



News Release

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Century Alum's Bucket List Includes Century College

Century College alum Mike McGrane of Scandia has Century College near the top of his "bucket list" after completing 36 years as a social worker based in St. Paul.

McGrane had such a positive experience at Century (the former Lakewood Community College), that he has a message for students and parents: community colleges are a great place to start.

"I know there are misconceptions about two-year colleges," said McGrane. "I would like to do all I can to dispel them."

McGrane said he never would have earned his undergraduate and graduate degrees in social work at the University of Minnesota if he hadn't started at Century. He also met his future wife (Gayle Aune McGrane, principal of Forest Lake's Alternative Learning Center) and his lifelong best friend, Kevin Joyce, while attending Century.

"People don't realize the amount of personal attention they receive at Century from instructors who are as sharp as they come," said McGrane. "I have worked in the inner city my whole career, and have lived in the suburbs listening to the youth from these communities. Many of them are not doing much in high school and they don't have a clue about college. I was like that, too."

McGrane grew up on St. Paul's North End and graduated from St. Bernards High School. Told that he was not college material, McGrane worked in a local grocery store after high school and was promoted to meat cutter. In 1970, he enlisted in the Navy, where he served for two years at the air base in San Diego. In 1972, he returned to his job as a butcher, but started realizing that his future would be brighter if he enrolled in college using his GI benefits.

McGrane enrolled in Century (the former Lakewood) in 1973 and took three classes – biology (“the hardest class I ever had”), English and African-American studies. “In my two years at Century, my teachers were outstanding,” he said. “I remember them to this day – especially Bob Steller, Ralph Costello, Glen Peterson and Leonard Crowley.”

McGrane transferred to the University of Minnesota in 1974 and won a campus creative writing competition with a story that he had written for a class at Century.

While he was still at Century, McGrane began volunteering for the Wilder Foundation at Bremer House, a halfway house for male offenders. McGrane ended up living at Bremer House, working for room and board. After graduating from the university in 1977, he went to work for Wilder as a social worker and stayed for 36 years. From 1980 to 2009, he ran a program for domestic abuse misdemeanor offenders. As a longtime member of the Naval Reserve, he also set up domestic abuse programs in many parts of the world, including Guam, Iceland, Puerto Rico, Korea and Canada. He has taught college classes and written two books.

These days, McGrane is playing acoustic guitar and singing with his two-person band “Walden Pond Revisited,” and thinking about how best to help people during the next chapter of his life.

“Our future depends on young people taking advantage of their educational opportunities,” said McGrane.

“I want to do everything I can to help them.”



Photo: Century alum Mike McGrane