a slew of perplexing challenges that necessitate thinking beyond the immediate situation and striving to find creative, fair, and

consistent solutions,” Hazzard said.

When ECTC built a campus in Springfield, Powell became the campus director.

“I had the opportunity to finalize equipping the facility, hire staff and faculty to run the campus and develop plans for the campus to open and grow,” Powell said. “This was a wonderful learning opportunity for me since I had large control of all operations of the campus from student services, academic programming and managing the physical campus.”

He then moved on to the new Leitchfield campus after it was built. He later added all extended campus that included Fort Knox to his management plate.

Serving as interim chief academic officer allows him to work with all areas of the college.

“One of the most significant changes that I have led is our transition to a primarily 8-week model for classes,” he said, adding ECTC previously used the 16-week semester. “After looking at the options to assist the college in improving our graduation rates and helping students finish college we determined that completing classes in 8 week sessions was proven by research to be more successful.”

Two years ago, 10% of classes were on eight-week terms, this semester the percentage is 74%.

“This shift is significant because data shows students are more successful in shorter terms,” he said. “With all the uncertainty, going on in our lives with COVID and other pressures, it is much easier for students to manage two classes in eight weeks than four classes for 16 weeks.”

ECTC President/CEO Dr. Juston Pate said he is proud of the work Powell has done at the college.

“He always makes time to listen to faculty, staff and students so he can act in their best interests,” he said.

He called Powell one of the best men he knows.

“He sincerely cares for the students and the college, and it shows in the way he leads,” Pate said. “He is one of the best listeners I’ve ever met and I believe that is one of the reasons people love to work with him.”

Powell learned a farm work ethic and to take control of his own destiny growing up on the farm.

"Farming is an enjoyable, tough way of life," Powell said. "There are long hot days and cold, wet days, but there is something magical about working with your hands and knowing that you are able to make a living on the same farm as your family has for well over 150 years."

His parents were full-time farmers and he spent many days following his dad doing daily chores around the farm as they farmed corn, soybeans and tobacco and had cows and pigs.

"You have to learn to prioritize since on any given day there are multiple projects that need to be done, but you generally only have time to get a few of them accomplished," he said. "As a child and into adulthood we often helped other farmers with tasks where extra hands were needed and they would reciprocate the gesture when we needed something, helping me to learn the value of compassion and helping others when needed."

Today, farming is a hobby for him, but he still farms 350 acres and has 100 cows.

"I enjoy spending time outdoors, working with my hands and spending time with my children as we accomplish chores around the farm," he said. "Being out on the same farmland as my father, grandfather and great-grandfather knowing that I am cutting hay in the same field they did just makes me appreciate their influence on me."

He's also been active in other roles in the community. Powell was once the chief of the West 84 Volunteer Fire Department, which his father, Darryl Powell, helped establish in 1979. He's been a Rotary Club president and member, been on the Lincoln Trail Area Development District Board, volunteered in school and been a part of various chambers of commerce.

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