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71-year-old Mesa college student moved by classmates' acceptance, offers scholarships

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POSTED 13 HRS AGO

MESA, AZ (3TV/CBS 5) - Nothing can slow down Wayne Balmer.

"I'm L-X-X-I. I call it lexi, which rhymes with sexy," says Balmer.

LXXI translates to 71, and Balmer says even at his age, you should never stop learning.

"I'll have six associates degrees and 11 certificates," said Balmer.

Balmer retired as the planning director for Queen Creek in 2014. Afterward, he enrolled at Mesa Community College to study health and fitness. But Balmer says he was intimidated to meet his classmates who would likely be 50 years his junior.

"And I thought they're really going to be put off and not want to be with me and wonder why I'm there, but it didn't turn out that way at all," said Balmer.

Instead, Balmer says his classmates not only accepted him but appreciated his wisdom. Through their talks, Balmer realized the financial struggle many of his classmates were dealing with.



Balmer retired as the planning director for Queen Creek in 2014.

(Source: 3TV/CBS 5)

"And they were always, you know, just really close to, can I stay in school or not," said Balmer.

Three years ago, he jumped into action, providing five \$1,000 scholarships to students. This year he decided that wasn't enough and set up an endowment so his scholarships will go on forever. His donations will total about \$115,000.

"He is the embodiment of a selfless, community-centered student-focused individual," says Jeff Messer, one of Balmer's first professors at MCC.

In April, Messer, along with other faculty and staff at MCC, will be honoring Balmer during their Heros of Education ceremony.

"Well, I don't feel much like a hero, you know. I just feel like a guy who's thinking what can I do," says Balmer.



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(Source: 3TV/CBS 5)

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