

Lifelong Learner: Attending class at 86 – and making a difference

August 14, 2015

Bill Hunsinger gets to class early – so early, in fact, that the room is still dark. He doesn't mind, though, as he turns on the lights and checks over his assignments.

At 86 years old, Mr. Hunsinger may be SUNY Broome's oldest Hornet – and he's certainly older than all of the young men and women in his criminal justice courses. Now in his second year of classes, he said his passion for education is driven by a larger mission: to battle drug dealers and child abuse.

"I like it, but I'm doing it because I have a very good reason," he said.

Prior to these past two years, Hunsinger never attended college. Born and raised in Pennsylvania, he spent 22 years in the military – "soldiering," as he puts it – and then worked in the warehouses of Endicott-Johnson when he returned. He's also a proud Shriner and Mason, and noted that the Shriners are known for their charitable work to benefit children.

When he lived in Endicott, he took pictures of license plates in an effort to scare drug dealers away from his neighborhood. It's a cause he's deeply passionate about, and one that he mentions often in the classroom, his professors said.

"I'm not a kid, but I'm not afraid either," Hunsinger said. "I hope to go after these people."

Of course, he talks about other topics, too.

"He brought a smile to everyone's face with his stories about his military service in Korea and how he held members of his unit responsible – sometimes financially – for their behavior," said Professor Joe Julian, who had Hunsinger in his Introduction to Corrections class last Spring.

In Professor Trevor Peachey's Introduction to Criminal Justice course, Hunsinger made sure to show his homework to his professor, spin a yarn about what happened to him since the previous class, and present newspaper articles to his fellow students on relevant topics. His fellow students were impressed by his dedication – and also by the newspaper articles themselves, which went beyond the instantaneous, social media-driven news cycle they were accustomed to.

"At first, the class was apprehensive on how to react to the older gentlemen sitting in the front row that seemed

all too interested in the latest lesson or discussion question,” Peachey said. “After time, though, they came to appreciate his perspective (historical) on how the criminal justice system in and around Binghamton had treated him and what his takeaways were.”

In addition to being early, Hunsinger also would stay after class, waiting for a ride back to his home in nearby St. Louise Manor. Near the end of the semester, students would wait with him, too – accompanying him on the elevator to hear him finish a story or ask questions, Peachey noticed. The professor often used Hunsinger as an example of success to other students, and they listened.

“I would always point out that if Mr. Hunsinger could make it to class prepared, that they should be able to as well,” Peachey said. “He took pride in that and would push the other students to succeed, in some cases better than me.”

Hunsinger’s love of education goes beyond the classroom. Unlike many of his fellow residents at St. Louise Manor, he rarely watches television, preferring books – almost always on law-related topics. On campus, he frequently stops by professors’ offices to chat about topics in the field and forges relationships with his fellow students.

Peachey summed up his senior student with these words: “He was dedicated, resilient, and professional, a true example of a life-long learner that cares about his fellow students and community.” Julian described him as a good student whose “presence added a distinct flavor to the classroom.”

Currently, Mr. Hunsinger is looking forward to a fall semester course on the juvenile justice system with Professor Darin Schmidt. He’s also looking to commemorate his educational achievements at some point down the road, when he completes his goals.

“I just want a paper to put in a frame,” he said. “I was told it would take four years. That’s all right. I’ve got the time.”

Willieam Hunsinger

Filed Under: [Focus on Accomplishments](#)