

'Bittersweet'

Longtime MCC Chemistry Instructor Scott Smith retires

By Shelly Springborn

Some decisions are easier to make than others and Scott Smith's decision to retire wasn't one of them.

After 22 years as Montcalm Community College's Chemistry Instructor, Smith closed this chapter of his life at the end of June.

"It was a tough decision. Bittersweet," he said.

"Teaching has been fantastic," Smith said. "I love being in the classroom. I love doing chemical demonstrations. The students love it, too. When they see there's a demonstration in class, they get so excited."

Smith, of Alma, has a long history at the college where he started his journey as a student in 1977. He graduated from MCC in 1979 with an Associate in Arts and Science and completed the credits necessary to fulfill the requirements of the Michigan Association of Collegiate Registrars & Admissions Officers (MACRAO) transfer agreement. He was hired as a part-time instructor spring semester 1990 in MCC's Science Department and continued in this role until 1994. During this time, he also worked as a high school chemistry instructor at Heritage High School in Saginaw. In July 1994, he moved to Oregon where he was science instructor at Milo Academy. He moved back to Michigan in 1995 to teach chemistry at Fruitport High School. In June 1999, he once again joined MCC, this time as a full-time chemistry instructor.

Coming from a family with deep roots in teaching, Smith said he's glad he shifted his original career path to education.

"My first job out of college was as a microbiologist in Ohio," he said. "As soon as they got me out of the lab and into management, it wasn't much fun."



He said he was influenced by the long list of educators in his family, including his dad, the late Kenneth J. Smith, who served the college as a Natural Sciences Instructor for many years, and for whom the Kenneth J. Smith Instructional Building on the college's Sidney campus is named. He was also one of Scott's instructors when he was an MCC student.

Throughout the years, Smith has had a reputation around the college for creating fun and exciting science experiments, and he left behind a few marks on the ceiling of his classroom as a reminder. He has been recognized by his students for being "fantastic. He is enjoyable to listen to and is always upbeat in the classroom."

They laud him for being excited to teach everyday and for making classroom experiments "fun and engaging. His enthusiasm is the best. It's chemistry ... there is fire and interesting reactions. He is an awesome teacher!"

Smith said he enjoyed interacting with students and making the content of his lessons fun and memorable.

"I do get goofy in the classroom. It's because I'm having so much fun," he said with a grin that reached all the way to his eyes. "I do my best to have a smile on my face and to provide a positive experience for my students."

Early in his career, Smith learned some basic teaching techniques that he said worked for him throughout his time in the classroom.

"Say it, write it on the board, stand back and say it again. This style served me very well," he said. "I tried different techniques through the years, but my old standby has stood the test of time."

This also provided some challenges during the past year with shifts to online instruction during the height of the COVID pandemic.

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"It made me extra aware of face-to-face interactions," he said. "You just can't teach hands-on lab and interactive classes the same way online as you do in person."

He also said throughout the years, he learned to have more patience and to meet students where they are at.

"Those things come with experience. You never know what a student has going on in their personal life," he said.

Smith also credited the college with providing a university-level teaching environment.

"We have some awesome equipment in our lab – students get to be hands-on with equipment that they normally would not get to use until they were at the graduate level at a university," he said.

In retirement, Smith said he's looking forward to catching up on some projects at home, spending time with his family and especially his grandchildren, doing some work on the family farm and fishing. He hopes to continue teaching part-time, too.

"This has really been fun. It has been a treat to work at MCC. I will miss teaching and the interaction with students," Smith said. ■

