Federal Way teacher named 2016 Distinguished Alumnus

The Centralia College Foundation is pleased to announce Ron Podmore, a 1987 graduate of Centralia College, as the 2016 Distinguished Alumnus.

Podmore is a 1985 graduate of W.F. West High School in Chehalis. He started taking classes at Centralia College that fall and earned an associate of arts degree in the spring of 1987. He went on to Gallaudet University in Washington, D.C., and later earned a bachelor’s degree at Western Washington University, a master’s degree in education from Lewis and Clark College Law School, and an administrative license from Pacific Lutheran University.

“The very foundation of my post-secondary success lies in what seeds were planted while I was at Centralia College,” Podmore said. “For that, I am ever grateful for the instruction I received. Without it, I would not have gotten where I am today. Centralia College played a pivotal role in unlocking my academic potential.

In 1999, he received the Golden Apple Award from PBS/KCTS. He was the first deaf teacher to receive the award. In 2009, he became the first Deaf American to achieve National Board Professional Teaching Standards certification. For the past four years, he has been an arts and humanities professor at Bellevue College. In addition, for the last 20 years, he has taught college-readiness, STEM (Science, Technology, Engineering, Math), and American Sign Language for Federal Way Public Schools.

Most recently, he returned to Washington, D.C., to work with the National Board for Professional Teaching Standards Foundation. Each month, he and a team of nine others wrote standards for the rigorous national board exams.

In his free time, he has published two books. He was the authorized biographer to Academy Award winning actress Marlee Matlin. He has participated in multiple humanitarian trips to Guatemala, working with the Mayan deaf population in the UNESCO village of Antigua.

Podmore will be a featured speaker at Centralia College’s commencement ceremony in June.

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ALUMNI SPOTLIGHT – JOEY VETTER

Growing up in Pe Ell, Joey Vetter first thought he wanted to be an architect. Wanting to see what college was like, he attended Centralia College as a junior in high school through the Running Start program. But, after two quarters, he decided he wanted to spend more time with friends and participate in high school sports. It was a good choice - with his help, the Pe Ell boys’ basketball team went on to become 2009-10 state champions.

After high school, he wanted to get some required classes out of the way before attending Washington State University to become an architect, and received a scholarship from the Centralia College Foundation.

“The scholarship really helped me focus on school rather than worry about getting a job,” Vetter said. “Centralia College is a great way to transition from high school before going to a four-year college, with good class sizes that allow you to meet with teachers when necessary. It allowed me to ease myself into the college experience while staying close to home.”

Centralia College is also where he met the woman who would ultimately become his wife, Bethany Elliot. She earned an associate degree at Centralia College and now teaches in the Head Start program for the Centralia School District.

After his first quarter in the architecture program at WSU, Vetter decided he didn’t want to be an architect, after all.

“There just wasn’t enough math in it for me,’ Vetter explained. “My first architecture class was in abstract art and had nothing to do with buildings. I like working with numbers, so I shifted my focus to accounting.”

That seems to have been a good choice, too. Vetter is currently an assistant state auditor for the State Auditor’s Office. He audits local governments around Lewis, Pacific, Thurston, and Grays Harbor counties.

“I recently had to audit Centralia College,” Vetter said. “It may not be the last time, we’ll just have to wait and see.”

Goals often change with time, and this holds true for one of Lewis County’s own.

CC SEEKS NEW PRESIDENT

Centralia College is actively searching for a new president. The search went live Feb. 8 with the goal of having a permanent president at the helm by July 1.

As part of the search process, the community will be invited to meet the finalists at a series of community forums. Watch the college website at www.centralia.edu for details on the president search.

Since January, Dr. James Walton has been serving as interim president of Centralia College, following a December decision by the Board of Trustees to sever ties with former president Dr. Robert Frost.

The board’s decision to contact Walton to serve as interim president was the direct result of feedback from community members, alumni, students, faculty, and staff, who stressed the importance of appointing someone from inside the Centralia College family.

Dr. Walton was the Centralia College president for 12 years. He retired June 2014.
Centralia College’s Volunteer Income Tax Assistance (VITA) program is offered as a service to the community. Accounting students volunteer their time and skills, and gain critical experience working in real-world situations.

“For student volunteers who run the VITA program, this opportunity means hands-on practice outside the classroom,” explained Otto Rabe, accounting professor. “Second-year students help complete tax forms under the supervision of third- and fourth-year students, who provide quality control. It’s a powerful learning experience and a great community service. A lot of people are intimidated by income taxes. We’re here to help.”

“Having the extra help with scholarships through the foundation has made life a lot easier while achieving my goals,” Elva said. “I’m now on a strong path for myself and my family’s security.”

In fewer than six months, Elva earned her GED and immediately set her sights on her next goal.

She earned an associate degree in accounting and finance in 2013, and then an associate degree in business in 2014. Elva is now in the two-year track to earn her Bachelor of Applied Science in Applied Management (BAS-AM) degree with a focus on accounting. She is expected to finish in the spring of 2017.

While earning her associate degree, Elva also began working for the college as a student worker in the TRIO program. She started as a part-time employee, but is now working full-time as an administrative assistant for the program. Although she just recently began the BAS-AM program, Elva is well on her way to the successful life she envisioned for herself and her children.

“It hasn’t been easy, and it’s a lot of work and responsibility, but I can see the light at the end of the tunnel,” Elva said. “Besides, I want to be a good example for my children, showing them a better way to live.”

**CENTRALIA COLLEGE TO OFFER FREE TAX HELP**

**Accounting professor Otto Rabe (Center) and his students can help prepare taxes through April 15.**

This free service is open to all local residents. (Those requiring an IRS Schedule C are only eligible if their self-employment income is $25,000 or less.)

The Volunteer Income Tax Assistance Program will operate from 9 a.m. to 3 p.m. Feb. 1 – April 15 in the Washington Hall Tax Lab, Room 110. Interested people can schedule an appointment by calling the Tax Lab at 360-736-9391, ext. 390. Drop-ins are also welcome.

In addition to their W2 forms, residents will need to bring two forms of identification and any supporting documentation, including bank account information, if they wish to have their tax return directly deposited into their account.
What if you could make a lasting and permanent gift, one that was bigger than you ever dreamed possible? And, what if you could do it in a way that honored and protected your loved ones’ inheritance at the same time?

Centralia College Foundation’s Legacy Society may be the perfect option for you. The Legacy Society allows the foundation to thank a very special group of people: those who have included the foundation in their future giving and estate plans.

As a Legacy Society member, you are honored on a special plaque that hangs in a prominent place on the Centralia College campus. Additionally, you receive a beautifully framed certificate, and are invited as a special guest to special foundation events.

Becoming a member of the Legacy Society is simple. Visit online at foundation.centralia.edu/trusts or call the foundation office at 360-736-9391, ext. 290, for details.
On Jan. 15, in the foyer of the gymnasium, Centralia College signed its first-ever players for a women’s soccer program. The team is expected to hit the field for the first time this fall, but Coach Horst Malunat has been working around the clock for months securing players.

The signing event in January was the culmination of months of hard work. Seven players were at the event.

Coach Malunat coached boys and girls soccer in Toledo and Winlock for 13 years. He led the Toledo-Winlock combined boys soccer team, United, to the State 1A playoffs. He started the Clark College women’s soccer program in 2000 and helped start the Skyview High School girls soccer program in Vancouver.

For more information, contact Coach Malunat at 360-751-5664 or cmalunat@centralia.edu.

Letters of Intent have been signed by the following players:
- Joni Lancaster – Rochester High School
- Grace Hamre – Napavine High School
- Sierra Seymour – Rochester High School
- Michelle Gleason – Winlock High School
- Emily Henderson – Hudson Bay High School (Vancouver)
- Salesha Harrah – Tumwater High School
- Kelsey Aselton – Adna High School
- Hailey Dickinson – Napavine High School
- Jamie Crews – Tumwater High School
- Keely Thomas – Timberline High School
- Megan Roorda – Tenino High School
- Sidney Rees – Black Hills High School

Centralia College Assistant Professor of Economics Paul Suozzo is unveiling a brand new economics course during spring quarter. Economics 180, Economic Systems, is being offered from 12 to 12:50 p.m. every day. It’s a five-credit course. There are no prerequisites.

Suozzo received a Northwest International Education Association grant to fund the new course, which exposes students to international economic systems and alternate approaches to managing the economy.

Suozzo, who has been teaching since 1999, has worked with many foreign students at Centralia College. It was through these interactions that he met Laju Nankani, director of International Programs, and was invited to attend the Northwest International Education Association meeting, where he first learned of the grant opportunity.

“As soon as I read the grant description, I knew my new course would be a shoe-in!” Suozzo said.

His course was one of two selected for a new course grant of $1,250.

On his travels to Europe and South Africa, Suozzo had the opportunity to observe several alternative approaches to economics. He hopes his new class “will internationalize student perspectives and cause them to think outside of conventional American bounds.”

In addition, he believes this class has the potential to lead to the formation of student clubs, travel, and study abroad.

For registration information, see “Economics” in the class schedule.

The Centralia College Foundation has partnered with Express Employment Professionals, Lewis EDC, Centralia-Chehalis Chamber of Commerce, and United Way to broadcast the Refresh Leadership Simulcast live from 9 to 12:30 p.m. April 13 in the Corbet Theatre at Centralia College. This leadership event will feature presentations from Shaquille O’Neal, 15-time NBA All-Star, Marshall Goldsmith, author, professor, and executive coach, and Kaplan Mobray, author, motivational speaker, and career consultant. This leadership event is presented as part of the Ellis Oliver Speaker Series. There is no cost to attend. Coffee and pastries will be provided from 8:15 to 8:45 a.m. For more information, contact the Foundation office at 360-736-9391, ext. 290.

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Contact the Centralia College Foundation to learn how you can pay it forward.

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