

When a student's face lights up while learning, Black Hawk College graduate Stephanie Moen knows she is where she belongs.

That place is C.R. Hanna Elementary School in Orion where she teaches music to every student, from kindergartners to fifth-graders.

During music class, the students sing, play instruments and move to the beat. Moen changes up activities to help them focus and connect.

Moen earned her Associate in Arts from Black Hawk College in 1995 then transferred to Augustana College. She graduated with a bachelor's degree in music education in 1997.

Picking Black Hawk College

She encourages students thinking about attending Black Hawk College to go for it.

"Black Hawk College is a great place to begin your education," she said. "I didn't feel like I missed anything when I went to Black Hawk College."

She suggests students participate in music, sports or other campus activities to make connections and gain great experiences while at Black Hawk College.

Affordability was a key factor in her choice to start off at a community college, and the decision paid off.

"I got married shortly after I graduated from college," she said. "We started our life with just a small amount of debt, and I had a great education that got me a job, the job I wanted."

She auditioned for BHC achievement awards in music both years, and the awards paid for the majority of her tuition.

Career path to music teacher

Right out of college, the Orion School District hired Moen as director of instrumental music, where she taught grades 6-12.



Teaching in a high school was her goal in college.

When she had children, she left the position and taught private violin lessons from home before returning to work in a school setting.

At Black Hawk College she was active in Jazz Band, two choirs and the Madrigals, a singing group that performed without instrumental accompaniment.

Her time in the BHC Jazz Band impacted her teaching career. Dr. Edgar Crockett, BHC professor of music, provided her with a basic understanding of jazz and jazz standards.

“When it came time for me to form a jazz band and teach it at the high school level, I felt comfortable and confident enough to choose music and teach the basics to my students,” she said.

Without Black Hawk College, Moen would not have had that experience. At a four-year institution, she said she likely would have only participated in orchestra and maybe choir or concert band.

In addition to teaching, Moen professionally plays the violin at weddings and other events as a member of the Eighth Avenue Strings in Moline. She joined the quartet 17 years ago.

The perfect job for Moen

Moen's favorite class at Black Hawk College was Psychology of Human Development.

She said it helped her confirm teaching was the right profession for her because she loved the child development aspects of the class.

"I decided at a very young age to become a music teacher," Moen said, adding that several dedicated and talented teachers inspired her.

Although teaching at an elementary school wasn't her initial career goal, she said the general music teacher position ended up being the perfect fit.

"This (job) is the best kept secret of the music world," she said.

Some of the perks include great co-workers, hours that work well for family life, and seeing students grow.

"I like the fast pace of my mornings and afternoons. I don't feel like I'm working," she said. "I feel like I'm just making music. It's great."

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