Manatee County Scores With Volunteer Schneider

In 2013, Mr. Tom Schneider retired from a successful business career in Connecticut and moved to the sunshine state. His retirement journey brought him to the Gulf Coast in Manatee County, seeking a way to regain a sense of purpose in his life and pursue a solid connection. His journey of discovery brought him to Manatee Technical College (MTC) Adult Education Center where students can improve basic skills, learn English or pass the GED® test.

Mr. Schneider had no formal teaching experience when he arrived in Manatee County but has offered conversational tutoring to English Language learners, meeting the needs of the students both academically and culturally. He continues to listen to the hopes and dreams of students and to their recollection of fear and strength. It is important for Mr. Schneider to help the students map out and put together a viable plan for their future, to ensure they achieve success. If students did not graduate high school in their native country, he encourages them to continue studying in order to pass the GED. He patiently helps them read over the MTC career training brochure to explore possible careers that match their interests and life goals.

Over the past three years, Tom has worked with 31 students from different walks of life and has made a true difference in their lives. A favorite memory for Mr. Schneider’s is tutoring an elegant man in his forties, a successful businessman from Czech Republic who had an advanced degree and engaged in sophisticated conversations with Mr. Schneider, welcoming the opportunity to perfect his English with a kindred spirit. Due to the encouragement of Mr. Schneider the European gentleman is now enrolled in a Marketing Program.

One of Mr. Schneider’s strengths is to cultivate a level of connection and trust with all of his students, regardless of how different than himself, they might be, he always bridges any gap between them and engages in genuine, meaningful and relaxed exchanges. Unlike the confident Czech student, some of our students are humble and shy. Mr. Schneider is able to draw them out so they gain confidence and feel comfortable taking new risks and setting ambitious goals. He helps them see that sometimes for the first time, the possibility of a career and a bright future is attainable.

One such student is a Hispanic mother of three who received little formal education in her native country. Once a week she would meet with Mr. Schneider, exchanges stories of the previous week, read a story and work on comprehension, vocabulary and light grammar points. After receiving the encouragement of volunteer Mr. Schneider, she now plans to get her GED and go to the Culinary Program at Manatee Technical College.

With a little sprinkle of patience and a dash of hope, Mr. Schneider has changed lives by providing Manatee County English Language Learners the opportunity to find a purpose and pursue a dream.