Father gives son chance he passed up

University Custodian's son plans to attend Truman and receive tuition discount

Rebecca Whitburn
for The Index

Mike Elam doesn’t want his son to make the same mistake he made. More than 25 years ago, Mike Elam had the opportunity to go to college, but he didn’t take it.

Mike Elam’s mother and father worked as full-time custodians at Northeast Missouri State University, and they never had enough money available to send their son.

“You was the only mistake I ever made,” Mike Elam said. “I just didn’t want to go to college. There was no drive to drive there, nobody pushing me to go. Even back then, you just say, ‘I don’t like school.’

Mike Elam, 48 and now a full-time University custodian himself, said he thinks his son Bill, a 17-year-old senior at Brashear High School, is going to take advantage of the opportunity he passed up.

Thirty years ago, Mike Elam attended high school at Kirksville and Florsheim Shoe Company in Kirksville. He said he immediately went to work for Wolverine Shoe Company, for 24 years and the factory “died [there] a slow and closed.”

Mike Elam said the factory’s closing forced him to look for a better job. That clarity had just brought him to a new home and car and would have to rely on the factory for his income. Mike Elam said he wanted a job at Truman and worked as a custodian in Pershing Building.

Not viewing higher education as a priority after graduation, Mike Elam said he immediately went to work for Harshala Shoe Company in Kirksville. He said he worked for the factory for 14 years and then for Wolverine Shoe Company, for 26 years and the factory “died [there] a slow and closed.”

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Although Mike Elam doesn’t have money can buy happiness, he does realize that it buys on education. He and his wife will be paying roughly $1,499 each year for Bill’s tuition, and they want they hope they will be able to get through college without a lot of money problems. He said his parents had enjoyed working for the University custodian, called and offered him a position at the University. Mike Elam has worked at the University for almost three-and-a-half years. As soon as Mike Elam became a full-time employee he, his wife and his children were eligible for the faculty/staff tuition discount.

Mike Elam said he has always wanted to go to college. He and his parents have helped him along his academic path and pushed him to take advantage of the opportunity he passed up.

“My parents always want their kids to do better than they did,” Bill said. “I want that for my kids, too. It could make life better because it promises more financial security and less he needs some money.”

Mike Elam applied for the custodial position at Truman, something he had done in the past without success, and his wife decided they could wait a little longer than those people who have a chance. He and his wife had to look elsewhere for employment.

Then, on Christmas Day, just two weeks after the couple’s deadline had passed, Cheryl Miller, Physical Plant custodial supervisor, called and offered him a position at the University.

“If you want a pretty good Christmas present for your kids, Bill said,” “He sure all of a sudden I’d think my son would have closed 20 years ago” because of his son’s happy new.”

That happiness can be seen by the many people who pass through the Pershing Building.

“Me not attending college was a negative choice,” Mike Elam said. “I’m proud of that.”

Bill said that he and his family “will always need an education, he knew,” Mike Elam said. “I’m proud of that.”

Bill said he has always wanted to go to college. He and his father were working for the University, he was not being a customer who would go to school. He and his wife are sure he will go to Truman because he likes the people and will get a good education.

“Bill already has been accepted to Truman, and when he comes to the University next fall, the Elam family will only have to pay 25 percent of Bill’s tuition. According to Section II.090 of the Board of Governors, full-time employees of the University as well as their spouses and children who are full-time employees of the University can receive a 75 percent tuition reduction on the tuition for the courses in which they enroll.”

As soon as Mike Elam became a full-time employee he, his wife and his children were eligible for the faculty/staff tuition discount which gives a 75 percent tuition reduction.

University custodian Mike Elam stands with son Bill Elam who plans to attend the University next year. Bill Elam will be able to use the faculty/staff discount which gives a 75 percent tuition reduction.

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