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Kansas State University **LIBRARIES**

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Dean Joe Mocnik, posing in Hale Library.

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**“I WANT ALL K-STATE
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THEY ARE SUPPORTED
BY THE LIBRARIES,
NO MATTER THEIR
BACKGROUND OR WHAT
CHALLENGES THEY FACE.”**

— JOE MOCNIK

LEAPING TO LEAD

BY CAILIN RILEY

JOE MOCNIK, NEW DEAN OF LIBRARIES, IS READY TO COLLABORATE WITH CAMPUS AND COMMUNITY

Nobody can say that Joe Mocnik didn't hit the ground running.

Mocnik took up the mantle of leadership at the Libraries this past July after the retirement of longtime dean, Lori Goetsch. Mocnik, who came to K-State from an appointment as dean of Libraries at North Dakota State University, spent his first few weeks setting up meetings with multiple staff, faculty and student workers to connect with them, hear their wishes for the Libraries going forward and start to ascertain how he can support them. In between these meetings and more with campus leadership, Mocnik and his family explored the campus and community, attending events such as new student convocation.

The path that brought Mocnik to K-State is one of determination and hope.

Mocnik, the youngest of four boys, grew up on a small family farm in Croatia. His father worked as a carpenter while his mother helped raise the children and supported the home. At the time of his youth, Croatia was largely controlled by communist rule. As a result, Mocnik recalls that access to further education and opportunities to travel were limited. Despite this, he started to develop a natural curiosity and desire to travel westward, toward countries whose cultures and languages intrigued him.

After a brief period of studying electrical engineering in high school, Mocnik decided to reevaluate his scholarly interests and double down on his efforts to travel west. He soon obtained a working scholarship to a small college in England that paid for most of his schooling. In order to study history and religion at the college, Mocnik had to practice and learn English for a full year before he was able to enroll. While in school, Mocnik worked at the college library, where he performed tasks such as shelving materials and working the circulation desk. It's suddenly no surprise why Mocnik is able to so easily relate to library student workers—he was one of them!

Near the end of his undergraduate years, Mocnik was advised by the library director at the time to consider looking into library studies as a potential career path. Mocnik took the advice to heart and enrolled at the University of London in library and information studies. During this time, he came across an advertisement for the United States' Visa lottery program; the past program was an effort to attract people from a variety of countries and provide an opportunity to work and live in the States. Although Mocnik remembers that he didn't have a lot of money at the time, he took the leap and spent the dregs of his account to send in applications for him and his wife. Their bet paid off.

“There was never any plan to stay in the States long term,” Mocnik said. “My wife and I figured, hey, we’re young, let’s go and live somewhere new for a few years and then we can always come back...well, that was 22 years ago!”

The first place the Mocniks settled in the States was Michigan, working for Andrews University, a private university in Berrien Springs. They then moved to Bowling Green State University in Ohio for Mocnik to pursue his PhD in history. Making the decision to continue his education was tough financially, Mocnik said, but he has no regrets, as that path eventually led him to a full and rich career in library leadership at many institutions throughout the country.

Mocnik said that while a large part of K-State’s appeal was the university’s reputation for providing an accessible, affordable and high-quality education, the spark came for him after he spoke with Libraries staff and university leadership during and after the interview process.

“The leadership at K-State thinks very holistically about student success, and that appealed very much to me,” Mocnik said. “Also, the people here at the Libraries are just above-average friendly! It’s an enchanting campus, but also the people are just enchanting too.”

Mocnik has wasted no time in sharing his goals for the Libraries with the community and working with stakeholders to begin to put them into action. By fall, Mocnik worked to raise the minimum hourly pay rate for student employees.

In addition to meeting goals that make the Libraries an appealing place to work within the

community, Mocnik also wants to focus on improving overall student success, advancing support for faculty and research, creating a culture of inclusion and innovation, increasing philanthropic support and fostering meaningful community outreach.

As a past international student and first-generation college graduate himself, Mocnik has a personal stake in supporting student success at K-State, particularly with international students and those from remote or disadvantaged communities.

“It can be challenging enough to go to school in a new place with a

different culture, but it can be even harder for students who are also trying to learn a new language,” Mocnik said. “I want all K-State students to feel that they are supported by the Libraries, no matter their background or what challenges they face.”

For all students, Mocnik hopes the new Sunderland Foundation Innovation Lab will be a place for students to learn both academic and

practical skills, as well as introduce them to new technologies that might become standard fare within their lifetimes. The Innovation Lab will also be a great offering to faculty, who can use the lab to advance their teaching and research.

Mocnik realizes that a large part of advancing student, faculty and staff success is creating a culture of inclusion that values the input of a variety of ideas. Part of this effort includes building programming and connections with resources like the Dow Center for Multicultural and Community Studies, which supports library acquisitions and professional development. The Center also provides financial support for multicultural programming to K-State groups or organizations, making it a great place to focus on fostering inclusion and acceptance within the Libraries.

“As we conclude the K-State 2025 strategic plan and develop exciting

new initiatives that will guide us into the future, we are fortunate to have the experience, vision and boundless energy of Joe Mocnik to lead K-State Libraries,” said Provost Chuck Taber. “The Libraries support our learning, discovery and engagement land-grant missions, and Joe will lead us to new frontiers with both fresh perspective and a deep commitment to our K-State culture.”

Lastly, Mocnik wants the Libraries to grow into K-State’s mission as a land-grant university by building relationships with Kansas communities. One of his goals is to partner with K-State’s Research and Extension services by seeking guidance on how to best serve the intellectual needs of Kansans.

“We are in a unique position after the Hale Library fire and the pandemic to foster collaboration internally and externally,” Mocnik said. “I want the Libraries to be more than a place students go to study or for faculty to use for research purposes. I want us to be a centered and supportive place of overall learning, inclusion and innovation for the entire community and beyond. And I think that’s within our reach.”



Dean Mocnik would love to hear from you. Reach out to him at lib.k-state.edu/dean

THE LIBRARIES SUPPORT OUR LEARNING, DISCOVERY AND ENGAGEMENT LAND-GRANT MISSIONS, AND JOE WILL LEAD US TO NEW FRONTIERS WITH BOTH FRESH PERSPECTIVE AND A DEEP COMMITMENT TO OUR K-STATE CULTURE.

— CHUCK TABER, PROVOST

Photos below, (left to right):

Mocnik, posing with his wife, Mirta, and their Newfoundland, Snowball.

Mocnik, Mirta and their two sons, Noel and Ben, checked out one of the study nooks in Hale Library.

Mocnik takes a photo opp with Willie the Wildcat on campus.

The Mocniks explore their native Croatia, which offers a variety of landscapes including seaside cities, ancient architecture and farmland, such as the farm that Dean Mocnik’s brother owns.

DEAN MOCNIK'S PATH TO ACADEMIC ACHIEVEMENT

1. Croatia
2. United Kingdom
3. Michigan
4. Ohio
5. Pennsylvania
6. Tennessee
7. Georgia
8. North Dakota
9. Kansas

