

Pittsford Resident Wins Excellence In Teaching Award

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On Sidney McQuay's wall is a framed, embroidered message, a 1984 gift from a former student's mother. It reads, "For his vast and always available supply of love, wisdom and patience, Sidney L. McQuay truly deserves the name of Professor and Friend." On the back, the student, Gary King, Jr., wrote, "Doc, thanks for all your caring."

These characteristics and more are the reasons Rochester Institute of Technology (RIT) recently chose McQuay as a recipient of the Richard and Virginia Eisenhart Provost's Award for Excellence in Teaching.

The Eisenhart Awards are presented annually to full-time RIT faculty who have demonstrated teaching excellence in the classroom and through constant and active involvement in enhancing and assisting RIT students for seven years or longer.

For each of the 29 years McQuay has taught manufacturing and design technology, mostly at RIT's National Technical Institute for the Deaf (NTID), he has received hundreds of notes and holiday cards from his students expressing similar sentiments. He saves many of them.

"Having technical skills is important to earn a living," says McQuay, 56, who spent 10 years in the engineering industry before he started teaching, "but what I enjoy most is providing the experiential education... teaching lifetime skills."

McQuay enriches his students' professional and personal lives in a wide variety of ways. Every year he takes his students on a field trip that many say is the highlight of their college experience.

The first stop is a private tour of the Harley Davidson manufacturing plant, where they learn about advanced production processes. The next stop is a tour of Tyco Electronics and then they're off to see all the sites of Washington, D.C., where they tour the White House, the Capitol, the Museum of American History, and the National Air and Space Museum. McQuay also coordinates brief visits with each student's congressman or senator.

McQuay says his students are like extended family, and he enjoys mentoring them inside and outside the classroom. He encourages his students to get involved with extra curricular projects, such as making parts for the RIT Baja vehicle, that are relevant to the coursework, and will help them find their personal niche, as well.

"I tell them, reach into your heart... find a career area that you are passionate about and then follow your dream," McQuay says.

McQuay's former student David Colwell says it was because of Dr. McQuay that he decided to enroll in the Manufacturing Processes Technology Program.

"It was one of the best decisions I ever made," Colwell said, who later earned a bachelor's in engineering technology, and became a partner in a machining company, seeking McQuay's advice along the way.

"He always gave freely of his time and mentored me for years after graduation," Colwell says. "Not once did he expect anything in return."

For years, on every snowy Saturday, McQuay and his grandson ski together at Bristol Mountain. Last year, McQuay decided to invite a group of students along. He expects it will become a tradition, where anyone who wants to join the "family" skiing is welcome.

"Tomorrow--today will be yesterday," McQuay frequently tells his students. "I tell them, do your best today because tomorrow you will be judged by those deeds." When it comes to problem solving, he tells his students it's like eating an elephant. "You can't eat it all at one time, but let's take as many bites as we can. Tell me what you do know, and don't tell me what you don't know."

While McQuay has served as a mentor and an inspiration to hundreds of young people, one might wonder what inspires him.

Without hesitation, he reaches for *Blazing New Trails*, a genealogy of RIT by George Wilson Hoke, and reads its dedication:

"... to the master builders as a record of their service in pointing the way to an education for the making of a living and for the living of a life not as two processes but as one."

"That sums it up for me. That is the essence of a quality education," he says. "At the end of the day, if each of us can say, RIT is a better place because I came to work today, then it will be."

"This job is 10-fold more rewarding and enjoyable than any other job I could dream of having," McQuay says unequivocally. "If I could do it all over again, I wouldn't change a thing."

Today, former student Colwell is now McQuay's colleague. "Sidney McQuay has a following of students that is unequalled," Colwell says. "I have co-taught with him and he gives his best every day, every week, every month, every year."

While he is thrilled to receive the Eisenhart Award, McQuay credits his wife, Kandy, for her unconditional, selfless support from the very beginning.

"There's no way possible that anyone can arrive at any level of success without support," McQuay says. "It was her sacrifice that allowed me to follow and realize my dream."

Kandy placed her undergraduate work on hold so Sidney could pursue his doctoral studies. She worked nights so he could take classes during the day. Their daughter also made many sacrifices by changing schools for the 12 different times they moved as he was pursuing his dream.

After 29 years of teaching, McQuay is far from bored. "When you think you've mastered it, you're fooling yourself," he says flatly. "The dynamics of the students are changing all the time - their needs, their personalities. I try to reinvent and challenge myself, and to find different ways to motivate the students. You can't instill excitement unless you're excited yourself."

McQuay and his wife live in Pittsford. They have one daughter and two grandchildren. He holds a Ph.D. in Technical/Industrial Education from the University of Connecticut, and his master's and bachelor's degrees in Technical/Industrial Education from SUNY Oswego.