



News Release

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Joseph Opatz Named Interim President of Ridgewater College

ST. PAUL, Minn., May 17, 2017 – The Board of Trustees of Minnesota State Colleges and Universities has named Joseph Opatz interim president of Ridgewater College. Opatz will succeed Doug Allen, who has served as president of Ridgewater College since 2003 and will complete his contract on June 30, 2017. The appointment of Opatz becomes effective July 1.

“Joe Opatz is exactly the right person at exactly the right time to lead Ridgewater College,” said Steven Rosenstone, chancellor of Minnesota State. “He has held a wide range of leadership roles at two of our state colleges and one of our state universities, including eight years as a college president. His many accomplishments as president of Normandale Community College include leading the college through a period of dramatic enrollment growth, maintaining the college’s financial health during challenging economic times, increasing the enrollment of students of color, and transforming the physical plant of the college. His skills and experience will be a tremendous asset at Ridgewater while the search for a permanent leader is conducted.”

Opatz has a lengthy and distinguished career serving higher education as well as the state of Minnesota. He was the president of Normandale Community College from 2007 to 2014, and was recognized by the Board of Trustees with president emeritus status. He also served Hennepin Technical College as interim vice president for workforce education, Central Lakes College as interim president and vice president for academic and student affairs, Anoka-Ramsey Community College as executive dean and dean of instructional programs, and St. Cloud State University as associate vice-president for academic affairs and special assistant to the president. He served for 12 years in the Minnesota House of Representatives, and was recognized as a Legislator of Distinction by the Coalition of Greater Minnesota Cities, and three times as an Outstanding Legislator of the Year by the Minnesota Business Partnership. He holds a bachelor’s degree from St. Cloud State University, a master’s from Kent State University, and a doctorate from the University of Minnesota.

A search for a permanent president will be launched this fall with the goal of having new leadership in place by the start of the 2018-2019 academic year.

Ridgewater College is a community and technical college with campuses in the central Minnesota communities of Willmar and Hutchinson. The college serves more than 5,000 students through its nearly 100 academic programs and more than 68,000 training hours for individuals and businesses through customized training and continuing education. Thanks to generous donors, the Ridgewater Foundation provides between \$225,000 and \$275,000 annually in student scholarships, and more than \$400,000 in additional cash and non-cash support for equipment, supplies, technology enhancements, and other essentials benefiting academic programs. The college is a member of Minnesota State and is accredited by the Higher Learning Commission of the North Central Association of Colleges and Schools.

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Minnesota State includes 30 community and technical colleges and seven state universities serving approximately 400,000 students. It is the fourth-largest system of two-year colleges and four-year universities in the United States.

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