Family man turned student pursues linguistic passion

by Matthew Makowski

Take a deep breath and imagine a life filled to capacity by attending school full time, studying five languages, tutoring, raising three kids under 10 years old, managing a photography business and working construction.

While this list may seem daunting to some, it’s status quo for Mark ten Haaf, ’15, who has been labeled an all-star student by faculty members in the Classics Department.

As a first-generation college student, ten Haaf always had aspirations to pursue higher education. That was put on hold when he started working for his father’s construction company, AAA Poured Wall, during high school.

“I had notions of going back to school at some point, but I really enjoyed working construction in the summer,” ten Haaf said.

ten Haaf, who lives in Kentwood with his children and wife, began taking night classes at Grand Rapids Community College in 2009. Three years later, ten Haaf began working part time for his family’s business in order to attend school full time at Grand Valley.

“It’s a huge collection of the finest thoughts and ideas that are still applicable in the world today. It’s a real treasure I hope we never lose.”

As if studying five languages wasn’t enough, ten Haaf was also a dedicated tutor at Grand Valley.

Throughout the latter part of his academic career at Grand Valley, ten Haaf collaborated closely with Peter Anderson, chair of the Classics Department, on his capstone research. Following months of intense work, ten Haaf had the opportunity to present his undergraduate research during a scholarly panel at the Classical Association of the Middle West and South conference in Fredericksburg, Virginia, in October. This is an opportunity more commonly granted to graduate students and professional scholars.

“Mark found something that filled a real intellectual passion, and that’s not something that happens everywhere and for every student,” Anderson said. “He is a credit to the kind of overall human that Grand Valley is interested in putting out into the workforce. He’s good at giving advice, people look up to him and he handles all that with a real sense of maturity, but also with humbleness.”

ten Haaf attributes much of his success to the motivation he gains from his family’s encouragement.

“My wife and children make enormous sacrifices, financially and in time that could be spent together,” ten Haaf said. “If I were to do things at half-throttle, I’d be making a statement about the value of the time and resources that were sacrificed. I owe it to them to perform with excellence since this is my job right now.”

Being raised by a father who believed in the value of completing tasks to the utmost of one’s abilities also instilled in ten Haaf a work ethic that transcends most.

“One thing I always keep in my mind is a verse in Ecclesiastes that says, “Whatsoever the hand findeth to do, do it with all thy might.”’”

Peter Anderson

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