

## **Fenn, one of MCC's founders, remembered for his vision, dedication to education**

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MANCHESTER — Former colleagues remembered Robert H. Fenn today as a man of vision dedicated to education.

Fenn, 85, died Saturday at his home in East Lyme.

A former science teacher at Manchester High School, Fenn was one of the founders of Manchester Community College.

The modern facilities in the town's southwest corner are now considered the flagship of the state's community college system.

But the Manchester campus had humble beginnings, with classes first taught at Manchester High School, then later in temporary trailers parked on the lower campus.

Andrew McKirdy, former chancellor of the state's community college system, said Fenn, along with his "partner in crime" then-President Fred Lowe, had the vision to see beyond the original modest grounds to what the campus could — and eventually did — become.

"They were both very similar and creative," McKirdy said. "They had that commitment to build that type of campus. They had that vision. That's why the temporary campus — which lasted about 44 years — was tucked away in the corner."

Fenn taught science classes at the college for 16 years, acting as chairman of the Science Department and director of arts and sciences.

After he retired from teaching, he remained active with the college foundation, raising funds to keep the dream going.

Jonathan Daube, the recently retired longtime president, said Fenn was extremely helpful to him when he began his career at MCC.

"He had a very good handle on the history here, and struck me as a tough, no-nonsense, imaginative person," Daube said.

And he was committed to academic quality, McKirdy added.

"He was very imaginative and creative, and in that sense, was really, truly a community college person," McKirdy said.

Fenn was committed to offering educational opportunities to people who otherwise might not have the chance and giving them a quality education, McKirdy explained.

Besides MCC and the high school, Fenn also served for a time on the Vernon Board of Education, and after retirement worked for CPI, the Computer Processing Institute in East Hartford, where he was vice president of academic affairs and responsible for getting that school regional accreditation, McKirdy said.

"He just had a terrific commitment to education," he said.

An avid camper and world traveler, Fenn was also an accomplished chess player, photographer, writer, and woodworker.

Born and raised in New Britain, Fenn joined the Navy at 19 and was stationed as a hospital corpsman in California. He married his high school sweetheart in 1944, and after his discharge, the two returned to Connecticut where he began his long career in education.

Calling hours are being held Saturday, Feb. 28, from 1 to 2 p.m., followed by a short memorial service, at the Thomas L. Neilan & Sons Funeral Home, 48 Grand St., East Lyme.

In lieu of flowers, memorial contributions can be made to Hospice of Southeastern Connecticut, 227 Dunham St., Norwich, CT 06360.