

Bruce Griffin played on MCC's first basketball team

By Shelly Springborn

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Athletics is about more than playing a game. It's an opportunity to build life skills.

Bruce Griffin, of Byron Center, played on Montcalm Community College's first basketball team from 1966 to 1968. He said the skills he learned on the court served him throughout his career and continue to support his work in retirement.

"Being on a team, you learn a lot about people," Griffin said.

Griffin came to MCC in fall 1966, after playing high school basketball in Grand Rapids. After trying out for and making it onto MCC's basketball team, Griffin moved to Greenville, renting a room from Marjorie and Jim Blinn, both art teachers at Greenville High School.

He has fond memories of his college basketball career.

"We didn't have a gym at the college, so we played at Central Montcalm High School," he said.

Griffin said he enjoys visiting the area with his wife, Doris, and reminiscing.

"I loved that little hamburger place on the corner," he said of what is now Cross Roads Diner on the corner of M-66 and Sidney Road. And when we drive by Central Montcalm High School, it brings back memories.

"Our team played Lansing Community College, Ferris, Muskegon, Grand Rapids Junior College – about 18 or 19 games per season," he said.

"I don't remember many of my teammates," he added.

“Being on a team, you learn a lot about people.”

–Bruce Griffin

“We played together, but we weren’t really close because there was not much campus life in the community college environment. After practice or a game, we all went our separate ways, but as a team, we were very close.”

However, he said he learned a lot from various experiences while at MCC.

Originally from Chicago, Griffin said it “was a different time. There was a lot of racial strife going on. I was the only black man on campus and I think in Greenville, too.

“There were times I didn’t really understand what was going on and would call my grandma back in Chicago to talk about it. But it was nice being here. Coming out here to campus was a respite,” he said of the college’s Sidney campus.

Griffin said when Martin Luther King, Jr., was assassinated, he came to class the next day and was not aware of what had happened.

“I was met at my car by one of the instructors and she told me about it. It was hard, but the staff and dean at the time were very supportive, and I’ll always remember the love and care they displayed,” he said.

At MCC, Griffin studied drafting. At the same time, he worked for Stan Ash at Greenville Tool and Die, where he sharpened his skills.

“He taught me a lot of things that served me well throughout my career,” Griffin said.

Griffin continued his education, earning a bachelor’s degree in Business from Aquinas College. After serving four years in the Airforce, he returned to the Grand Rapids area where he worked with AT&T for 30 years, working his way up from a technician to executive-level management. During much of his career, he also shared his passion for athletics and mentoring as a coach.

Griffin played basketball in the Air Force in Central and South America, where he was also a team captain. He went on to coach basketball at Tri-Unity Christian School in Wyoming, Mich., earning the 2002 Class D State Championship. As coach of the National Grand Rapids AYT Basketball, he led his team to a 2nd place finish at the University of Indiana Tournament. Griffin also coached golf at Tri Unity for six years.

“I got into coaching because I wanted to make a difference,” he said. “Mentoring young people is fulfilling.”

Life experiences are what shape you,” he said. “They have shaped my management style and how I act toward others.”

Long since retired from AT&T, Griffin continues sharing his experiences with others. He is a technical sales representative for Cobra/Puma Golf Company for outstate Michigan and he teaches golf, holding golf clinics for ladies and juniors.

“A lot of things I couldn’t do right now if it wasn’t for the experiences I have had,” he said. ■



Bruce Griffin holds a photo of the MCC basketball team he was a member of.