

Collar Named UW-LaCrosse Distinguished Graduate

Master teacher Bill Collar has stayed in the classroom for his love of teaching. There's widespread belief that if teachers don't become administrators, they aren't successful. Bill Collar says that's wrong - and he has his career to prove it. During 31 years of teaching, Collar has had the opportunity to step into an administrative role, but he enjoyed the classroom setting and teaching history so much he turned it down. "There are many of us teachers, who love what we're doing and are having a great time," he explains.

Collar says a key to good education is for teachers to find out what works for each student. "All students are gifted at something," he notes. "It's a teacher's responsibility to find out what that gift is and how to get the student to use it." Often it's not what teachers say or how they teach, but it's how they lead. In fact, Collar says it's best to get students to learn from one another. "It's better to become the guide on the side instead of the sage on the stage," he says. "It is important to set a good example for the students. Teach who you are first, then what you know."

Another way to reach students, according to Collar, is to get them interested in something besides classes and homework. He should know. He came to UW-L in the late '60s, fueled by a desire to play football. But during the first week of practice he broke his ankle. His father came to take him home, but Coach E. William Vickroy convinced them that college was more than athletics. Collar stayed. His grades weren't very commendable his freshman year, but they improved when he went back on the gridiron the next fall. The experience helped him realize he should enter teaching and coaching.

More than 30 years later, he still believes the two go hand in hand. "I believe a successful coach must take pride in being an excellent teacher," he says. "The athletic field is simply an extension of the classroom where students learn lasting lessons about life. I've taken pride in doing a great job in the classroom, as well as on the football field."

Collar says if he wasn't so busy teaching, coaching football and track, and running a weightlifting program, he probably would have been an advisor in forensics or drama. "It's important for students to develop their skills outside the classroom. The concept of making a commitment to a team is essential in life". Collar says often life's lessons are more important than the facts students may be required to remember. "It's all about teaching students life-long lessons and when they learn some history along the way, that's great."

Collar, who earned a bachelor's degree in 1966 and a master's in 1968, says many college professors at UW-LaCrosse had a great impact on his life. It's something that Collar, obviously, has taken into his classroom at Seymour High School. He was named 1977 Wisconsin History Teacher of the Year and 1988 Wisconsin Teacher of the Year.

To avoid becoming routine, Collar changes his classes each year. He has taught high school juniors for the last 29 years and utilizes a wide variety of methodologies. "It's very invigorating to be around people that age, they have so much energy," he explains. "The most rewarding thing is to see the growth of the students from the beginning of the year to the end.

In more recent years Collar has taken what he has learned in the classroom on the road. Collar has spoken at numerous state and regional meetings of teachers, coaches and business leaders about "P.M.A." - Positive Mental Attitude.

Apparently, Collar practices what he teaches at home, too. He and his wife, Holly, a 1966 UW-L graduate and former teacher, have three daughters - all teachers.

The Collar File:

- * Two degrees from UW-L - Bachelor's degree, 1966; Master's degree, 1968.
- * History teacher and coach, Antigo, Wis. High School, 1966-68.
- * Associate Director of UW-L housing office and offensive line coach, 1968-1972.
- * Directed a Football Line Camp on campus that is still popular.
- * History teacher, head football coach and assistant track coach at Seymour High School, 1972-2001.
- * Director of the state's Teacher World program and helped establish the Teacher Forum in Madison.
- * Wisconsin Social Studies Teacher of the Year - 1977.
- * Wisconsin Football Coach of the Year - 1985.
- * Wisconsin High School Teacher of the Year - 1988.
- * Inducted into UW-L Wall of Fame, 1994
- * Instrumental in organizing Seymour's Historical Society, Museum, and Hamburger Festival.
- * Planner and coordinator of the Seymour Community Fitness Center
- * Nationally certified Strength and Conditioning Specialist
- * Wisconsin Football Coaches Association Hall of Fame, 2000.

