



Editorial

The Soapbox: College continues to mature. Writer, too

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From humble beginnings, Copper Mountain College has grown to a full fledged, first rate, fully accredited, top notch, stand-alone institution of higher learning.

In what seems now like a previous lifetime — the 1970s — the Hi-Desert campus of College of the Desert was located in the on again, off again Blessed Sacrament Catholic school near the Joshua Tree National Monument Headquarters at the Oasis of Mara.

Additional classes were scattered around high schools and aboard the Marine Corps base. Not to take anything away from the quality of the teaching at the time, but such a learning environment lacked spirit. It had no soul.

To be certain, COD HD was expedient. Housewives took continuing ed courses. Veterans took advantage of their Vietnam-era G.I. Bill. A smattering of local high school students, including this young wanna-be journalist, stuck around the basin and knocked out their 101s tuition-free.

We called the grade school campus College of the Desperate. A high school with ash trays. With apologies to my instructors, some of whom are still around, I was underwhelmed with my initial collegiate experience.

The best thing the place had going for it was its location near the oasis, where I spent many brown bag lunches, boning up for an exam or just listening to bird songs. In something of a good news/bad news scenario, I soon learned colleges don't have truancy officers.

Turns out they didn't care too much one way or the other whether I showed up for class. And this 19-year-old had much more important things to do at that point in my life than waste time learning about the Hawley-Smoot Tariff of 1930, an act of Congress about which I still know not because I wasn't there that day.

But I digress. So much of the learning I received from Jim Hopkins' freshman composition and speech courses, and Merle Merritt's U.S. history and sociological analysis courses have come of use for me over the years.

I gained much from the Rev. Butch Fawnstock's philosophy "death" class, even though I flunked it because I chose not to write the requisite paper due to all of the other pressing priorities I had at the time.

Like tearing around the local roadways in my '66 GTO looking for trouble. Of which there is plenty around here, once you find out where to look.

My point is here somewhere. I'm still sorting it out. I guess what I'm beating around the dead horse about, is that you can lead a student to learning, but you can't make him think.

But a good start in the process is to build the student a full fledged, first rate, fully accredited, top notch, stand-alone institution of higher learning in his and her community. And that is what CMC has grown up to become.

With an excellent library, bookstore, science lab, art studio and automotive trades facility. To that physical plant, mix in a solid faculty and staff of quality people who genuinely care about the success of their students.

Add a cafeteria that breaks the college mold and serves food that actually tastes good. Top it off with an inspiring view of the Basin, the mountains and national park. That's a recipe for success that should be pleasing to any student's pallet.

But wait, there's more ... the place is still growing! One of the few active construction projects in the Basin is a multi-use sports complex that will keep CMC on the road to greatness.

Happy 25th anniversary, College of the People. I remember when you were just a little guy. Now you're all grewed up. I hope and I am confident that you will continue to mature and grow in size alongside the community you serve so well.

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Jimmy Biggerstaff is a Hi-Desert Star reporter and photographer.

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