



*By Mike McKibbin*

Starting a college is never easy, and in Steamboat Springs, colorful characters like longtime professor George Tolles played a key role in helping those early efforts lead to today's Colorado Mountain College campus.

In the early 1960s, George – originally from Ohio – and Lucile Bogue were among the teachers at the preparatory Lowell Whiteman School in Strawberry Park. After George left for a U.S. State Department career, Lucile launched Yampa Valley College and while in his second year at a post in Cali, Colombia, George received a telegram from Lucile about her plan to start a college in Steamboat Springs.

“And I thought that was kind of strange,” he says. “She called on the phone and said, ‘I’ve started a college called Yampa Valley College and I’d like you to come back and do it.’” By that time, George had tired of government service, “So I came back.” He said good-bye to a diplomatic career to teach at the college for an annual stipend of \$3,500.

George taught German, Spanish, history, economics and political science in St. Paul's Episcopal Church on Oak Street. He also helped the school recruit students, using the colorful scenery and ski slopes to lure students from as far away as the East Coast.

“I took several trips back to New England and worked through the Perry Mansfield (Performing Arts School and

summer camp in Steamboat Springs) recruiting offices,” George recalls. “I visited high schools in New York and Connecticut. Oddly enough, we got a lot of students in those years. I’ve often tried to figure out why and I think it was because if you can’t get in to Dartmouth or Princeton or Yale or Harvard, what’s the next alternative? Somehow, Yampa Valley College filled the bill.”

After many decades of change – including tough financial times that nearly closed it down – the college eventually joined the Colorado Mountain College district and George continued to educate students.

To survive tough economic times when the college struggled, George taught in local elementary and high schools.

Between the two colleges, George taught in Steamboat Springs more than 30 years. He was twice awarded prestigious Fulbright Fellowships, once to study citizen action groups in Berlin, the second time to study Islamic law in Pakistan.

While he played a key role in CMC’s development into the quality institution it is today, George is just as well known as a dowser who can pinpoint the best location for a water well on a 35-acre lot.

George retired in 1991 with distinction as professor emeritus of arts and sciences at Colorado Mountain College Steamboat Springs. He then ran public seminars at CMC called “Great Decisions,” focused on foreign policy decisions that faced the U.S. Each seminar would attract 70-80 people, which helped the college become “the center of political discussions and activities.” “I’ve certainly enjoyed my years teaching here,” he says.

George is still often on campus, enjoying lunch and conversations in the student dining hall, taking classes, and setting the pace for others to pursue lifelong learning.

---

 Use our story form to send us text, audio or video and [Share Your Story!](#)

---

*Filed Under: [Steamboat Springs](#), [Stories](#) Tagged With: [Steamboat Springs](#)*