

## By Kathy Hannah

It was time to say thank you, and Barton County Community College did so with the presentation of its first Distinguished Service Awards at a banquet, January 18. Paul Conrad and J. A. "Joe" Mermis were the recipients of the award, designated by the Endowment Association to honor outstanding service to BCCC. Making the awards presentation was Bob Keenan, Chairman of the BCCC Board of Trustees.

Conrad, former editor of the Great Bend Tribune, left Barton county more than 15 years ago. But before he left, Conrad was "one of the initial catalysts" in the project that was to become Barton County Community College.

Once the idea for a community college was conceived, Conrad began researching the project, and enlisted the help of would-be foes by making them chairmen of an ex-officio research committee. Pros and cons of such a venture were carefully studied, including capital construction costs, continuing costs and economic benefits.

After it was determined that the idea of a college was a financially sound one, special legislation had to be enacted, and an election held on the question. Since Conrad is an attorney, he helped draft the statutes which made BCCC possible. The question of a college was presented to area voters twice before it passed.

In accepting his award, Conrad said, "I hope everyone of you has a chance at some point in your life to be honored like this. I want to thank you for remembering I had any part in it at all."

Conrad is now executive director of Allied Daily Newspapers, a trade association of papers in Washington, Oregon, Alaska, Idaho and Montana.

J. A. "Joe" Mermis was nominated for his record of service to the college during its early years. As one of the original trustees appointed by the County Commission following the election in 1965, he was elected first Chairman of the Board, a position he held from 1965 to 1971.

Under his guidance, the process of beginning an institution of higher learning from scratch was begun.

# Founders Honored by College



Bill Chambers

*Joe Mermis (left) and Paul Conrad (right) discuss the growth of BCCC after being honored for their efforts in the founding of the college. The two were the first recipients of BCCC's Distinguished Service Awards.*

Educational consultants were hired, state and federal authorities contacted, architects interviewed, and faculty and administrators screened.

During the planning stage, Mermis and the other trustees made numerous trips to visit community college campuses so the most impressive features of each school could be incorporated into the building of BCCC.

In the mid-70s, when the college decided to go ahead with plans to

purchase Camp Aldrich near Clafin, Mermis helped raise additional money to make the purchase possible with state and federal grants.

Presently, Mermis is Vice-Chairman, Chief Executive Officer and Trust Officer of Security State Bank in Great Bend, which he helped organize in 1950.

Both men were presented with engraved silver trays and certificates of appreciation before approximately 100 people. ☺