



News Release

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Century Student Says College Helped Him Start Over

After his concrete masonry business faltered, John Nelsen of Stillwater found himself at a crossroads that is painfully familiar to many Americans in this economy: you can give up, or you can start over.

Nelsen, 53, chose to start over. After re-enrolling at Century College, where he had been a student in the early 1980s, Nelsen found a new career path in the areas of criminal justice and chemical dependency treatment.

Nelsen graduated from Century in May, but is taking two additional classes this fall to prepare to enter Metropolitan State University for his four-year degree. He is finding quiet satisfaction in the turn his life has taken.

“You’ve got to keep swinging, or you die,” said Nelsen, interviewed in the West Campus cafeteria at Century.

Nelsen said it was rewarding to run his own business for 14 years, but construction really slowed down in 2006 and 2007. “I wasn’t getting the calls anymore,” said Nelsen. “I had to let my crew go. I was just not making it.”

Nelsen, who is 17 years sober, began working as a chemical health technician in a treatment center, and found it very satisfying. A military veteran, he decided that he would like to dedicate his life to working with veterans to help them with their drug and alcohol problems. In the summer of 2010, he re-enrolled at Century College and worked with counselor Charlotte Nordstrom to put together an academic plan that would use his past college credits and steer him down his new career path.

“Century has been great for me,” said Nelsen, a 1976 graduate of Stillwater High School. He noted that his younger daughter is also a student at Century, and his two older children have earned their bachelor’s degrees. Nelsen has been married for 32 years.

Nelsen said his parents, who are in their early 80s, attended his Century graduation last spring at Aldrich Arena. The graduation ceremony was especially poignant for his parents because Nelsen’s two brothers died young.

“Returning to college as an adult opens you up to so many things,” said Nelsen. “Starting over is tough, but it is possible. You just take it one day at a time.”