April 22, 2013

Countdown to Riverside City College's 100th Anniversary

Quadrangle Room 240 on the Riverside City College campus is dedicated to Earl A. McDermont. The plaque (below right) is mounted next to the classroom. McDermont was a well-known figure at Riverside City College for seven decades.

![Plaque Dedication to Earl A. McDermont](image)

Born in 1893, he graduated from high school in Long Beach in 1911. He then attended Occidental College, graduating in 1915 with a Bachelor's Degree. While at Occidental, McDermont was a member of the OMA (Order of Mystic Apes) Fraternity. This group was founded for “disseminating the principles of lasting friendship, and promoting a stronger feeling of brotherhood and good fellowship to bind men together in a brotherhood based upon eternal immutable principles”. The OMA advisor was a young professor of History by the name of Arthur G. Paul. McDermont moved to New York City to earn a Master's Degree at Columbia University. Returning to California, he obtained his teaching credential at UC Berkeley. World War I intervened and he enlisted in the Army. He served with the Medical Corps Special Operating Units. Not long after he arrived in Europe, the war ended and he found himself with time on his hands as combat troops had the first priority to return to the USA. His time was not idle and he attended classes at the University Of Montpelier, France. After returning to the states, he worked a number of odd jobs. In 1921, McDermont arrived in Riverside to care for his mother after the death of his father. The family had moved to Riverside after his father retired. He began teaching at Riverside Poly High and renewed his friendship with Arthur G. Paul who had become the Director of what was then called Riverside Junior College. Soon he was teaching Business Organization, Economics and History at the college. The photos below (from “Tequesquite” yearbooks) show McDermont over the years at RCC.
RCC colleague Maurice Mackenzie (Economics, Political Science 1926-1965) said McDermont was:

“A man of great wit and compassion, Earl always listened to his students. He was always described as their friend”.

In later years McDermont served as Director of College Guidance and Registrar and was involved in many of the institution changing construction projects and progressive policies of the college. He finished his career as the RCC’s first Vice President. Below are photos of McDermont as Registrar and Vice President.

Tom Johnson (V.P. Academic Affairs, Professor of English & Humanities 1958-1997) said McDermont was:

“Obviously a man of learning, a man with a deep sense of commitment to the institution, a man with a sense of humor. All of those things were present, but one quality that seemed to me most present was what I can only call kindliness”.

Even after his retirement in 1958, McDermont was still a regular visitor to the campus. On September 12, 1986, at the age of 93, McDermont spoke briefly at the RCC Convocation ceremony. He said:

“For me, what we represent in this community, in this country, is an amazing development in public education, the Community College. And as far as I’m concerned, I have to show up every week or two around here just to show you all that I can’t forget who you are. And I shall do that as long as I can stand on two legs and a cane. Thank you all for being a part of this institution. The world is becoming rapidly a community and the Community College has in the last century become an amazing public institution. And I know of no one in the country that’s a finer example of what it can be and is, as you people are. So thank you all for being a part of our life and I’ll try to stay with you at long as I can hobble. Thank you.”

That same year, McDermont Hall (in old Quadrangle room 134) was dedicated in his honor. His last visit to RCC occurred on April 3, 1989 celebrating his 96th birthday. He passed away in July of 1989. McDermont Hall was unfortunately part of the Quadrangle that was torn down, rebuilt and modernized between the years 2005-7. A rededication of McDermont Hall in Quad 240 of the new wing took place on February 19, 2010. His daughter Marjorie attended the ceremony and made these remarks:
“This lecture hall is really closer to what he was than the original hall downstairs. He was mainly a teacher and he held court in the south Quad upstairs in a room much smaller than this. And he loved the interaction that he had with his students no matter what subject he was teaching. This room is a marvelous legacy to him, I think, for what he gave and what he meant to this college, as a teacher, as a mentor and as a friend.”

Below left, is a photo of McDermont participating in RCC’s Homecoming activities as Grand Marshall from the December 4, 1981 “Viewpoints” student newspaper. Below right is McDermont’s daughter Marjorie, attending the rededication of McDermont Hall.

It is 2 years and 46 weeks until RCC’s 100th Anniversary on March 13, 2016.

The Riverside City College Instructional Media Center is bringing you this five year countdown to RCC’s 100th Anniversary. Our intention is to give everyone a weekly glance at the many people and events that have been a part of the college.

Our thanks go to the RCC Digital Library Archives and the District’s Office of Strategic Communications and Relations for allowing us to use their photo and newspaper collections. Thanks as well to all of the RCC students and Faculty Advisors that were a part of the yearbook and newspaper staffs. Thanks also to Tom Johnson and Gilbert Jimenez who wrote “the book” about RCC’s history. “Riverside City College 1916-1981- A 65 Year History” is available in the RCC Digital Library.

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