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Kansas State University LIBRARIES

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“I WANT ALL K-STATE STUDENTS TO FEEL THAT 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.