

Centralia College's Distinguished Alumnus Overcomes Adversity

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Distinguished Alumnus Ron Podmore receives a standing ovation after being recognized as Centralia College's 2016 Distinguished Alumnus at a luncheon on campus Friday afternoon. Podmore is a deaf teacher, publisher of two books, and is involved in humanitarian trips to Guatemala.

Ron Podmore has several degrees, but during his high school days, he was ready to drop out of school.

Podmore, who is deaf, said he struggled through the education system and no longer wanted to be an outcast or misfit.

He was born with mild to moderate hearing loss, and now only has about 30 to 40 percent of his hearing left.

It wasn't until he attended Centralia College that he found acceptance in an educational setting and a love in furthering his education. He credits several educators at the college for continuing to push him to find his dreams, and discover his capabilities.

"The very foundation of my post-secondary success lies in what seeds were planted while I was at Centralia College," he said.

He urged those around people with disabilities to extend a helping hand and to provide guidance to those who need it — something he wishes he had more of during his high school years.

On Friday, Podmore was honored at a luncheon, adding his name to a long list of the college's Distinguished Alumnus winners.

"You will now become part of the college's history and join these extremely impressive people," Centralia College Interim President Jim Walton said.

After graduating high school in Chehalis in 1985, his father, Ray, sent Podmore to stay with family in Europe, where he continually received advice to attend college. If he decided not to continue his secondary education, Podmore would have had to work with his father's roofing crew.

After he returned, he agreed to take a few classes at Centralia College, and later earned his associate's degree in 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 School of Education and Counseling, and an administrative license from Pacific Lutheran University. He has also published two books.

In 1999, he was the first deaf teacher to receive the Golden Apple Award, which recognizes individuals and programs that make a dramatic difference in education in grades pre-K through 12th grade. He was also the first deaf American to achieve National Board Professional Teaching Standards certification in 2009, giving him the accreditation to teach anywhere in the nation.

Since 2012, he has been an arts and humanities professor at Bellevue College, and has taught college-readiness for the last 20 years, as well as STEM — science, technology, engineering, math — and American Sign Language for Federal Way Public Schools.

He enjoys helping students who face adversity because he has experienced it himself, he said.

Residing in Federal Way, and summering in Palm Beach, California, the 49-year-old has been involved in numerous humanitarian trips to Guatemala, helping to provide school supplies to children in need.

Although his career has not quite panned out like he had expected, he said he has enjoyed teaching. Originally, he hoped to become a principal or a superintendent, but he said the path he is now on, especially in reference to his humanitarian work, is the correct one for him. His future is still unknown. He will likely continue teaching for three more years, and then he said he would like to do more enrichment work in countries like Guatemala.

"The need there is so great, I can see going down for extended periods of time," he said. "I'm approaching 50 and there is still a lot of things I want to do."

He said someday he'd like to maybe work for the Gates Foundation, or another nonprofit that shares his motivation for helping others.

His mother, Judy, said the family is extremely proud of Podmore and everything he has

accomplished.

“High school was not one of his favorites because of his hearing probably,” she said. “We told him college would be different than high school.”

Podmore agreed with his mother’s assessment, stating Centralia College infused a passion and love for learning, something he enjoyed as he continued his education.

The college creates a sense of community and commitment, he said.

Along with the Distinguished Alumnus award, Podmore spoke at Centralia College’s Commencement Ceremony on Friday afternoon.