

Meet the Laboratorian – Dan Griess

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What got you interested in pursuing a career in laboratory science?

I have always been fascinated with the sciences. I grew up in Morrill, a small community of 940 people located in Western Nebraska just eight miles from the Wyoming border. My father owned and operated a custom processing plant and I was immersed in the anatomy and physiology of animals, from butchering them on the kill floor to cutting and packaging the numerous cuts of meat, without even knowing the impact this experience would have for me someday. I must admit my science teachers seemed to enjoy my “show and tell” objects such as an occasional eye, or heart, or blood clot to name only a few. Let’s just say I kept them guessing.

I happened to read an advertisement from the local junior college that a new program was being introduced into their college curriculum, Medical Laboratory Technician. After reading the article, I made an appointment with the Dean of Eastern Wyoming College in Torrington, Wyoming to learn more about this degree program. My father only attended school through the eighth grade and my mother passed on when I was twelve. As the oldest child, college was a foreign topic in our family and a future career path in healthcare was something I would have never imagined. I believe it was divine intervention.



Where did you attend med tech school? Where did you receive your formal training?

I began my laboratory education by receiving an Associate of Applied Science degree as a Medical Laboratory Technician from Eastern Wyoming College. I chose to continue my education by completing my Bachelor of Science degree in Medical Technology through the University of Nebraska Medical Center, which is also where I completed my student rotations.

How long have you worked in your present location?

After working on the bench for nearly six years in both Scottsbluff and Omaha, I had an opportunity to move into a management position while, at the same time, allowing me to return to Western Nebraska. In March 1992, I accepted the Laboratory Manager position for Box Butte General Hospital in Alliance. Four years later, I moved into a leadership position, Vice President of Support Services, and then assumed the role of Chief Executive Officer at the end of 2003. I have also completed my Master’s degree in Healthcare Administration through the University of Minnesota. All in all, I am in my 18th year at Box Butte General Hospital.

What is the biggest challenge you face in your job today?

There are a number of challenges we face in healthcare each and every day. The biggest challenge for me would be related to the topic of workforce. It truly has been a blessing for me to serve in a rural healthcare setting for the past 18 years, both personally and professionally. We have been fortunate to find other health professionals who feel the same way and appreciate the quality of life that rural medicine has to offer. It is a privilege to serve our families and our neighbors in a manner where we are able to promote a patient-centered experience and our patients are cared for by someone they know and they trust. Often, the difficulty lies in our inability to find qualified professionals who exhibit a desire to serve in a rural area. As a small hospital, a vacancy with a Pharmacists, Ultrasonographers or Respiratory Therapists can weaken our ability to offer critical, lifesaving services. Therefore, we work hard to be great at promoting our opportunities when they arise and to give our employees numerous reasons to choose to stay at Box Butte General Hospital.

Additionally, we have partnered with Alliance High School to form a Health Professions Club. These high school students attend monthly meetings at the hospital where they are introduced to a diverse number of health profession careers. Additionally, they must participate in community service activities, job shadowing opportunities and then they are eligible to participate in two field trips to further introduce them to the field of healthcare. We have visited academic programs in Denver, Ft. Collins, Lincoln, Omaha and Rapid City in the past as well as local academic programs offering professional careers through community colleges and satellite college and university campuses. We believe it is important to begin building our workforce locally and at an early age.