

Blast from the past raises hope for the future

WAY BACK WHEN MARTY McFly first took the DeLorean for a spin and the walkman was the newest innovative technology, students were for the first time able to attend the first community college in Collin County.

Back in 1987, the population of Plano was less than half of its current number of 274,000, and Collin College had just been established and was graduating its first classes of students. Class of 1987 alumni and now Texas A&M University-Commerce professor Dr. Eric Gruver was one of the first graduates from Collin College and says his experiences at Collin College forever changed him.

"Several of my professors at Collin College really challenged me in different ways," Gruver said. "My professors showed me that higher education didn't have to be drudgery."

A Wylie High School graduate, Gruver focused on his core courses at Collin College, knowing he wanted to study history. His passion for history has turned into an expansive project that chronicles the oral history of war veterans.

"Growing up, my dad and I used to watch a lot of old war movies," Gruver explained. "From there, I started reading historical biographies, and I developed the love for learning about individual people and their experiences that grabbed my attention."

Now a professor teaching history at A&M-Commerce, Gruver uses his passion for history to create the East Texas War and Memory Project, which

chronicles the experiences of American veterans and their families.

"My students interview the subjects about their experiences and it really brings history home," Gruver said. "Students come to me saying, 'This



Dr. Eric Gruver (seated) began his academic career at Collin College.

person could be my grandfather.' We're trying to keep people in history and to give a veteran perspective as well as a family perspective of war and history."


Now in its second year, students involved in the project have interviewed more than 350 veterans and have added more than 4,000 items such as war letters and photos to the project's collection.

"The best part of my job and part of the project is watching students flourish," Gruver said. "I strive to build a dialogue with students and help them. I've learned that there really needs to be a rapport with students for them to succeed and I love building that with them."

Before students can get the chance to learn from enthusiastic professors like Professor Gruver, they have to get past financial considerations that could block their college path.

Currently, college debt for students is at an all-time high, and more than 70 percent of students are working full time or part time. Many students work multiple jobs. While Collin College has the lowest tuition in the state of Texas, many of the nearly 53,000 students who attend Collin College need assistance to further their higher education.

"A college education can have such a tremendous impact on a person's life," said District Interim President Dr. Colleen Smith. "Paying for college is a real concern for many students. In fact, more than 28,500 students requested assistance last year, and they desperately need our help to open the door to higher education. By raising money and making scholarships available to those who need it most, Collin College ensures access to excellent education, outstanding professors and state-of-the-art facilities."

To help students pay for college, Collin College will host the "Back to the Future" themed Stetson and Stiletto trivia night fundraiser, which raises money for student scholarships. The event will be held on Saturday, February 21 at the college's Spring Creek Campus Library in Plano. Corporate and individual sponsorship opportunities are available. For more information, visit www.collin.edu/foundation. 

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