Welcome from Dean Sue Maes

Fifty years! That’s half a century of helping students like you achieve your educational goals. I am so proud to be a part of providing this opportunity to students across the state, the nation and the world.

You, our alumni, are doing some amazing things! It’s wonderful to hear your stories and be a part of your educational journey. As lifelong learners, you are continually seeking new ways to grow and expand your knowledge. We’re thrilled to be your partner in this endeavor. It is my pleasure to share with you the stories of fellow alumni and students in this issue of Link.

“As lifelong learners, you are continually seeking new ways to grow and expand your knowledge.”

In this issue, you’ll learn about a fellow Wildcat who was knighted by the Norwegian government for his contributions to the environment and service in the interests of Norway. You’ll meet our 2016 Alumni Fellow, Joel DiGirolamo, and learn of his passion for helping others through personal coaching. Maybe you’ll feel a connection to the first-generation student who won an award for her dedication to her studies while working a full-time job and supporting a family. You’ll also find the story of a disabled veteran returning to school via our online program, working toward her bachelor’s degree while supporting her family.

We’ve helped provide professional development in the area of industrial refrigeration, and we worked with the College of Education to develop the Master of Arts in Teaching to meet the current teacher shortage. Kansas State University Global Campus has been helping individuals get the information they need from the very beginning, from teaching the public how to build fallout shelters in the 1960s, to helping military students earn their GED. Our program development strives to balance the needs of students and professionals with the needs of industry and society. Is there a program you’re looking for? Do you work in an industry and need professional development? Let us know your educational needs. I’d love to hear from you!

I’m proud to be a fellow Wildcat with you and wish you all the best in your future pursuits!

Warm Wishes,

Sue C. Maes
Dean
K-State Global Campus
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PROTECTING THE PEOPLE

Education that kept Kansans safe in turbulent times

By Rosanna Vail

Early morning, 1963: Jerry Boettcher loads up the back of a van with a concrete container of radioactive samples. He ties down the cargo securely and prepares for a long drive. It’s his routine.

“They just got it. I could tell from the expressions on their faces.”

Boettcher, originally from Beloit, Kansas, was a nuclear engineer who didn’t want to spend the rest of his life in a laboratory. At a time of national and global tension following the Cuban Missile Crisis of the early 1960s, he took a job at Kansas State University to teach people how to build fallout shelters statewide. The program started through a grant from the U.S. Department of Defense.

“I was in a different town every night,” Boettcher said. “It was a lot of work, all that driving. I was living in Manhattan, Kansas, so if you go somewhere like Colby, Kansas, that’s 270 miles.”

Boettcher’s work began shortly before K-State established the Division of Continuing Education — now Kansas State University Global Campus — out of the university’s extension roots. At the time, long-distance driving was critical to bringing knowledge to Kansans. Boettcher reached people in all corners of the state who could use what they learned to make their homes and communities safer during uncertain times.

“They represented a good cross-section of the community,” Boettcher said. “There were public employees, city employees or somebody from a hospital or a university. The subject was interesting to me, and my challenge was to try to make it interesting to them so they could feel comfortable instructing others.”

Part of the class required an overnight stay in a designated fallout shelter in the community, an experience that helped people understand the gravity of fallout shelter safety. The community typically identified the building where they would take shelter during an emergency, and Boettcher discussed structural enhancements for safety that were feasible for them to make.

“The class focused on an understandable level of communication,” he said. “You need to have a conversation about why a fallout shelter that’s made of wood is no good because it’s not very dense. Concrete is denser. Or maybe there are too many windows. You can’t just designate a certain building or room in your house.”

Boettcher also provided instruction about the subsequent radiation from debris after a blast and residual radiation that could be wind-borne. He used the radioactive samples he packed as part of a class exercise to identify dangerous materials. His teaching had results.

“Anyone who’s been a teacher has had an experience where you’re talking to your class, and for some reason, you’re not getting through,” Boettcher said. “Then when you look back, they’ve got a different look on their faces completely. They just got it. I could tell from the expressions on their faces.”

After his work in the program, Boettcher developed a career as an investment analyst, later becoming president of several corporations in the Beloit area. He has served in leadership roles at Kansas State University and was appointed to the Kansas Board of Regents in 2007, continuing his dedication to Kansas education.
Learning through difficulty

“The biggest class I had, about 40 people, was in Dodge City, Kansas. I remember that because I was unloading the car at my motel when I turned on the TV and heard Walter Cronkite saying the president (Kennedy) has been shot. I had to make a decision on the spot whether to have class. We weren’t in the days of email. Because many people drove from other communities, I would have had to have stayed just to say, ‘We’re not having class.’ So we went ahead and had a class that morning.”

— Jerry Boettcher
SUPPORTING STUDENTS, POSTWAR

The Division of Continuing Education supported a diverse array of programs. Bill Lockhart was part of Kansas State University’s efforts to help educate soldiers in the U.S. Army returning brigade during the Vietnam War. He wrote a proposal for a program that would help military students complete the General Educational Development test, or GED, and move closer to postwar career success.

Lockhart’s staff collected information and supplementary tests, serving students in the program for 13 years. They wrote to every state and territory in the U.S. government to obtain post-high school educational materials. Lockhart kept a folder for each location.

“My best story is a guy who came in and said he wanted to be an architectural technician,” Lockhart said. “I said, ‘Where are you from?’ He said, ‘Guam.’ I had no folder for Guam yet.”

Lockhart found that students wanted to talk not only about what they needed to learn for the GED, but what they hoped to do after they received it. His role grew into a listener and a supporter of students needing someone who understood their lives in the military and their working-class backgrounds.

“The thing I didn’t understand when I started was how much counseling you would do in a program like this,” he said. “A lot of them wanted to get a GED so they could get a job and not be on welfare. They were singing my song. And that’s exactly what we did.”

SHARE YOUR MEMORIES

How has K-State helped your community or career? Share your experience on our 50th anniversary website at global.k-state.edu/50.
in industrial refrigeration, helping train engineers, designers, contractors and plant supervisors in refrigeration best practices. While his annual conference, the Industrial Refrigeration Workshop, serves a niche audience, those who attend receive valuable training that can't be found elsewhere.

“We make improvements every year,” Fenton said. “We change our lectures, we change the staff members who help us make the presentations. One of the things that’s important is I introduce the fundamental theory explaining how the equipment operates, followed by industry people making presentations concerning the applications of equipment. That helps the workshop have more depth than it would otherwise have.”

Fenton said his passion for putting on the conference continues to hold steady because of the opportunity to help newcomers avoid common pitfalls.

“What comes to my mind first is the direct interaction with people who are usually new to the field of industrial refrigeration,” he said. “It’s quite gratifying to be able to present information to tie all the aspects of the industrial refrigeration system together.”

Regardless of occupation, professional development is a key component of a well-built career and one of the easiest ways to stay up to date and informed on the nuances of any given industry.

Many of these conferences are specific even within one aspect of an industry, as is the case with the Industrial Refrigeration Workshop. Find a conference or noncredit opportunity relevant to you by browsing our conferences calendar at global.k-state.edu/conferences/current.
When Michael Moore left Kansas State University in the late 1970s, he didn't have a concrete plan. Born and raised in rural Kansas, he opted for something new, moving to the East Coast to live with an uncle and find his own way.

Now more than 35 years later, Moore smiles as he reflects on a career in the energy business that started from nothing and spanned the globe. A leg of that journey even earned him recognition from the Norwegian government in the form of knighthood, an honor he’ll treasure the rest of his life.
Humble beginnings

Moore grew up in Skiddy, Kansas, an unincorporated community about 30 miles southwest of Manhattan. After graduating from White City High School in 1975, Moore started work on a bachelor’s degree from Kansas State University in electrical engineering.

As he ventured into the business world, Moore found himself more and more distracted from his studies. Eventually, he opted to discontinue his education and find his own way in New York City. It was there that he began work as a commodity trader, a move that ultimately led to his hiring by one of his current employers, FearnOil Inc.

He quickly found success and his career led him all over the country and even the world, but he was constantly reminded of his decision to not finish school, especially in a business environment where many of his peers had advanced degrees.

“I got lucky,” Moore said. “I was able to dance through the world and have success. But there was a piece of me that regretted not finishing college. Of all the things I could do and had been doing, it was the one thing I hadn’t done, and I’m with this whole world of people that had.”

Unfinished business

After some encouragement from his family, Moore decided to look into his options to go back to school. He quickly discovered Kansas State University Global Campus, which gave him the chance to finish his coursework online and graduate from the institution where his educational journey began years before. Moore worked with K-State Global Campus advisors to develop a plan and find a degree that would best utilize the credits he had already earned before ultimately choosing interdisciplinary social sciences.

“It took four years and a lot of hours to cover,” Moore said. “Some subjects needed to be covered again. And it was a lot of work; there’s nothing easy about it. I have a family, I have a business and I travel a lot. And I didn’t want to take 20 years to do it. But I got it done.”

Moore, who graduated in 2008, said the online social sciences program he chose was accommodating of his unique situation as a nontraditional student, and he hopes others take the all-important first step toward exploring their educational options.

“At the end of the day, the opportunity for people like myself to have been able to come back and complete my education is huge,” Moore said. “I never bothered to try before because I never figured there was a way to do it without physically coming back to class, which there was no way I could. I couldn’t stop working because I have to pay bills, you know? I’m not independently wealthy, so I have to do my thing.”

The path to knighthood

Moore’s connection to Norway came through his ongoing work with FearnOil Inc. The connections only continued to grow as his career took him away from the commercial side of his commodity work and into the political realm.

At this point in his career, Moore has a diverse workload. He serves as vice president of energy commodities and advisory services for FearnOil Inc., a Houston-based division of a firm based in Oslo, Norway. He also runs an advisory service that keeps him in contact with many firms worldwide and is the executive director of the North American Carbon Capture & Storage Association, a nonprofit that supports the development of a sustainable carbon dioxide capture use and storage industry in the United States.

A colleague from Norway who had partnered with Moore on several advocacy projects, Norwegian Consul General Dr. Jostein Mykletun, entered Moore into the nomination process for the Royal Norwegian Order of Merit, an award given to foreigners for outstanding service in the interests of Norway.

“At the end of the day, the opportunity for people like myself to have been able to come back and complete my education is huge.”

— Michael Moore
It wasn’t long after Moore received a call from his firm in Norway. The king’s office had called and inquired about Moore.

“The guy on the phone says, ‘The king’s office doesn’t call us for anything. And of all people, they’re calling about you, an American in Houston,’” Moore said.

Soon after, arrangements were made for Moore to receive the award in Houston at the Norwegian consulate. He spoke at a luncheon in his honor, then was knighted by Norwegian officials.

Moore said finishing his degree gave him added confidence.

“Finishing the degree filled a gap in my personal psyche, and it just put a layer of support and confidence in me and my capacity to do things and get things done,” Moore said. “And did that have any impact on me getting the award as a knight? Who knows?

“But I say it sure didn’t hurt. And as a result of all these different things, it’s where I’m at today.”

**HAVE UNFINISHED BUSINESS?**

K-State Global Campus offers a variety of bachelor’s degree completion programs. Reach out and see how you can use the credits you’ve already earned and complete your degree by visiting [global.k-state.edu/distance/undergraduate](http://global.k-state.edu/distance/undergraduate).
A distinguished leader in the field of psychology, and more specifically, executive coaching, Joel DiGirolamo has built a career around the idea of coaching others to be their best in every sense. DiGirolamo, the 2016 Alumni Fellow for Kansas State University Global Campus, is the director of coaching science for the International Coach Federation, where he leads the organization’s efforts to develop, curate and disseminate information around the science of coaching.

He has more than 30 years of staff and management experience and has written two books. He graduated from K-State’s online industrial and organizational psychology master’s program in 2006 and also has a master’s degree in business administration from Xavier University and a bachelor’s degree in electrical engineering from Purdue University.

In the following Q-and-A, DiGirolamo describes his unique work in his own words.

**In terms of your career and the work you do, what is coaching?**

“Coaching can be very difficult to define, but the coaching that we talk about is a co-creating atmosphere. The coach will basically facilitate with the client what needs to happen. Do they need to grow? Do they need to change? The coach is really just a facilitator in helping to draw that out. The theory is the clients already have the answer inside them — the coach just needs to draw it out and work through them.

So the definition of coaching that we use is a very pure experience in that sense.”

**How is coaching different from any other leadership position?**

“The difference between coaching and leadership is that with coaching, you’re trying to draw out something from the client. You’re helping them to grow and to change. With leadership, there’s an element of guiding and controlling the direction of the way things are going. While the coaching can be an aspect of the leadership, the leadership is somewhat different from coaching.”

**Is there a difference between athletic coaching and life coaching?**

“(Laughing) An athletic coach tends to be very directional and controlling, saying, ‘This is the way you must do it. This is where you need to go.’ With an executive coach or a life coach, it’s much more open-ended. Here, we’re trying to get clients to understand where they might be able to explore, where they might be able to grow. One of the key elements is asking powerful questions.”

**What’s next for you in terms of career goals?**

“In the next three to five years, I’m looking to take the capability that we have and the access we have to coaches and do a lot of research to fundamentally understand what’s going on in coaching. How are the clients being helped to change and grow? And what are the elements of that, and how can we teach coaches to be more effective as a result of that? I’d really like to help the industry and help businesses and organizations to be higher performers, both the individuals and the teams, through this research.”

**What was it like to be named an Alumni Fellow?**

“Becoming a K-State Alumni Fellow is just a wonderful experience. I’m extremely grateful to have this honor, and it’s affirming to me that the path I’ve been on has been the right path for me. To be here in this capacity is very humbling. To be in the company of other Alumni Fellows has been very gratifying. Talking with them about their experiences and the path they’ve been on, and seeing how they may have been on journeys similar to mine and have been multifaceted. It’s very humbling and I’m very grateful for it.”

**TELL YOUR STORY**

K-State Alumni Fellows are both passionate and successful within their fields, but obviously aren’t the only ones. Tell us your story of how you’re using your K-State education to make a positive impact by emailing global@k-state.edu.
Mind the Gap
College of Education seeks to address teacher shortage with 12-month master’s degree
By Ashley Nietfeld

“Now they have a road to that goal from a trusted, cost-effective program.”

As many school districts in Kansas continue to struggle to find certified teachers to fill open positions, discussions around the state have pushed for alternative ways to educate potential teachers for the profession. In June, the Kansas State Board of Education approved a plan to allow unlicensed teachers into classrooms in high-need areas such as the Kansas City, Kansas, district.

The College of Education at Kansas State University has also taken steps to address this problem with the launch of an online Master of Arts in Teaching (MAT) program in May 2016. The program is an intensive, one-year degree designed for individuals with a bachelor’s degree who want to teach.

Debbie Mercer, dean of the College of Education, said the program can help address the teacher shortage not just in Kansas, but nationwide. It enables qualified Kansans and residents of other states to earn the degree in 12 months and be recommended for Kansas’ initial teacher licensure in grades K-6. Once out-of-state students pass the Kansas licensure exam, they can seek licensure in their home state.

“The college frequently receives inquiries from college graduates who want to become teachers but there has been no path available to them (through K-State for K-6) other than the bachelor’s degree in education,” Mercer said. “Now they have a road to that goal from a trusted, cost-effective program that has prepared teachers for more than 150 years.”

The MAT was also designated by the Kansas Board of Regents a Kansas Transitions to Teaching project in 2016 and could potentially have this designation in the future. The project provides $6,000 fellowships for up to 30 applicants from underserved school districts in Kansas. Fellows previously chosen must complete the program,
obtain the necessary licensure and engage in full-time teaching in an underserved geographic area in Kansas within six months of licensure. The targeted areas include Dodge City, Garden City, Liberal, Great Bend, Topeka and Kansas City, Kansas.

The MAT program, which was approved in mid-March, has already exceeded the college’s expectations for enrollment. Fifty-four students enrolled in the first course, a four-week intersession course called Social Foundations of Education. The students come from a wide variety of backgrounds — one student is a high school coach and another was a lawyer — and age ranges.

The rigorous curriculum is delivered online through K-State Global Campus, and field experiences are arranged in accredited elementary schools convenient to students in the program. The program uses tablets, such as iPads, and Swivl technology to connect students to instructors at K-State. The instructors will be able to perform video classroom observations and evaluations in real time, regardless of where the student is located.

The qualified professionals transitioning into teaching roles using the many innovative techniques offered in the MAT program make for a win-win situation for education in Kansas.

**INTERESTED IN TEACHING?**

Visit global.k-state.edu/education/mateaching for more information.
BRAND-AID

How to build and maintain your personal brand and professional online reputation

By Rosanna Vail

Tritia Moneypenny, 2016 graduate of K-State’s online youth development master’s program, developed a professional website and infographic resume to prepare for an employment transition.

“I enjoy having a place to showcase my skills and all that I’ve done in one place. I’ve sent people to my website if they’re interested in my services, and I include a link to the website and my LinkedIn profile in my email signature. I feel this adds credibility to my professional communications. I’ve received a lot of positive feedback.”

—Tritia Moneypenny
What would potential employers think if they saw your most recent online posts? If your answer is anywhere near “uh-oh,” read on.

Living and working in an increasingly connected world means the line between personal and professional communication becomes blurred. Dana Nordyke, senior assistant director of Kansas State University’s Career Center, says it’s critical to find a balance between expressing yourself in personal online situations and maintaining a professional persona. The way you’re known online can help or hurt your career.

“Personal branding is a combination of how you represent your own personal materials, like a website or a blog. It extends into how you represent yourself on social media and what somebody would see if they Googled you,” Nordyke said. “A reputation is how people perceive you and what you’re known for. They go hand in hand.”

While many professionals closely monitor their social media content — whether professional or personal accounts — it’s easy to forget what else contributes to a professional persona. Nordyke says how people respond in blog posts or online conversations within a particular field can also affect their reputation.

“When people read what you’ve written in online discussion boards, are you being argumentative or are you positioning yourself professionally?” she said. “You can still disagree and express your views or feelings so that they’re not overwhelming. Then you don’t put yourself at risk of a potential or even a current employer perceiving you the wrong way.”

Establishing your personal brand requires consistency, not only in how you communicate online, but also within your professional materials such as a resume or online portfolio. Nordyke says students and professionals should customize their materials for a specific job or employer. In terms of style and format, one size doesn’t fit all; everything depends on the industry.

“More and more students are developing online portfolios,” she said. “In some industries, the practice is well established, and in others, it’s an up-and-coming idea. For some positions, an infographic or other creative style of resume is the way to go. In others, a more traditional resume might be better based on what the employer is seeking or the specifications of how application materials are screened.”

Once you know the standards within your field, everything should feel like part of a cohesive set, from the resume and cover letter to the website or other materials. Nordyke advises students to consistently tell the same story in their materials — online, in print and in person.

“It’s about the industry you’re in right now, but also about where you want to be and how you can best target your materials,” she said. “You can change or improve your professional online reputation. It’s about being authentic and having your true self represented.”

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<td><strong>Google yourself.</strong> What are the top items that show up in the search? An online portfolio could help create a professional first impression.</td>
<td><strong>Shortchange yourself.</strong> Even if you’ve just graduated, you have skills and experiences to showcase online to future employers.</td>
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<td><strong>Customize content.</strong> When an employer sees your materials, they should feel like everything is developed specifically for them or that job.</td>
<td><strong>Forget the details.</strong> Use similar font styles and format your headings the same way. All the little things add up to the larger overall presence.</td>
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<td><strong>Communicate professionally.</strong> Differences of opinion, both in personal and professional settings, are OK. Keep the conversation respectful during disagreements.</td>
<td><strong>Be inappropriate.</strong> Even your personal and high-privacy social media accounts can affect your professional image if riddled with rants or questionable photos.</td>
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<td><strong>Follow the policies.</strong> Using photos or other content may require permission from the content owner. Be sure to respect privacy agreements and the rights to content.</td>
<td><strong>Make things complicated.</strong> Developing materials in a format that isn’t easy to update can take up more of your time. Find templates or resources that work best for you.</td>
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<td><strong>Get perspective.</strong> An advisor or professional in your industry can help review your materials to identify the look and feel. Is the tone appropriate? Is everything cohesive?</td>
<td><strong>Get discouraged.</strong> You can improve your personal brand and reputation. Start making your online presence more professional by filtering what you or others feed into your content.</td>
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Pay It Forward
Distance student’s scholarship fund impacts education of disabled veteran

By Ashley Nietfeld

When students enroll at Kansas State University Global Campus, they may expect to have limited interactions with other students. Often, this is not the case.

Whether it’s through group projects, message boards or, in the case of Allan D. Sicat and Crystal Miller, a scholarship, online students have a much bigger impact on one another than they may have ever imagined.

Sicat completed an online master’s degree in engineering management from K-State Global Campus in 2003. A graduate of the U.S. Military Academy at West Point and a U.S. Army officer, Sicat went on to become the president of Carousel Designs in Douglasville, Georgia. In 2011, he became the first distinguished K-State Global Campus Alumni Fellow.

Having developed a strong relationship with the university over the years, he felt a strong desire to give back and approached K-State Global Campus to set up a scholarship fund. Sicat committed to providing a $1,500 scholarship each year over the following five years. Active duty military and military veterans enrolled in a distance education program would be eligible to apply.

This year, Crystal Miller, Junction City, Kansas, was awarded the scholarship. Miller joined the Army in 2003 and attended basic training to become a member of the military police. She also completed three years in the reserves and spent time in Afghanistan supporting the troops. After breaking her hip, Miller is now a disabled veteran with a high degree of pain that sometimes leaves her unable to walk. She supports her family on a limited income while she works to earn a bachelor’s degree in family studies and human services.

“I really didn’t think that I could go.”
— Crystal Miller

“I have a lot of issues from being injured and this scholarship helps me immensely,” Miller said. “This completely boosts my spirit and gives me one more semester to go on.”

Growing up, Miller said she often went without food as a child and didn’t think she would ever go to college.

“I was the poor kid growing up in Las Vegas who heard other kids talking about going to college, and I thought it was too expensive for me,” Miller said. “So I really didn’t think that I could go.”

Miller said she has found her passion in her degree program and hopes to make a difference for children like her, who may be unaware of the funding options available to help them attend college.

ESTABLISH A SCHOLARSHIP

Interested in establishing a scholarship for distance students? Visit global.k-state.edu/students/tuition/scholarship for more information.
From left to right, Crystal Miller with her family, with her platoon and with her children.
HONORS AND AWARDS

Kansas State University Global Campus recently received awards through the Association for Continuing Higher Education (ACHE) and the University Professional and Continuing Education Association (UPCEA), as well as through K-State and the Greater Manhattan Community Foundation.

**NATIONAL AWARDS**

**ACHE Rising Star Award**
Jo Maseberg-Tomlinson, academic and professional programs coordinator, K-State Global Campus

**ACHE Emeritus Award**
Dave Stewart, recent retiree from the position of associate dean for program development and marketing, K-State Global Campus

**ACHE Outstanding Services to Underserved Populations Award**
Project EXCELL (Extended College Education for Lifelong Learning)

**REGIONAL AWARDS**

**UPCEA Engagement Award**
Women Managing the Farm Conference

**UPCEA Continuing Education Support Specialist Award — Staff in a Support Role**
Maleah Lundeen, student services and recruitment coordinator, K-State Global Campus

**LOCAL/KANSAS STATE UNIVERSITY AWARDS**

**Greater Manhattan Community Foundation Nonprofit Service Award**
UFM Community Learning Center

**K-State Alumni Association Anderson Senior Award for Outstanding Inspiration**
Stephanie Plaschka, ‘16, family studies and human services

**K-State Global Campus Excellence in Teaching Award**
Richard Rosenkranz, associate professor of food, nutrition, dietetics and health

**K-State Global Campus Extraordinary Student Award**
Patrice Lyon, food science master’s student

**K-State Global Campus Friend of Global Campus Award**
Greg Dressman, associate director of application infrastructure and integration, Office of Mediated Education

**K-State Global Campus Lynda Spire Positive Focus Award**
Jo Maseberg-Tomlinson, academic and professional programs coordinator, K-State Global Campus

**K-State Global Campus Outstanding Advisor Award**
Karla Girard, distance program coordinator, College of Human Ecology

Growing up, Stephanie Plaschka's family did not make education a priority. The first in her biological family to earn a high school diploma, Plaschka was told she would never be able to earn a degree, and for many years she believed it. Although she dreamt of going to law school, Plaschka's lack of confidence combined with her desire for a family led her to put that dream on hold. Instead, she got married and began to fulfill her dream of having children, giving birth to three kids.

After a divorce and a remarriage to a man with two children of his own, Plaschka became passionate about helping children of divorce and families dealing with custody issues. She realized that if she was ever going to achieve her dream of helping others transition more smoothly through divorce, she would need a college degree.

At 38 years old, the decision to go back to school is difficult for anyone. And Plaschka wouldn't be going to school for just a few years. She was committing to a bachelor's degree followed by law school — a daunting prospect at any age — with the goal of becoming a certified mediator and a Guardian ad Litem.

“I just started to be pulled toward helping people mediate divorce and...
custody, and helping them see successful families; that even though they went through divorce, they could still be a family, they could still co-parent and the kids would be better off in the end,” Plaschka said.

Her first semester of community college, Plaschka enrolled in 14 credit hours, despite the advice from her advisor and husband to start slowly and take classes part time. Although she was taking care of her family and working 40 hours a week at her job as a medical billing specialist, Plaschka earned high marks in all of her classes.

Within two years, she had graduated from Allen Community College in Iola, Kansas, with an Associate of Arts, the first in her family to earn an associate degree. With a graduating GPA of 3.779 and membership in the Phi Theta Kappa Honor Society, Plaschka set her sights on K-State.

At 40, Plaschka decided to take classes online rather than uproot her family. She enrolled in the family studies and human services bachelor's degree program. After two years and a lot of hard work, Plaschka earned not only her bachelor’s degree with honors, but also a minor in conflict analysis and trauma studies, and a certificate in conflict resolution. She became a member of the Phi Kappa Phi Honor Society and the Kappa Omicron Nu Honor Society, as well as the first member of her family to receive a bachelor's degree.

After hearing of Plaschka’s story, K-State Global Campus decided to nominate her for the K-State Alumni Association’s Anderson Senior Award for Outstanding Inspiration, an award given to seniors at K-State who have been inspirational to others. Another first to add to her basket, Plaschka became the first distance student to receive the award. She traveled to Manhattan to accept it at a luncheon in April, and a few weeks later returned to walk across the stage at graduation.

“When you reach this age and you’re doing something that’s not what everybody else is doing, you have this backlash that you’re wasting precious time with your family, you’re wasting family finances,” she said. “I’ve been able to push back on all of that and prove myself.”

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