

By LARRY PHILLIPS

• Daily Leader

His folks had to leave Liberal and move to Wichita during his senior year at Liberal High School. They let him stay to finish school, and he completed the football season playing for the Redskins. But then, he and another classmate wrecked a car out on the Cimarron River Bridge, and that's when his folks said, "Enough of that, you're coming to Wichita."

Andrew C. Corbin had to leave school half way through his graduation year in December of 1967. Having moved here at the age of 4 from Alva, Okla., Andy was scheduled to graduate with the class of '68 the following May.

Despite a traumatic interruption in his schooling, Andy went ahead and graduated high school in Wichita and earned a Bachelor of Arts in Education at Wichita State University.

His education, determination and High Plains work ethic has paid off.



Andy is now the president and CEO of Blue Cross Blue Shield of Kansas headquartered in Topeka. But like many, the road to success was long and winding. After college, Andy found himself living in Salina and teaching in Assaria, just a few miles south of Salina.

"I taught school at Southeast Saline, which is in Assaria," he said, adding the Vietnam War had a bearing on his job possibilities in 1972.

"I had the (military draft) lottery No. 24, and I had a 2-S deferment until I graduated from college," Andy explained. "So when I graduated, I was ready to teach, but nobody would have me because of my low lottery number. That's how I ended up at a little 2A school in Assaria."

“After about two months of teaching there, I got called up – this was in 1972,” he said. “I went up to the induction center – I wear contacts and didn’t even have a pair of glasses – and I went all the way through. I was perfectly healthy and went to the last test, which is the eye test.

“I said, ‘Should I leave my contacts in?’ and the sergeant started barking and hollering at me saying I was a no good kid, and that I had to come back in two weeks and redo the test. The Sunday following that, Nixon stopped the draft,” Andy said, with a chuckle.

It was also the year Andy married his wife, Robin.

“I’ve been married to the same lovely girl since 1972,” Andy said, with pride.

They have four children – Elijah, 32; Tyler, 30; Logan, 25; and Caitlin, 21. They also have three grandchildren.

After Assaria, Andy and Robin found themselves in Kansas City. Andy was again teaching school.

“I was also working at United Parcel Service and making more money with them than I was at teaching,” Andy said. “So, I decided to get into business.”

On July 1, 1974, Andy joined Blue Cross Blue Shield of Kansas in the Kansas City office.

“I was with them for about six years, and then I went with Blue Cross Blue Shield of Texas in San Antonio,” he said.

He stayed with BCBS of Texas for nearly five-and-a-half years, and decided to take a job with Humana Insurance Co. in San Antonio. But that only lasted about a year-and-a-half.

“In 1987, I came back up here to Topeka and took over as director of sales for Blue Cross Blue Shield of Kansas,” Andy said. “And I’ve been back with them for 21 years.”

Throughout those years, up until around 2000, Andy was also named vice president of sales and provider of professional relations, became president of BCBS’ subsidiary Advance Insurance Co. and president of Premier Health Inc., another BCBS subsidiary.

Then in 2007, the company’s former president and CEO announced his forthcoming retirement. It was then that Andy decided to apply for the position.

“The board went on a search, and I put my name in the hat, along with a couple of other senior executives at Blue Cross Blue Shield,” Andy said. “I was already on the steering committee, and then I interviewed with the board and was selected in July.”

But it wasn’t until Oct. 1 that Andy stepped into the new job.

When asked if he believes that growing up in Liberal has influenced his work ethic and his career, he said, “Yes. And for a couple of reasons.

“One – my parents were from Alva, Okla., that same general area of the country, and they had a very strong work ethic,” Andy said. “I delivered potato chips for the Morton Potato Chip man when I was 8 years old. I used to carry in boxes, and the people in the businesses got upset with him because they said I was too little. But from my way of thinking – hey, I wanted my 50 cents.

“I delivered SpudNuts (donuts) on my bicycle when I was a little kid,” he continued. “I started working at the Ideal Food Market with the Blackmores when I was 14 – cutting up chickens until

the food safety people came by and saw I was using a knife and cutting up chickens. I lost my job. Then I started washing trucks out at Liberal Truck Service.”

Andy’s parents both worked – his father ran the service department at a trucking outfit and his mother was a legal secretary.

“If I wanted something, I knew I had to get out there and get it done.” Andy said. “ I wasn’t on any special sport team where everybody got a trophy. I had to work at winning a medal in track or playing on the football team or whatever.

“I think that all goes together,” he said. “Liberal was a fun place to grow up. And it was a good cultural mix – we had black families.

We had Mexican families, and I grew up with them and never thought anything about it.

“It was a good place to grow up,” he added.

Andy still finds time to return to Southwest Kansas. For several decades, he has come back for opening day of pheasant season and hunts with old friends.

Andy has reached substantial heights in his company, and he is gratified and proud to be associated with BCBS.

“I’ve always felt that Blue Cross Blue Shield is a mutual not-for-profit in Kansas, and I’ve always been glad I’ve worked for that kind of company,” he said. “The mentality of our company is to pay what people contract for and not try to figure out a way to not pay. I think they have a good moral responsibility and obligation, and that was important to me as I selected companies that I wanted to spend my career with.”

EDITOR'S NOTE: Watch the Daily Leader for president and CEO of Blue Cross Blue Shield of Kansas Andrew C. Corbin's thoughts on a national health care system, something president-elect Barack Obama has said he and his administration will address.