

An "academic revelation" opened a new world of learning for Gary O. Seabaugh when he was a student at Johnson County Community College. Seabaugh, a member of JCCC's first graduating class in 1971 and now director of the Plaza Academy, has been named *Alumnus of the Year* by the JCCC Alumni Association.

Vivian Wilkerson, president of the JCCC Alumni Association, said Seabaugh was chosen as *Alumnus of the Year* for his "dedication to education and for the work he's doing with kids who have not been turned on by education." Seabaugh was honored as *Alumnus of the Year* at the Alumni Association Annual Dinner June 27 at the Overland Park Marriott.

Honors are not new for Seabaugh, who also has been decorated for his military service and has received numerous professional distinctions. But success did not come easily for him. After an unsuccessful stint at Metropolitan Community College, Seabaugh joined the U.S. Navy and U.S. Marine Corps in 1966. When he returned from Vietnam four years later, he enrolled at JCCC.

Seabaugh holds a special fondness for JCCC, where he says he had his first "academic revelation." He explains, "I remember making my first A on a test and thinking, 'This is easy. This is fun.'" He didn't take such a revelation lightly because one of his high school teachers had told him and his mother that he was learning disabled.

"I was a 23-year-old returning vet," Seabaugh remembers. "Times were not good to Vietnam vets then, but the [JCCC] students were enormously supportive. I remember one day I wore my Marine Corps jacket to school — ready for a fight — but Fred Krebs and the other faculty members kept making positive comments about it."

Seabaugh credits JCCC faculty members Fred Krebs, Jay Crotchett and Dorothy Duffe with making a major impact on his life.

"They were very interested in our learning," he says. "They taught relevant, innovative courses." As director of the Plaza Academy, Seabaugh says he has referred "hundreds of kids to JCCC."

After graduating in 1971, Seabaugh continued his education, receiving his bachelor of arts in philosophy and his master of arts in education from the University of Missouri—Kansas City. He received his Ph.D. in developmental and child psychology from the University of Kansas.

The Plaza Academy, where Seabaugh is full-time director, is located in Kansas City, Mo. It is a private high school that specializes in college preparation and special education services through an individualized, academic curriculum with individual, group and family counseling services.

The 60 students who make up the student body are dropouts or "kick-outs" from traditional high schools. The Plaza Academy provides a junior college atmosphere at the high school level to give students maximum freedom and responsibility. "I think it's paradoxical that the bigger and stronger our

JCCC's Alum of the Year

Seabaugh teaches troubled kids the rewards of success



Gary O. Seabaugh, director of the Plaza Academy, wants students to feel love and respect from their teachers.

kids get, the more restricted our schools get," Seabaugh says.

"We arrange an environment to give kids the opportunity to succeed so they can come in contact with the rewards of success," Seabaugh explains. "We teach them to manage their own behavior."

Without a doubt, Seabaugh is the moving

force behind the Plaza Academy. When he took over directorship of the faltering academy in 1978, there were no books, no furniture, one classroom and eight students. "Education was just not happening here," he says. "But they got the kids off the streets." His predecessor's approach was to allow the kids to "do their own thing." The community at large would be their textbook. Seabaugh sums up the problems with this — "Doing their own thing meant holding up Quik Trips."

Today, the Plaza Academy boasts an alumna who has become a Missouri State Scholar. Seventy percent of its graduates continue their education in community colleges or universities. And just as important, the academy can boast that the hundreds of students who have passed through its halls have gained self-confidence and a more positive self-image. With Seabaugh at the helm, that is no surprise. "I'm a surrogate father to my kids," Seabaugh says. "I want them to feel a sense of love and respect from their teachers."



A 1971 JCCC graduate, Seabaugh is the 1989 Alumnus of the Year.

— Bobbi Herring