

Vietnam War era veteran finds purpose in the classroom at QCC

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WORCESTER, Mass. - A local veteran from the Vietnam War era who recently started taking classes at Quinsigamond Community College wants others to know it's never too late to learn.

What You Need To Know

Tom Vincent is one of thousands of students taking advantage of the MassReconnect initiative, which covers community college tuition and fees for state residents over 25

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Vincent struggled with depression, but in the tight-knit community of QCC's Veteran Affairs Office he found people who understand

His goal after finishing his courses is to get a job in virtual bookkeeping

Tom Vincent is one of thousands of students taking advantage of the MassReconnect initiative, which covers community college tuition and fees for state residents over 25.

"It's been 50 years since I was last in school," Vincent said. "I've had other trainings like truck driving school, but nothing like college."

For Vincent, being a student again means much more than the degree he will eventually leave with. He's broken a cycle of self-doubt he's lived with most of his life, and found a sense of belonging he had been missing.

"When I walked in the door, I really had to force myself in because I was depressed and I didn't think that I belong here," Vincent said. "I didn't think that I should be given such a chance to have an education like this."

Vincent enlisted in the Army during the Vietnam War, and although his unit spent years training at Fort Bragg, they were never deployed.

He said it made him feel like less of a veteran, and it sat with him for years. In the tight-knit community of QCC's Veteran Affairs Office, lead by director Matthew Casaubon, he found people who understand.

"Matt sat me down and we had a long talk about why I felt that way, and I felt a lot more comfortable, a lot more deserving, and as time has gone by, I've even come out of my shell," Vincent said.

“Tom has really been inspirational to not just himself, not just to older veterans, but younger veterans too, because they see somebody facing something that was so terrifying and then going for it,” Casaubon said.

Casaubon and the Veteran Affairs Office have helped Vincent every step of the way on this new journey, even providing him a scooter after he mentioned he was having trouble walking to class.

Skylar Kuczvara works to make QCC’s veteran’s center a comfortable and welcoming place, and hopes to see more older veterans like Vincent enroll in college courses.

“Seeing people come out of their shells, especially Tom who you could tell was visibly nervous when he came in here, seeing something like that is extraordinary,” Kuczvara said. “He’s able to joke around, relax and just decompress in this space.”

As he continues his college courses with goals to get a job in virtual bookkeeping, Vincent has some advice for others considering a return to education - don’t be afraid to go back.

“I was afraid, and I wasted a lot of years just being afraid,” Vincent said. “My grandfather taught me when I was young that you’re never too old to learn, he said you learn something new every day, and there’s a lot of truth to that. Find something that you like to do, and go forward with it. Try it. What have you got to lose?”