

Alumni Pride: McGrath ranks high in service

by Natalie Johnson - Wednesday, July 29, 2009

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As an inventor, geologist, lieutenant colonel and long-distance runner, University of Wisconsin Oshkosh alumnus Joseph McGrath '78, of Waupaca, tackles all of life's "missions" with a high level of skill and determination.

McGrath will be among the nine University of Wisconsin Oshkosh alumni to be honored for their professional and civic achievements by the UW Oshkosh Alumni Association during homecoming weekend Oct. 16-17, 2009. He will receive the association's highest honor, the Distinguished Alumni Award, for his extensive civilian and military careers.

"Even while serving on active duty, Joe still maintained an abiding love for and curiosity about the earth," said UW Oshkosh geology professor and department chair William Mode.

"Though Joe is a keen observer of earth features, it is his service to his country that makes him a distinguished alumnus," Mode said. "The list of military decorations in his biographical sketch is long and begins with the Bronze Star — a medal reserved for the very few most deserving service people."

Upon earning a bachelor's degree in geology and completing the ROTC program at UW Oshkosh, McGrath was commissioned as a second lieutenant in the Army Field Artillery. Over the years, he rose through the ranks to lieutenant colonel in various staff, command and chief of staff positions.

He returned to postgraduate studies in petroleum geology at Kansas State University and then began working with Dow Chemical as a down-hole petroleum engineer, which led to a progression of positions with the company that took him and his family to Kansas, Texas, Michigan, Oklahoma, California and Maine. In 1999, they returned to Wisconsin, where McGrath transferred from the Army Reserves to become a member of the Wisconsin Army National Guard.

"Following 9/11, I have been deployed twice with service in Nicaragua and again in Afghanistan," McGrath said. "Although I never planned a career for this period of time, I have always met the challenge to serve as long as I had the talent, expertise and physical capability to continue to safeguard our nation's freedoms."

While serving with the National Guard, McGrath completed his MBA through Touro University International. "I was very proud to have completed my MBA during a trying time in our lives with Afghanistan deployment," he said.

In addition to his military service and career as a geologist, McGrath is an inventor with three patents as well as an avid outdoorsman, taxidermist and runner.

"Nothing brought more pride than crossing the finish line at the end of several full, 26.2-mile marathons

and a host of half marathons, 10ks and 5ks, which supported numerous community fundraisers and the fight against cancer,” he said.

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