

Long-time friends follow the same education path

by Stella Shepard

Adult Education

Tom McGrath and Kevin Sampson are long-time friends with a lot in common. They both live in the Morell area and have travelled down the same employment path over the years. Right now they are on the same educational highway, which they hope will lead to good employment prospects.

Tom and Kevin are classmates at the **Adult & Community Education (ACE)** program in Morell. Tom enrolled in the program in 2009, unaware that Kevin had recently joined. They studied together to prepare for the GED tests. A few months later, they wrote the tests and proudly earned GED certificates.

Tom and Kevin decided to continue their academic studies. They are both studying physics, and oceanography to qualify for a college pipefitting program. After completing the trades program, they plan to travel to western Canada to work for the same oil rig company. The following is the story of their personal career journeys.

Tom's career journey

Tom was only 12 years old when he started fishing for a living. At 18, he left this seasonal job to work year-round. For 15 years, he worked at a meat packing plant that went out of business. Unemployed and with three children to support, Tom began fishing and working seasonal jobs.

"When I was young, I had no interest in school and quit. A lack of education kept me from being promoted at the plant," says Tom. "Not having an education robbed me of the confidence to do any job that required paperwork.

"I wanted to enroll in an adult education program for years but didn't think I could do the work. I would often see Anne Morrison (ACE instructor) walking to work. I would jokingly tell her that I was going to enroll. She would say, 'we'll be waiting for you.' Truth was, I wanted to enroll but I was just too scared.

"The fishing industry started to decline and I was getting less work. I knew that I needed a grade 12 education if I wanted a good paying, year-round job," says Tom McGrath.

"It was pretty scary stepping into the classroom that first day. But it didn't take long to feel comfortable. I really enjoy learning. Learning subjects that I've never studied before is easier than I thought."



Tom McGrath and Kevin Sampson are long-time friends who enrolled in the Adult & Community Education program in Morell. Both earned their GED and are now studying physics and oceanography. They plan to enroll in a pipefitting course in the fall.

Kevin's career journey

Kevin works as a buyer in the fishing industry. Over the past 20 years, he witnessed the decline in the industry. "Years ago, I could expect to work six months of the year," says Kevin. "Today, I am doing good to work three months.

"Without a grade 12 diploma, I had to settle for low paying, seasonal work. I became tired of the routine of drawing employment insurance. It feels good that I can now put on my resumé that I have a grade 12 education."

"I wanted to enroll in adult education for years but didn't think I was capable of doing the work," says Kevin. "Former ACE students highly recommended the program, which encouraged me to enroll. My wife and I have a family of seven. I decided to enroll in the ACE program when our daughter was in grade 12 so we could graduate together. It was a very proud moment for both of us when I got my GED the same time as she graduated.

"The worst part of enrolling was walking in the door the first day. Anne and Peter, the instructors, made me feel welcome and it wasn't long before I was comfortable in the classroom.

"If I am having difficulties with some areas of math, such as fractions, I pull out the measuring tape I used while doing carpentry work and apply some common sense to the problem. I discovered that math is not as difficult as I thought it would be.

"We have two more children in high school. As well, our older children have worked hard for their university education and careers. My children were my inspiration to earn my grade 12 education," says Kevin.

ACE enrollment in Morell has increased

Anne Morrison, instructor with the Adult & Community Education in Morell, says enrollment has increased in the last two years. "In the past four or five years enrollment declined," says Anne. "Last year, it started to improve, and this year it really picked up.

"About 18 students were enrolled in 2009, which is considered a high number for a small community. This year, we have 26 students and more are waiting for approval. Student ages range from 19 to 60 years.

"More young people are deciding to go back to school. They are high school graduates who are searching for a career and need to upgrade their marks. While in high school, a passing mark might have been enough. Now they want careers and need to upgrade their academic levels.

"Many in the older group are enrolled because of the decline of the fishing industry. Also, people can only do physical labour for so long before it becomes too hard on the body. They need to upgrade their education to pursue other career interests.

"About six women in the ACE program are considering a career in the health field. A couple of women are considering a career in the trades. Many of the men are headed towards the trades or marine technology.

"We are a small community within the classroom. Most of the people know each other outside of the ACE program. They encourage and care for each other like an extended family."

For more information about **Adult & Community Education**, contact the central office at 566-9628 or toll free 1-800-446-5265 (press 3).