

HE'S A MAN ON A MISSION

By MEREDITH ANN KOPULOS
Special to The Star

Gary Seabaugh began his first mission back in 1967 when he received orders to go to Vietnam. He was assigned to a Marine Corps infantry as a hospital corpsman.

His unit of 61 men went to Hue City to fight. Seabaugh treated the wounded and carried an M-79 grenade launcher. Twenty-eight days later, seven of the original men made it out alive.

The military awarded Seabaugh three Purple Hearts and a Silver Star. Once home, he began another mission. First he earned a doctorate in development and child psychology, a bachelor's in philosophy and a master's in education.

Then Seabaugh began a "central mission" to serve teenagers whose needs weren't being met: those who were gifted, learning disabled or dissatisfied with school.

Thirty years ago Seabaugh founded the Plaza Academy, a private alternative school for ages 12-19.

"The students here are genuine sweet kids that are interested in education but need a smaller academic environment," he said. They occupy what was once the school of Guardian Angels church on Westport Road. About 30 students are enrolled now, engrossed in the likes of American history and 18th-century literature..

Seabaugh talks like a proud papa: "They're kids from Missouri and Kansas. They're bright, gifted, athletic and well-behaved."

It's love. Over the years he's fought financial battles to keep the doors open, oftentimes donating his own money.

But the combat veteran won't give up.

"It's fulfilling, and we make a huge difference in a student's life. I want them to love school."



FRED BLOCHER/The Kansas City Star

Gary Seabaugh (center) surrounded by some Plaza Academy students (clockwise from lower left): Ari Silver, Danielle Stewart, Mykel Ross, Ryan Hayes, Michael Bussell, Staci Jeffries and Jon Woods.

Seabaugh doesn't see students' past sins. "The key here is to thrive, not get through it," he says. "These kids are doing just that."

Seabaugh lives in Prairie Village with his wife, Ruth Anne, and their three sons, Will, 10, Hunter, 8, and Spencer, 7.

Have a love story to share? Send it to sundayfyi@kctar.com.