

Students 'dig' geology professor

BY SANDRA DALKA-PRISY
CORRESPONDENT

He's known as "The Rock Master" by students at Schoolcraft College and this is a fitting title for Jim Rexius. He has, after all, a master's degree, and it is in geology. But the title only begins to describe this passionate professor, who has shared his love and knowledge for rocks and all things geological with students for more than 25 years.

Rexius' career path began to take shape when he served in the U.S. Navy in the 1960s and traveled the world, including a stint in Vietnam.



Jim Rexius on Wizard Island.

Philippines and Japan. "For a Michigan boy from Saginaw, which is located in one of the state's flattest counties, these enormous geological formations were awesome," he said.

After he was discharged from the service, Rexius ended up in California, where he performed in a blues band for two years. He played the piano, drums and a harmonica "with the band in small clubs at night and went to college during the day on the G.I. Bill.

NEWFOUND INTEREST

"I didn't know what I wanted to do or be until I discovered a special book in the college bookstore. I opened this book, looked at the pictures of volcanoes and other geological sites and let out a loud 'WOW!' I then looked at the book's one-word title and decided this was it. I would study G-E-O-L-O-G-Y."

He returned to Michigan and the University of Michigan for his undergraduate degree. He then attended Eastern Michigan University and was asked by the department head "even before I had completed work on my master's degree" to teach night classes in geology off-site in Detroit for policemen and firefighters. "I was the only choice available. The professors didn't want to travel off campus to teach a class."

According to Rexius, during his

college years he found that many geology professors were dull teachers.

"They presented great information about exciting things, but their classes were boring," he said. "When I had the opportunity to teach I resolved to do better. I would make the subject as exciting as it was."

This was and continues to be his goal.

WELL-LIKED PROFESSOR

A background as a performer and a love of geology have made Rexius one of the most popular professors on the Livonia campus, where he has been happily entrenched since 1979. There is always a long line of students hoping to get one of the 30 seats in his classes.

"His classes are so popular because he really cares about his students and does special things for them," said Midge Carleton, who recently retired as the college's dean of Science and Nursing. "He has a love of geology, which he transfers through his enthusiasm to his students." She added that he goes the extra steps and puts in a great deal of effort to make his classroom material and presentations interesting.

According to the geology professor, there are an abundance of ways to keep students interested and awake. "I throw in funny pictures of myself during slide show presentations, such as one of me sitting on a dead bear. (He was quick to add that someone else killed the bear.)

"Making my class enjoyable is my first priority. I'll do just about anything to help the students learn," said the enthusiastic teacher. With a mischievous glint in his eye, he emphasized "just about anything." Once he threw some volcanic ash just as a volcano was erupting during a movie presentation in his classroom.

"This got the students' attention. "I want my students to appreciate what I have discovered... that geology has a great deal to offer," Rexius added. "This is why I use some unorthodox teaching methods. It's also the reason I plan two-week study trips, basically in North America. I want the students to get up close to many of the things and places we study in class."

TRAVELING MAN

A 1995 trip took him and 25 students to Costa Rica to observe an active volcano. "We wanted to see the eruption at night so we lined up chairs facing the volcano outside the lodge where we were staying and waited, and waited, and waited. Seven hours later, we finally went to bed.

"An hour later, we were awakened from our sleep by the eruption. We all ran outside in various states of undress, including many of us in the nude because of the tropical heat. But this didn't matter, the students didn't notice.

"You know you're doing a good job when your young students are more interested in seeing the beauty of a volcano erupting than unclothed members of the opposite sex."

Hawaii, Mount St. Helen in the Cascade Mountains in Washington and the Grand Canyon have been destinations of other student trips over the years.

"My dream is to visit Iceland to observe the interplay of fire and ice. It's one of those rare places where volcanoes erupt under glaciers."

Other future plans for this Farmington Hills resident include getting involved in community theater and performing on stage; writing and publishing a book on geological sites off Michigan trails, and taking part in Civil War re-enactments. "I'll have to be a general or some other top guy, so I guess I better learn to ride a horse."

ANNOUNCEMENTS

Stevens-Fleck

Geoff and Jan Stevens of West Bloomfield announce the engagement of their daughter, Tracey, to Ed Fleck, son of John and Joanne Fleck of Farmington Hills.

The bride-to-be is a graduate of Wayne State University. She is a physical therapist at Maines and Dean Physical Therapy in Brighton and a lecture/lab instructor for the physical therapy master's program at Wayne State University.

Her fiancé is a graduate of Wayne State University. He is a registered nurse at Detroit Receiving Hospital. A May wedding is planned at Prince of Peace Catholic Church in West Bloomfield.



Cuniffe 60th

Marie Terece (Chatel) and John Patrick Cuniffe of Farmington and Melbourne, Fla., celebrate their 60th wedding anniversary on May 8.

The couple were married at St. Bridget's Catholic Church in Detroit in 1943. "Jack" and Marie have 11 children, 21 grandchildren and two great-grandchildren.



Gold-Stillman

Francine and Edward Gold of Bloomfield Hills announce the engagement of their daughter, Karen Beth, to Nathaniel Noah Stillman, son of Joanne and Philip Stillman of Boca Raton, Fla.

The bride-to-be is a graduate of the University of Wisconsin. She is a senior vice president at Fleishman-Hillard International Communications in Chicago.

Her fiancé is a graduate of Arizona State University. He is the director of business development for Career Sports Management in Chicago.

An August wedding is planned at the Townsend Hotel in Birmingham.



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