Coffee shop owner sponsors scholarship

Oliver Burnette keeps up on UMKC changes at his coffee shop near 51st and Oak streets.

As a 2001 graduate of the College of Arts and Sciences and founder and owner of Muddy's Coffeehouse, Oliver Burnette doesn't just observe UMKC from across the street; he loves it.

Burnette grew up in Lone Jack, Mo., but once he came to UMKC, he quickly felt at home. Now, not only does he work at UMKC as a local business owner, but he also is in the community as a resident.

“I love the neighborhood and the new energy that UMKC students bring to it every year,” Burnette says.

Part of the energy Burnette speaks of comes from the diversity of experiences represented in UMKC’s student body. When Burnette was a UMKC student, he contributed unique experiences of his own by participating in the study abroad program. Burnette spent two years in Spain, where he developed a love for travel and meeting people from around the world. Now, Burnette spends as much time as possible traveling the globe, but when he’s home, he loves existing with international students attending UMKC and hopes the University will always be part of their lives.

Burnette employs UMKC students and embraces the opportunity to be part of their educational experience. He hopes his employees not only come from the funds that they need to attend UMKC, but that they also receive meaningful life lessons to supplement their coursework.

Burnette also utilizes UMKC faculty as a resource to make himself a better employer. For example, Burnette recently partnered with the UMKC Economics Department to determine a proper living wage for students working for him. Additionally, Burnette tried to take at least one class every semester because he says being on campus and around students sharpens and energizes him. He is also doing what he can to help future UMKC students. As he took “a little extra” time to finish his degree by quitting school in 1994 to start Muddy’s and later returning, Burnette understands how difficult the process can be. So he is raising money for his scholarship fund to help returning adult students. Although it will take a few years to become fully funded, Burnette says he is determined to make it happen. To start the fund, he has committed 20 percent of Muddy’s bulk coffee sales.

Beginning in the fall, he will award $500 to a student between the ages of 25 and 55 who wants to come back and finish a degree.

“It is my responsibility as an alum to set a good example, not only to other graduates, but to the other businesses surrounding the campus,” Burnette says.

As one of UMKC’s neighbors, Burnette says he enjoys watching the University change and grow. In the past couple of years, he has been delighted with the new residence halls, watching the University change and grow. In the past couple of years, he has been delighted with the new residence halls, residence life, and enrollment increases and other campus developments. Burnette describes UMKC’s current administrative and community leadership team as the “perfect synergy” creating an exciting future not only for UMKC students but for the neighborhood.

Wanting to be a part of this synergy, Burnette makes sure he is up to date on UMKC’s latest changes, but also to develop meaningful relationships with people who make decisions on campus, which is a simple task as many administrators and faculty stop by for their daily coffee break. Burnette says he feels fortunate that he has been able to stay involved with UMKC through Muddy’s and enjoys sharing in the campus accommodations.

For more information about the scholarship opportunity, email Burnette at oburnette@umkc.edu.

By Karen English
Thanks for your continued support of the College. I hope to suggest a visit to the UMKC Web site at www.umkc.edu and let others know about the many fine programs we have at UMKC. This degree right here. We would appreciate your letting others know about the many fine programs we have at UMKC and then go on for a degree in film and media studies. He was surprised to learn that, indeed, he could get a B.A. degree and took the LSAT exam to be accepted into law school but was denied admission because his score was too low.

When the alarm goes off every morning at 4:30 a.m., Steven St. John does what he has loved since he started this. St. John worked at 1510. Things only got better. St. John had boxed in the Golden Gloves in college and remained connected with Kansas City’s boxing scene. Finally, after what St. John says “must have been a minimum of 50 phone calls,” Bouger gave him a break on Sports Radio 1510. He co-hosted with local sports radio personality Randle Carver, and the show became successful. St. John says he’s still saddened that Carver’s cancer was cut short when he died in the ring the following year. From his start at 1510, things only got better. St. John continued to increase his presence on sports radio and now believes what Whiting knew a long time ago: He’s pretty good at this.

When I founded the Ad Hoc Group Against Crime in 1968, I was the first director of the department. It was my career as a cop that played the largest role in my appointment as the director of the Kansas City, Mo., human relations department shortly after the riot in 1968. I was the first director of the department and the first African-American department head for the City of Kansas City. I was promoted to city manager and grew service to the city for 23 years. I was also able to draw upon my education and experience when I founded the Ad Hoc Group Against Crime in 1977 and became its president/CEO from 1991 to 2000.

Getting into radio didn’t just take the encouragement of family but a lot of perseverance too. St. John’s first journalism job was out of college as an entertainment writer for the Shaw Journal-Herald in Shawnee, Kan., where he did everything from writing articles, designing pages to taking photos and delivering copy to the printer. It was a lot of work, but it allowed him to request press passes, so he asked for credentials for almost every sports event in Kansas City. In 1998, he ran into Chad Bouger, now general manager and program director for Sports Radio 810 WHB in the Kansas City Royals’ press box. St. John unmasked himself and began convincing him to give him a chance to host a local boxing show. St. John had boxed in the Golden Gloves in college and remained connected with Kansas City’s boxing scene. Finally, after what St. John says “must have been a minimum of 50 phone calls,” Bouger gave him a break on Sports Radio 1510. He co-hosted with local sports radio personality Randle Carver, and the show became successful. St. John says he’s still saddened that Carver’s cancer was cut short when he died in the ring the following year. From his start at 1510, things only got better. St. John continued to increase his presence on sports radio and now believes what Whiting knew a long time ago: He’s pretty good at this.

Two-time alumnus, civic leader shares memories

Alvin Brooks (’59, ’73) is an honorary co-chair for UMKC’s 75th anniversary celebration. The long-time community advocate shared his memories of the College of Arts and Sciences and reflected on how his alma mater helped impact his career. Brooks’ full interview is available at www.umkc.edu/75years.

Q: Why did you agree to serve as the honorary co-chair for the 75th anniversary of the founding of the University?

A: I have a great affection and fondness for my alma mater. Throughout the years, I have been often called on by the administration, faculty and students to participate in many UMKC activities. As a Alumnus, I have always offered my support to my alma mater any way that I could. When asked to be an honorary co-chair for the 75th anniversary, without any hesitation, I said yes.

Q: Who is your favorite professor and why?

A: Of course the late Professor Edith Westerman, chair of the history and government department, is one of my favorite professors, but there is another, the late Ed Tomich.

Dean’s corner

The College of Arts and Sciences continues to grow and evolve. With new faculty hires during the past two years, we now number 180 full-time and regular faculty. This is a 7% increase in two years. In addition, we have 31 full-time, non-tenure track faculty and many adjunct instructors who contribute to the College learning experience.

Counting the staff with those groups, the College employs more than 286 people, whose mission is to provide the best liberal arts and sciences education possible. We serve more than 6,000 undergraduates and 720 graduate students according to last fall’s enrollment figures. A quick look at these numbers reveals favorable student-to-faculty ratio, another indication of the quality educational experience the College provides.

Yet, we are aiming higher. In line with the chancellor’s goal of increasing our undergraduate student body by 25 percent over the next five years, we have put committees together to look at our recruitment and retention procedures and devise innovative strategies to attract and retain our students. We look for these to be implemented soon.

In addition, we have a committee looking at a possible revision of our general education requirements, which we hope will better reflect our overall commitment to interdisciplinary education. This one will take some time as it affects not only the College, but also other schools within UMKC, as well as our many transfer students.

The College also will grow by one more department this year. Some of you may recall that the Administration of Justice program was folded into the Department of Sociology in the mid-1980s. Renamed Criminal Justice and Criminology (CJC), this program has grown in faculty and majors over the years, enough to warrant it once again becoming its own department. The official start date is July 1, when the CJC Department will be the fifth largest in the College and has the potential for significant growth.

You, as our alumni, can help as you grow. For some reason, we still seem to be the best-kept secret in town. One student mentioned to our chair of the Communication Studies Department that he wanted to spend the first two years here at UMKC and then go on for a degree in film and media studies. He was surprised to learn that, indeed, he could get this degree right here. We would appreciate your letting others know about the many fine programs we have at UMKC. I am only one, and his son, love of family remains his first priority. “My mom was always the biggest inspiration to me,” he says. “I became a believer in myself and gained self-motivation because of her. Both my parents inspired me in different ways.”

Several years later that exam was challenged in the Federal Court, and the court ruled the test was racially biased, and that version was declared unconstitutional. At the time of the ruling I was too far along in my public service career to re-take the exam.

Q: How did your education influence your career in public service?

A: My education and my public service career parallel one another except for about the first two years of my college career when I was a full-time police officer (patrolman and detective). It was my career as a cop that caused me to omit my major in sociology in graduate school.

My graduate degree in sociology played an important role in my appointment as the director of the Kansas City, Mo., human relations department shortly after the riot in 1968. I was the first director of the department and the first African-American department head for the City of Kansas City. I was promoted to city manager and grew service to the city for 23 years. I was also able to draw upon my education and experience when I founded the Ad Hoc Group Against Crime in 1977 and became its president/CEO from 1991 to 2000.

Steven St. John (right) hosts a UMKC men’s basketball press conference with coach Matt Brown.

When I founded the Ad Hoc Group Against Crime in 1968, I was the first director of the department. It was my career as a cop that played the largest role in my appointment as the director of the Kansas City, Mo., human relations department shortly after the riot in 1968. I was the first director of the department and the first African-American department head for the City of Kansas City. I was promoted to city manager and grew service to the city for 23 years. I was also able to draw upon my education and experience when I founded the Ad Hoc Group Against Crime in 1977 and became its president/CEO from 1991 to 2000.