



## **FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE**

Rappahannock Community College  
Michele Inderrieden  
Media Services Manager  
[minderrieden@rappahannock.edu](mailto:minderrieden@rappahannock.edu)  
(804)333-6824

October 26, 2023

### **RCC Baseball Players Return to Classroom 48 Years Later**

When retired Rappahannock Community College (RCC) professor Joseph Swonk announced he was teaching a lifelong learning course at RCC, several former students signed up. Treadwell Davison, John Kent, Phil McKenney, Mike Newsome, Steve Swope, and Mike VanLandingham, teammates on RCC's baseball team in the early 1970s were in the classroom again—almost 50 years after their first college class.

Bringing these guys back to the classroom, and to learn about Robert Frost, is a testament to the impact Swonk had on his students. "We're here to support Joe and to hear what he has to say," commented the students. "He's a good guy. Witty, funny, intelligent and was always a good teacher." Swonk was the baseball pitcher in addition to teaching English. "Joe and Wade (Johnson) were our coaches but they weren't much older than we were and we formed a bond," said Swope. The group still gets together at least quarterly for breakfast to catch up and reminisce. They tell stories about winning the State Baseball Championships for RCC, beating Northern Virginia Community College at Community College Play Day, and leaving Swonk speechless during Public Speaking classes.

"Writing Poetry and the Creative Process Using Robert Frost's Life and Works," Swonk's recent class for RCC's Rappahannock Institute for Lifelong Learning (RILL), was held over three consecutive Mondays in October for a total of six hours. The teammates enjoyed the class and participated in thoughtful discussions. "Just finished a 6-hour course on Robert Frost with my old professor Joe Swonk," commented Swope on Facebook. "That's how much I love Joe Swonk to take this course!"

When he received a poor grade on a paper at the University of Virginia (UVA), Davison contacted Swonk for suggestions on how to do better moving forward. "Joe didn't hesitate to help me and my grades improved," Davison remarked.

Kent and Swope transferred to Virginia Tech (VT) and roomed together. Kent, a graduate of Northumberland High School, studied accounting, became a partner in a Richmond accounting firm, and is now a retired Certified Public Accountant (CPA). Swope, from Colonial Beach, studied Physical Education and returned to Colonial Beach where he taught and coached. Although retired from Colonial Beach Public Schools he is still a coach and mentor and actively supports youth sports.

Davison and McKenney graduated from Washington and Lee High School (now Westmoreland High School) in Montross. He studied economics and foreign affairs at UVA and retired from the freight railroading industry. McKenney worked for the Virginia ABC Board then returned to college at Virginia Commonwealth University (VCU) where he studied art and design. He is a professional artist and performer in Montross.

“As faculty (and coaches), we cared about our students, and they knew we were dedicated to their well-being,” said Swonk. “Wade Johnson told his players, ‘You are a baseball scholar, not just a player’. He checked in with their professors, the counseling center, and financial aid, to make sure his ‘boys’ were doing what they needed to do. If they weren’t he would take them aside and explain that they would be benched if they weren’t.”

“RCC is more like a family than a school, though our students do learn here and graduate because they are given every opportunity to succeed,” added Swonk. “We worked as a team, gathered around each student, and informed one another of each student’s needs and problems. They all graduated and became doctors, nurses, teachers, coaches, mentors, businessmen—decent, caring, reliable men.”

###

Since 1970, Rappahannock Community College has been breaking down barriers to education in the Middle Peninsula and Northern Neck. Five degrees, 6 certificates, and 26 career and workforce studies programs are offered through RCC, in addition to nearly 40 guaranteed admissions agreements with colleges and universities across the state and region. For more information, visit [rappahannock.edu](http://rappahannock.edu).