In looking over the career of retiring OCTE (Office of Career and Technical Education) executive director John Marks, one can immediately see that he has worked across the entire spectrum of vocational technical education and the KY Tech school district. This is the major reason he was originally hired to serve in the position. He has brought a depth of experience and insight to his role as a result of field and central office knowledge gained from the grind of going through the ranks.

Over the years, Marks' education, experience, and skills have served him in a variety of vocations.

A Champion
of
Career and Technical Education

John M. Marks

John M. Marks was the first born child of Edith and John Wade Marks. His sister Julie came along six years later. Both of his parents finished high school, but did not attend college. However, both siblings went to college and completed degrees at Murray State University. Julie is a chemist at Bristol-Myers Squibb.

His father was a combat veteran of WWII. After the war, he worked for the Ashland Oil Company, headquartered in Owensboro. He initially worked on the pipeline team and later became a "gauger" for the company.

At an early age, John came to understand the value of hard work. He got a bicycle for Christmas when he was 10. That bike became his major mode of transportation when he began his first job - delivering newspapers in Sebree, located in Webster County.

His father taught him how to be a mechanic – something extremely important when living in a rural setting. Why? "If you were just a poor kid, you had to be able to work on a bike, car, or even farm equipment," says Marks. "It was something natural to learn because if you wanted to keep a job, you had to know a little bit of everything. It was always important to make money and have the ability to keep stuff running."

At fifteen, he began working as a mechanic's helper in the local Ford Garage. There, he was not only able to put to use the skills his father had taught him over the years, but he also learned how to paint cars and work on transmissions.

There was also his grandfather, Ernest Harkins. He was a man who knew nothing but hard work using both his back and hands. "My grandfather grew up in the depression and knew carpentry, farming, and was a pretty good mechanic," said Marks. "We were very close. I stayed with him as much as I did at home and helped in the summers and fall on the farm. He was like a buddy to me because he had no sons. He taught me the 'how to' of planting an organic garden before it became vogue."

Wendell Ashby, the father of his best friend Milton A., introduced John to the real world of electricity. When the family TV would quit, "dad called Wendell to come and fix it," says Marks. "Magically, the TV would once again work. I thought he was superman and that's when I decided what I wanted to do."

On the weekends, Marks went to his friend's house to find out more about electronics. "And, Milton A. came to my house to learn more about mechanics," said Marks.

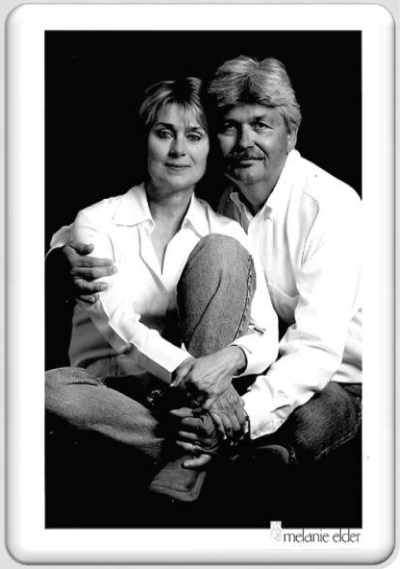
When they turned sixteen, Wendell sent Milton and John out to do some jobs on the weekends that included putting in underground services to mobile homes. Marks remembers Wendell as being "a tough boss, task oriented, very knowledgeable, and a great teacher because he not only taught us the process, but was able to explain the theory." He taught them Ohm's law and electrical theory because he thought it was so important. "That was a big help to me," says Marks. "Not only was I learning electricity, I was getting basic electronic theory and developing a curiosity for the mystery related to electricity, electronics, and radio."

Years before, Marks had already set up shop on the back porch of his house, complete with a handmade sign entitled, "Marks Electric." He remembers filling the porch with old radios, TVs and all of the electrical components he could find. It was his haven to tinker in what would become a lifelong interest.

When he entered high school, there was no "vocational" school in the district. Marks was all about academics and interested in a college track curriculum. As a sophomore, he became the Webster County High School drum major. At the time, the school did not have a football team and band was the major activity. "Band was my hands-on connection to something," said Marks. "We were good. We did street marching routines and many of the parents would come out to watch us practice."

When Marks was a senior in high school, band director and mentor A.Y. Hodge secured an invitation for the Webster County High School Marching Band to go to New Orleans. In 1970, they represented the state of Kentucky by marching in the Mardi Gras parade.

The trip was expensive and many fund raising events were held to help defray the cost of going. It just so happens that his future wife, Pam Chandler, also became a member of the Kentucky delegation during that trip. She won a contest by earning the most money for the band to take the trip. As a result, she was also invited to go and had the distinct pleasure and honor of riding in a convertible in front of the band led by drum major John Marks. "She was Kentucky's queen and decked out in a formal dress," said Marks.



Pam and John Marks

Pam and John have enjoyed life together for 40 years. They have two sons, Chandler and Walker.

Marks family (l to r): John, Chandler, Pam and Walker.

Overall, Marks developed a background of learning skills by working on farms (cattle, horse, and hog), hauling hay, working on tractors, being a mechanic's and welder's helper, a union carpenter apprentice, truck driver, an electrician in the coal mines, and later he became an electrical contractor.

Encouraged to go to school by family and having a love for learning, Marks graduated from Madisonville Community College with an associate's degree. He continued his college career at Murray State University where he earned a Bachelor of Science degree in Vocational Technical Education, a Master of Science degree in Vocational Administration, and a Rank I. Currently, he holds several certifications, is a master electrician, and an amateur radio extra class operator.

Marks began his professional career in vocational technical education as an electricity instructor at the Webster County Area Vocational Education Center (now called KY Tech-Webster County Area Technology Center). The job offer was given to him based on the recommendation of retiring electricity teacher Dwight Borum.

"When I became the electrical technology instructor, my old friend Wendell Ashby was the first one I called to be on my advisory committee," said Marks.

After six and one half years in the classroom, he moved to the OCTE central office in 1991 where he has held a variety of positions including KY State VICA director (now called SkillsUSA Kentucky), program consultant, branch manager, KY State Tech Prep director, and KY Tech area supervisor.

He left the central office in May 2000 to serve as principal of the KY Tech-Clark County Area Technology Center.

As an interim principal during the first year, "we did a lot of physical work to clean up the building; and my teachers and I worked on developing a better rapport with the high school and community," said Marks. "When I took over as principal, we had some momentum. During my time at the school, what I learned was invaluable because it brought home that our principals run the ship at the local level. I also learned that the area supervisors were the life line when I needed help because they serve as the bridge from the field to the central office."

Two years later, Marks left Clark County to accept the position of director at the Bluegrass Community and Technical College-Lawrenceburg campus. In October 2004 he returned to the OCTE central office and was named division director of Secondary Education and Technical Training prior to being appointed as OCTE executive director in May 2007.

When asked about some of the most important initiatives during his stint as division director, Marks had this to say, "Commissioner Emil Jezik and I had an opportunity to

meet with officials from SACS to see if we met their district model. They offered us candidacy on the spot; however, it was another nine months before we were able to accept their proposal because of some additional projects we wanted to complete in the system. In the meantime, we put together the original version of the program improvement plan (PIP), school improvement plan (SIP) and district improvement plan (DIP); all of which was based on program assessment."

As executive director, Marks believes that program assessment, through its progression into a data collection system, has become the backbone of the Kentucky Tech school district. "We use program assessment for improvement at all levels," said Marks. "It has now evolved into a peer review because we have principals and teachers involved in the assessment process itself and it's continually updated to meet AdvancED standards. It has also become the collection for all of our accountability including AdvancED, Perkins, industry, and state. We have successfully merged that

Photo: Former deputy executive director Lewis Carter and division director John Marks watch as executive director Emil Jezik signs document for KY Tech to be officially accepted as candidate for SACS accreditation.

into the process resulting in a consolidated accountability and continuous improvement system that is benchmarked by the international academic standards of AdvancED."

According to Marks, program assessment is the one major initiative in the system that has allowed Kentucky Tech to stand above the data collection and accountability improvement processes that come and go from year to year. "In my opinion, program assessment is strong enough to accommodate program review or anything else that comes along that relates to collection of data and use of that data for continuous improvement."

2006 photo (l to r): OCTE division director John Marks and executive director David L. Billingsley accept the SACS/CASI District Accreditation from Dr. Robert Storer, and Mr. Tom Jones, KY SACS/CASI

2006 photo at right: John Marks talks with David Billingsley during a work session. Myra Wilson is in the background and QAR team member Gene Kirchner is in the foreground.

Marks:

"It is our mission to engage all students in the mastery of academic and technical skills needed to be ready for college and a career. In 2006, Kentucky Tech set the national benchmark for career and technical education as the first system in the nation to become SACS/CASI accredited as a district.

"By challenging ourselves through our continuous improvement process, we will provide the foundation for school improvement that will continue to impact Kentucky Tech students. We are all about providing our students with the academic and technical education, and skills training required in getting and keeping a job in the 21st century."

In addition to his Kentucky Tech and KCTCS experiences, Marks has also been an adjunct professor for Murray State University where he taught a CTSO advisor class for instructors enrolled in career and technical education programs.

Knowing a little bit of everything has been an important mission in the life and career of John Marks. Understanding the value of a good education, combined with having technical skills and a strong faith have been his ingredients for success.

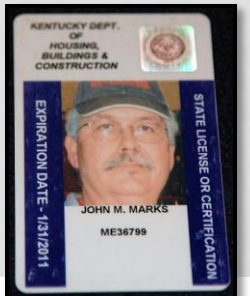
Above: First official photo taken of the new leadership team of Mike Kindred and John Marks.

Above: John Marks and Mike Kindred getting ready to take a ride.

Above: KY Tech-Floyd Co. ATC principal Lenville Martin talks with John Marks.

Above: Presenting to Interim Joint Committee on Education

At left: Marks is recognized by SkillsUSA state officer Danielle Chastain.



OCTE Leadership Team

From left to right: William Denton, Ombudsman; John Marks, executive director; and Michael Kindred, deputy executive director.

Kindred:

"A couple of sentences or a paragraph would never adequately describe the admiration and respect I have for John Marks. It has been an honor and a privilege to serve as his deputy for the last four years. I have grown personally and professionally because of John's friendship and leadership.

"He led Kentucky Tech through some difficult years without compromising his values or integrity, and I will always respect him for that.

"I guess the best compliment I can give John comes from Matthew 25:23, "Well done, good and faithful servant."

William Denton:

"Having worked with John over the past twenty years, both as a peer and most recently as executive director of OCTE and my immediate supervisor, I have found him to be one the finest persons I have ever been associated with. His dedication and compassion toward career and technical education is second to no one and he has been a valuable asset to the system. This is also true regarding his avocations including firefighting and ham radio operations to name a few. But, most importantly, it includes his family and religious affiliation. John will definitely be missed. I wish him happiness and good health in his retirement."

Dr. Dale Winkler joined the OCTE central office on June 16, 2011 and will officially replace John Marks upon his retirement.

Dr. Dale Winkler:

"Words cannot adequately describe all of the great contributions John Marks has made to career and technical education. He has served the Kentucky CTE community in a variety of roles, and his service in each role has helped prepare students for the workforce.

"I truly appreciate the service he has provided to the Kentucky Tech System, and I know teachers and administrators are thankful for the guidance he provided as executive director. He has helped me in making several critical decisions, and I know his advice will be missed. I wish him the best as he transitions to retirement."

Marks poses with Kentucky Tech area supervisors Mary Stratton and Linda Floyd.

Kentucky Tech area supervisor Barney Judd recognizes John Marks for his service and dedication during a southeast region principals' meeting.

Floyd:

"John Marks has been an individual who has shown great leadership in his role as executive director. The passion he exhibited for CTE has revitalized and enriched many around him. He is also an individual of exceptional Christian values. I am lucky to have had the opportunity to work for such an energetic, far-sighted public servant as John and have benefited from his leadership.

"I want to thank him for his invaluable guidance to me as an area supervisor, his concern for quality education in CTE, and for being my friend."

Judd:

"John Marks has been an outstanding executive director. His vision has prepared us so that we can be a vital part of Kentucky's educational team as we strive to help students become ready for 21st century life and careers."

Southeast region principals

Emily Hehl
branch supervisor:

"John Marks is so knowledgeable and enthusiastic about career and technical education—it's hard to imagine central office without him. He has been a very kind and caring leader and every decision he made as executive director, no matter how difficult, showed concern for how it would impact staff and students. It has been an honor to work with someone like John. He will be missed by all."

Charlene Baxter
administrative specialist:

"I remember meeting John Marks when he was shuffled into a division meeting and introduced as the new VICA director in 1991. Working for John over the last 2 ½ years has been an amazing experience. I respect and admire his leadership and commitment to OCTE, to the students of the Commonwealth, but most importantly his commitment to God and family. OCTE is losing a wealth of knowledge as John Marks departs on July 29th. I wish him the best."

Steve L. Bennett
branch supervisor:

"I have enjoyed serving under the leadership of John Marks during these last five years. He has allowed me to grow professionally and provided me with a friendship that I will treasure for all times.

"In my opinion, Kentucky Tech is a better system because of the decisions and actions he implemented and the genuine care that he has shown for all in the system."

Question and Answer Session with John Marks

<u>What do you consider to be your most important contribution during your tenure in CTE?</u>

First, probably the most personal contribution would be to those students that I have directly helped either through classroom instruction or through SkillsUSA.

Secondly, I would have to say the time I spent teaching the CTSO advisor class at Murray State University was an important contribution for those taking the course and becoming involved with student organizations. I feel like I may have impacted teachers in a positive way.

My overall hope is that I have contributed as an administrator to a process of good communication and trust; and, that I did as much as possible to avoid change just for change sake.

In terms of the following Kentucky Tech issues and initiatives, I offer the following:

***Kentucky Tech Curriculum*: From the beginning, I was involved in the Kentucky Tech curriculum process (both version's - one and two). Interestingly enough, the essence of our curriculum is still used by both Kentucky Tech and KCTCS. And, the curriculum allows us to teach high school students beginning college courses that transfer directly to KCTCS at *<u>no</u>* cost to the student.**

Question and Answer Session with John Marks

Articulation and Dual Credit: I need to give both Dr. Joyce Wogoman-Stubbs and Mary Stratton due credit on this issue - we now have a system to system articulation agreement for credit earned at KY Tech with KCTCS at *no* cost to the student. Dual credit is much improved and streamlined. It is my hope that it will also remain at *no* cost to the student after I'm gone.

Program Assessment: This legislated initiative is something that I feel has strengthened Kentucky Tech and CTE in general. It has allowed us to become the first and only CTE district to be accredited as such. More importantly, the continuous improvement process that has evolved from this whole endeavor is improving us as a system.

Consultants: When I came here in 1991, my job duties were VICA advisor (now, SkillsUSA) and Trade and Industrial (T&I) advisor for all secondary and postsecondary programs. I have to give Dr. Joyce Wogoman-Stubbs a good deal of the credit for helping create specific positions to provide more service. We now have a full-time SkillsUSA state director and full-time consultants in health, business, manufacturing, transportation, and construction. With the development of these positions, we have been able to bring our programs up to the cutting edge in industry approved training, as well as program and student certifications. I'm sure many would agree that we are second to none - both inside and outside of our commonwealth when it comes to the programs we offer in the classroom.

Question and Answer Session with John Marks

How do you think people will remember you?

I hope I am remembered as someone who tried to help students want to learn, to help teachers want to teach, and to help staff want to come to work.

Can you tie in any outside activities with your vocational-technical activities and/or endeavors?

Yes – I am an amateur radio operator and have had the pleasure of working to promote public service through "ham" radio. I was trained as an electrician and love electronics. I still do some volunteer work in the construction trades which helps me stay connected.

In conjunction with the 2009 Commonwealth Pandemic Influenza Exercise, Marks helped by operating the Amateur Radio Station at the state Emergency Operation Center (EOC).

Question and Answer Session with John Marks

Over the course of the years, what do you see as some of the major changes during the time you have been involved in vocational-technical education?

Like many professions, the gravy days are over. When I started, we had phenomenal insurance, great hours with enough extended employment to stay up to date on college work, staff exchange, and technical upgrade requirements. We also had five percent raises each year. These were the good old days for sure.

In spite of the hardships, when visiting a KY Tech school you see a quality, well educated, and well trained teacher. Because of two very important equipment funding appropriations during the Patton Administration (one in 1998 and the second in 2000), one can see a good and mostly well equipped shop, and a pretty good attitude to boot. Incredibly, over the years, we have been able to maintain commitment and quality because we have great professionals who know what kids need to learn to get and keep a job.

What person(s)/mentor influenced you to become involved in vocational-technical education? Why?

In looking over my career, I'll have to give my old principal Jim Pfeiffer credit for starting me down this path. And, my old friend James Nance, who was a colleague of mine at the Webster Co. ATC, has also been a positive influence. Over the years, he has been there when I needed him and I appreciate his support.

At right: Board Chairman James Nance recognizes John Marks with the 2008 Webster County High School Hall of Fame award.

Personal message from John Marks:

"Most of our principals are in the process of getting ready to receive students and things are starting to get back to full speed for the upcoming year. I remember those days and know the excitement, apprehension, and resolve that comes with each new year and each new class.

"Our jobs are extremely challenging and rewarding at the same time. However, in my opinion, rewards in life often come through challenging circumstances. So what are your rewards?

- *To KY Tech principals: It's rewarding when you see a new teacher who was scared to death during that first year and has now become an outstanding professional – you know the system is working.*
- *To KY Tech teachers: It's rewarding when you have the student that you don't even remember very well (or that you remember all too well!) stop you at Wal-Mart to shake your hand and thank you for caring – you know what you do has made a difference.*
- *To KY Tech secretaries: It's rewarding to everyone when you pull the teachers and principal out of the fiery furnace of paperwork one more time; or when you help that one student each day who needs a little extra word of encouragement – it's those moments when you are rewarded because you know how much you are needed.*
- *To KY Tech maintenance employees: It's rewarding to everyone when you open up each morning proud of the painting, waxing, and cleaning that you have done to give kids, who are not always looking on the sunny side of life, a bright optimistic place to learn. You know you mean something.*

"These are just a few of your rewards for being part of shaping the future for so many, and all of you do it because of <u>who we are</u> and <u>what we do every day</u> on the front line.

continued:

"Please know that we are and have always worked hard to help you do your job. Understand that we know it isn't always easy (believe it or not, our jobs in Frankfort aren't always easy). But, let us remember why we are so important. It's because we all are in this business to help kids do a little better, to feel a little better, and to learn a little more about life each day.

"My reward. . .

"My reward is just knowing you. The great teachers, principals, school staff, and central office staff. My reward has been serving in the best educational system in in the nation - Kentucky Tech."

Editor's Note:

"Our old friend Dr. Charles Byers once said, 'People may not remember what you did, but they will always remember how you treated them.' And, there are many who will remember who you are.

"Your indelible mark will be left on the system for many years to come – but times are changing. And, it's our ability to adapt to change that will allow us to continue moving forward in a successful manner.

"And finally, we forgive you for being a U of L Cardinal fan."

Marks poses with Kentucky Tech principals during his last summer conference – July 2011.

Good News Story #355
By: Fran Dundon -July 27, 2011
Office of Career and Technical Education
Education and Workforce Development Cabinet

Special thanks to Photographer Tim Thornberry for many of the photos used in this story.