

# Timely intercessions by a caring instructor loom large in this graduate's success story



James L. Steck

As we look back on life, we often remember what I like to call "pivot points," moments in time when one decision — or perhaps a word or gesture from one special person — helped us change course and become what we're meant to be. As educators, the faculty and staff at Ivy Tech Community College – Richmond *live* for those pivot points. We're lucky, really — privileged to occupy an important niche in the lives of our students.

As they seek to improve their lives and reach their goals, we can sometimes be there at those pivot points. We can make a difference. In fact, Ivy Tech instructors do it every day, and the proof of that is evident in the lives of our graduates.

Consider Richmond native Marion Rhodus, for example. Marion is 53 years old, a successful accountant and management executive. He and his wife Judy have been married for 35 years and have three grown children and an 8-year-old grandson. He owns a beautiful home and commutes daily to what he calls "a great job." Marion is Director of Finance and Administrative Services at the Butler County (Ohio) Mental Health Board — the agency charged with developing and implementing a comprehensive mental health system for the entire county of some 350,000 residents. Essentially, he's responsible for handling the financial and operational aspects of the agency, keeping the office running smoothly so the mental health professionals can focus on providing the services so vital to so many.

Marion's very good at what he does — a fact reflected in the 23% salary increase he got when he accepted the job at the agency about a year ago, transferring from a similar position in an adjacent county. He has an associate degree in accounting from Ivy Tech, a bachelor of science in management and accounting from Park University, and just this year he finished a master's degree in public administration from the University of Colorado-Denver. In short, Marion Rhodus has made it. He's a success by any measure.

But it wasn't always so. Marion's success was by no means a sure thing, and it didn't come easy. "I grew up on the poor side of town," Marion recalls. "Went to what was perceived as the worst elementary school in Richmond...and I had limited advantages." The oldest of eight children, Marion graduated from Richmond High School in 1973. He tried several jobs — including a management-training position with a cafeteria chain and stints in collections and in management for a finance company — but always found his chances for advancement limited by his lack of education. He enrolled at Indiana

University East, but dropped out fairly quickly. By the mid-1980s, with two children, an unsatisfying job and few prospects, Marion knew he had to make a change. "My wife and I lived in a little old mobile home on the east side of Richmond that had a fake roof on it," he says. "At age 30 I said to myself: 'You have got to do something because more of the same will only get you more of the same, and it is not working.'"

Marion had reached a pivot point. He decided to give college another try, and this time he turned to

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*Marion Rhodus*



**Marion Rhodus credits Ivy Tech Instructor Peggy Berrier with making "the difference."**

Ivy Tech. What he found here changed his life — more accurately, it was *who* he found that really made the difference.

"For me, the best break was that I got a teacher named Peggy Berrier," Marion says. "I don't know what that little woman has going for her, but I felt a connection to her early on." Though challenged by the material in his accounting classes — even those taught by Berrier, his favorite professor — Marion got the support he needed to succeed. And when the barriers he faced seemed too high and his confidence waned, Berrier was always right there to keep him on track.

"Peggy and I would talk because I was a little stubborn then, and she knew that about me. Really, it was disguised desperation," Marion says. "I recall talking to her in the hall one day, and I was telling her I was about to drop out of intermediate accounting. I felt burnt out by all the accounting classes and given how complicated intermediate accounting is I thought I should change to something else. She began sharing with me the many things she recalled about our time together in class and that she thought I was making a wrong decision." In short, Berrier was there for Marion at yet another pivot point. She convinced the faltering student not to give up, that he really *did* have what it takes. "All I can say is that woman has some kind of magic that is rarely found in teachers, at least in my experience with teachers."

And Berrier's magic extended far beyond the classroom. She was instrumental in helping Marion find a better job as he attended Ivy Tech — as the

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office manager for a local auto dealership. He held that job for three years; not only did it improve his family's financial situation at the time, it also afforded him valuable management experience that he still draws on today. And yet, looking back, Marion insists he would never have had the confidence to apply for the position without Berrier's encouragement.

"I had several excellent teachers at Ivy Tech, but Peggy Berrier topped them all," Marion says. "I simply would not be where I am today if it had not been for how she respected me as a person. There is no doubt in my mind that she made the difference for me."

Two decades later, Peggy Berrier is still making a difference for her students. She lives in Florida now, but still conducts online courses as an adjunct member of our faculty. And she is just one of scores of dedicated Ivy Tech instructors who make it their business to help their students succeed — both in the classroom and in the real world.

In fact, if you've reached a pivot point here at Ivy Tech – Richmond, chances are good you'll find one of those dedicated instructors right there beside you.

James L. Steck, Chancellor  
Ivy Tech Community College of  
Indiana – Richmond



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