

# A Quiet Man with a Gentle Roar

by Kimberly Golden Benner

---

## *Spring/Summer 2006 TRADITION*

---

It is with a quiet elegance that Ken McGeary ('65, B.A., *Liberal Arts*) has made an impact on the Lehigh Valley community. It's an impact that has affected and positively changed the lives of children, teens, and adults alike for forty years. McGeary, Regional Director in the Office of Continuing Education for the University, has used a kind and gentle hand to help others on their path to success.

When he walked through the doors of the Allentown Campus of The Pennsylvania State University in February 1966 as the assistant district administrator in Continuing Education, no one could have predicted the influence McGeary would make in people's lives – both in the community and within the University. This quiet man has spent forty years at the University creating some of the most innovative programming the University has implemented and directing the success of the Penn State Lehigh Valley Corporate Learning Center in Bethlehem.

Since the onset of his continuing education career, McGeary's initiatives have received public recognition and well-deserved praise from his colleagues. Press clippings from 1971 show a smiling McGeary accepting an award for antipollution seminars he led for industry and community leaders. Fast forward to 2003 and, again, a smiling McGeary is being recognized — this time with the Outstanding Leadership Award in Continuing Education from Penn State. Of course, in between those years are countless awards, plaques, and accolades that pay tribute to this visionary's ability to not only understand what his community needs, but to respond to those needs with viable programs.

McGeary was the mastermind behind Penn State Lehigh Valley's innovative Precollege Youth Partnership program that, for more than fifteen years, has partnered corporations, school districts, and community organizations together to provide inner-city, at-risk youth with academic and social programming opportunities. This program has been the springboard for countless others like KidsConnect (benefitting over 90 inner-city children each year by connecting them with academic programs) and the Keystone Program (a middle-school program preparing more than 100 students for future education or gainful employment).

From the Lehigh Valley Writing Project – a National Writing Project site which provides high-quality professional development programming for teachers – to workforce development and customized corporate training programs that meet the demands of the Lehigh Valley industry, McGeary has had a hand in all of it. Along with a dedicated staff, Penn State Lehigh Valley's Continuing Education Office has consistently been one of the leading, if not the leading, offices in generating profitable programs.

In his years of service, he has learned to work within the system – every system, actually. McGeary has brought together partnerships that others only dream about and has received unprecedented grant award funding that make other institutions green with envy. One Pennsylvania Department of Education grant supported McGeary's Master's in Teaching English as a Second Language degree program in partnership with the University of Turabo in Puerto Rico.

As if all this doesn't keep him busy enough, McGeary finds time to teach evening courses and even spend a moment or two with his wife (of nearly 42 years) Carol, his children Jodi and Jake, and his three grandchildren.

McGeary has worked to change the face of his community and to offer programming that would actually make a difference. He has done it with heart and conviction, with diligence and grace, and with a quiet disposition that roars above the rest.