

## Brenda Edleston – TRAC-7

This is Kansas Profile. I'm Ron Wilson, director of the Huck Boyd National Institute for Rural Development at Kansas State University.

A crime has been committed. The team of analysts is hard at work, extracting DNA from crime scene evidence. Is this a high tech lab at the FBI? Or maybe a scene from a Hollywood CSI show? No, none of the above. In this case, the crime was that somebody stole the cookies. The team of analysts is a group of students from rural Kansas. They are using real-world science on this project and learning a lot in the process. It's today's Kansas Profile.

Brenda Edleston is Dean of the Geary County campus of Cloud County Community College. A lifelong educator, she was a teacher and administrator in Arkansas before coming to Kansas. Her husband, Rob Edleston, is President of Manhattan Area Technical College.

In 2006, Brenda came to the Geary County Campus of Cloud County Community College and worked her way up to become Dean. The campus in Junction City has been there since 1996. The central office for Cloud County Community College is in the rural community of Concordia, population 5,548 people. Now, that's rural.

In 2010, the college joined a project called TRAC-7. TRAC is an acronym for Technical Retraining to Achieve Credentials. The 7 refers to the seven educational institutions that came together in this project: Washburn Institute of Technology, Cloud County Community College, Dodge City Community College, Salina Area Technical College, Garden City Community College, Flint Hills Technical College, and Highland County Community College.

This consortium received a 19.6 million dollar grant from the U.S. Department of Labor Employment and Training Administration to help build a more skilled workforce statewide. "They were looking for institutions with unique programs," Brenda Edleston said. Each member of the consortium brought their unique programs to the table. The grant supported providing these unique courses online as well as through specialized mobile units for hands-on training.

Altogether, the consortium includes online classes in advanced systems technology, electrical power technician, power plant technology, environmental technology, food science, risk management, and agri-biotechnology. This last one is the one from Cloud County Community College, taught by Cathy Troupe.

In addition, the TRAC-7 grant provided for mobile labs to complement the online classes with experiential learning. "Watching and doing are two different things," Brenda noted. "Virtual participation in the classes is a precursor to the hands-on experiments in the mobile laboratory."

So Brenda and her staff set out to design a mobile lab for the biotechnology program. "We started with a sheet of notebook paper and a ruler and a pencil with a good eraser," Brenda said with a smile. They designed a laboratory on wheels – essentially, a camper with slide-out sides and high-tech equipment inside. New Horizons RV in Junction City was the successful bidder to construct the project.

"We were so pleased to be working with a local firm, and they have done a terrific job," Brenda said. The mobile unit has twelve student work stations, each with linked computers and a microscope, plus two incubators and a fume hood. In this

facility, students can do experiments such as extracting DNA from lab samples under the supervision of an instructor. One instructor designed a mock scenario where somebody took some cookies and the students are to analyze the DNA so as to identify the culprit. That might be useful around my house – except it would eliminate my deniability.

Currently the mobile unit is being taken around the state for demonstrations. Microbiology and biotechnology lab classes will be taught in this facility beginning in fall 2014.

“Adult learners tend to be placebound,” Brenda Edleston said. “We can broaden everybody’s opportunities if we can go to where the students are.” For more information, go to [www.cloud.edu](http://www.cloud.edu) or [www.trac7.org](http://www.trac7.org).

A crime has been committed. The team of analysts is hard at work, extracting DNA from crime scene evidence. But this isn’t the FBI or CSI, this is the Geary County campus of Cloud County Community College teaching students about biotechnology. We salute Brenda Edleston, Cathy Troupe, and all those involved with this project for making a difference with this innovative educational initiative. Just don’t get caught with your DNA in the cookie jar.

For the Huck Boyd National Institute for Rural Development, this is Ron Wilson with Kansas Profile.