Robert Meyer, shown during a visit to UW-Stout earlier this month, was selected on Tuesday as the university’s next chancellor. Meyer is president and chief executive officer of Wisconsin Indianhead Technical College based in Shell Lake.

News, Page 1A
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Chancellor named

By Pamela Powers
Menomonie News Bureau

MENOMONIE — The thought of becoming UW-Stout’s chancellor certainly never crossed Robert Meyer’s mind while he was an undergraduate and graduate student at the Menomonie university.

“Not in my wildest dreams,” he said, recalling those days.

But Meyer did start thinking about what skills it would take to become a campus leader when he was a dean at UW-Stout in the early 2000s. “I felt I could do it,” said Meyer, presently president and chief executive officer of Wisconsin Indianhead Technical College in Shell Lake. “That is why I went to WITC, so I could take on a CEO challenge. I wanted to test myself.”

Meyer, 57, was named UW-Stout’s seventh chancellor on Tuesday, replacing Chancellor Charles Sorensen when he retires Aug. 15. The UW System Board of Regents confirmed the appointment Tuesday made by UW System President Ray Cross.

In a conference call Tuesday afternoon, Meyer confirmed his commitment to doubling the university’s foundation’s assets within five years. The foundation currently has assets of about $47 million.

“One of my priorities is to really challenge the fundraising aspect and being intricately involved with that,” Meyer said. “I think it is the right goal.”
Funding is needed to continue the university’s growth as the UW System’s polytechnic university, Meyer said.

Because of state budget constraints, the university will have to look at fundraising and grants to help pay for staff development, scholarships, and ensuring labs and classrooms remain up to date, Meyer said.

“Hiring the talent and keeping the talent is paramount not only for UW-Stout but the whole system,” Meyer said.

Deep roots at UW-Stout

Meyer, who obtained bachelor’s and master’s degrees from UW-Stout, also worked at the university from 1983 until he took the WITC president job in 2008. He held many positions at UW-Stout, including assistant to the chancellor for state and federal relations, dean of the College of Technology, Engineering and Management and director of the Northwest Wisconsin Manufacturing Outreach Center.

Meyer, a Port Washington native, has his doctorate in industrial engineering from the University of Minnesota.

Carol Mooney, a UW-Stout professor and program director for career and technical education, has known Meyer for 25 years and once taught in a classroom next to Meyer’s.

“I think he is going to be just outstanding,” Mooney said. “I applaud the Search and Screen Committee and the Board of Regents for selecting a leader who is going to provide a smooth transition. He gets Stout’s mission. I just think he is going to take us to that next step.”

Mooney recalls that at a campus visit, Meyer was asked what his legacy would be at UW-Stout. Meyer said he wanted UW-Stout recognized internationally for its polytechnic mission, a goal Mooney believes Meyer will accomplish.

“Bob is just a good salt-of-the-earth person,” she said. “He is proud of his roots. He is really grounded. He is really smart. He empowers people to do their jobs. He really believes in people.”

Rich Rothaupt, associate dean of the UW-Stout Science, Technology, Engineering and Mathematics College, has known Meyer since 1995. Rothaupt used to team teach classes with Meyer in manufacturing engineering and senior capstone projects.

“It was a lot of fun teaching with Bob,” Rothaupt said. “He is a great teacher. He is very personable and excellent with students.

“He is really good at involving everybody with the process,” Rothaupt added. “He is going to be an excellent chancellor. He has a great way of bringing people together and working on a common goal.”
Cross said Meyer is an established leader with an extensive knowledge of Wisconsin and a longtime affinity with UW-Stout.

“He understands its mission, challenges and potential, and how higher education must evolve to meet the needs of those it serves,” Cross said in a statement. “He has a distinguished record of successful service and senior-level leadership, and I am confident he is well-prepared to lead UW-Stout to a bright future.”

Edmund Manydeeds of Eau Claire, a member of the Board of Regents who was part of the committee that interviewed the finalists with Cross, said the committee spent considerable time discussing the candidates.

“In the end the new chancellor distinguished himself,” Manydeeds said. “(It was) his passion and ability to work with people and collaborate.”

Manydeeds said it was important to get the right fit for the campus and the community. The committee unanimously recommended Meyer for the position.

Petre (Nelu) Ghenciu, associate professor of mathematics, who chaired the 21-member campus Search and Screen Committee, said Meyer brought a commitment to the university’s polytechnic mission. “We liked his dedication, his boldness,” Ghenciu said. “(We liked) his laying down ideas like new strategic planning and doubling the foundation. We like challenges at Stout, and Stout is known for being successful in challenges.”

**Big shoes to fill**

Meyer expressed excitement about being named the new chancellor but recognized he had big shoes to fill replacing Sorensen.

“I’m ready for the challenge,” he said. “I plan a fast start as chancellor, drawing upon my experiences and relationships developed as a UW-Stout graduate, faculty member and leader.”

Meyer said he believes he is an insider with an outsider perspective coming to the campus. He has experience dealing with tight budgets, strategic planning and making the tough decisions while at WITC.

WITC informed its employees Tuesday afternoon about Meyer’s impending departure for UW-Stout.

“It is with mixed emotions that I verbally accepted Bob’s resignation, effective Aug. 16,” college board President Morrie Veilleux stated in an email.

During his six years at the northern Wisconsin technical college, Meyer provided outstanding leadership and improved WITC’s process of creating its strategic direction, Veilleux noted.

While at WITC, Meyer expanded partnerships with K-12 districts, technical colleges and universities and increased WITC Foundation holdings more than 50 percent. During his tenure, WITC was
recognized three times among the top 10 of Washing Monthly Magazine’s national rankings of two-year colleges.

Sen. Sheila Harsdorf, R-River Falls, said Meyer’s experience at UW-Stout and WITC and his knowledge of northwestern Wisconsin will be an asset to UW-Stout, she added.

“As UW-Stout continues to excel as Wisconsin’s Polytechnic University, his experience will be valuable to students, the campus community and our region,” Harsdorf said.

The other chancellor finalists were Richard Lapidus, the dean of the College of Business Administration at California State Polytechnic, Margaret Madden, provost and vice president for Academic Affairs at the State University of New York at Potsdam, and D.C. Coston, president of Dickinson State University in Dickinson, N.D. Bryan Albrecht, current president and chief executive officer of Gateway Technical College in Kenosha, was named as a finalist but withdrew his name.

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