



# SJ-R.COM

The State Journal-Register • Springfield, IL • The Oldest Newspaper in Illinois

## UIS ceremony marks sixth college graduation for area woman

By **CHRIS DETRO**

**THE STATE JOURNAL-REGISTER**

Posted May 15, 2010 @ 11:30 PM

Last update May 15, 2010 @ 11:40 PM

Peggy Dunn's mother, who lives in Arizona, recently told her daughter she was sorry she wouldn't be able to make it back Saturday to see Peggy graduate with a master's degree from the University of Illinois Springfield.

Her daughter reminded her that it's not like she hasn't seen it before.

When Peggy Dunn, 62, got her master's in history Saturday — joining 693 other graduates, out of the 1,198 who were eligible to participate — it was her third such degree, to go along with two bachelor's degrees and a doctorate. It's her second UIS degree.

She says she keeps going to school "because of the challenge of learning new things. I love that challenge."

"Each person who teaches a course comes with a certain level of expertise," she said. "Then it comes down to 'What do I want to learn?'"

Dunn has been an adjunct lecturer in education at UIS for 10 years. Her mother, Helen, is a graduate of the former Sangamon State University and former president of the alumni association board.

### **Cancer survivor**

An endless quest for learning wouldn't seem all that unusual for an educator who comes from a family of educators. But there is more to Dunn's story.

She is a 10-year cancer survivor, and that's part of how the learning all got started again.

Dunn received a bachelor's degree in science from Southern Illinois University-Carbondale in 1969, and another bachelor's from SIU in administrative justice and social welfare in 1975. A master's in rehabilitation counseling at SIU followed in 1978.

Then she moved to Springfield, where she worked for a Fortune 100 company until the early 1990s.

"I was uncomfortable," she said. "I realized that business didn't have the same morality I did."

She had always wanted to teach, but was trying to raise a family.

She worked as a full-time substitute teacher while going to school herself in the evenings.

Dunn got her teacher certification in 1997, along with a master's in science education through UIS. She taught secondary special education students who had social problems — a class some referred to as the "knife and gun club."

"They weren't violent kids," she said. "In the end, they were responding to people who acted violently toward them."

After Dunn left, Christian County developed an alternative school for such students.

"They deserved to have another place," she said.

### **'Life list' pursuit**

She was teaching middle school science at Auburn in 1998 when she was diagnosed with terminal cancer.

"I was given eight weeks to live," Dunn said. "But I had an innovative physician who spent three years trying to keep me alive."

She has endured seven surgeries, two rounds of chemotherapy, and massive doses of radiation. She spent a year on a feeding tube.

She still stays in touch with Dr. Mokenge Malafa, who was her physician at SIU School of Medicine and now is an oncology surgeon at the H. Lee Moffitt Cancer Center in Florida.

"He got me to start a life list — a list of the things you're going to accomplish before you die," Dunn said.

"I wanted to honor the list, so I got a doctorate in education from the University of Illinois at Urbana in 2009," she said.

An interest in history is longstanding for Dunn, who volunteers at the Abraham Lincoln Presidential Museum and does some historic reenacting.

Dunn was director of Public Policy and High School Initiatives and the Abraham Lincoln Leadership Summer Institute at UIS from 2001 to 2006 until it closed because of lack of funding.

"History teachers and kids across Illinois learned about public policy and developing programs to solve problems," she said. They took courses at UIS in the summer, which included work at some of the state's historic sites. Some of those students are now in law school, Dunn said.

**Author too**

And, she's written a couple of books. One, "Mrs. Lady President and the Women of Washington Society," is about Mary Todd Lincoln, and the other concerns Illinois military units active in the Civil War. She said she's just finished another book on Victorian games and activities.

But she's getting a degree in history for another reason.

"I applied for a job and didn't get it," she said. "They were impressed with my knowledge, but I didn't have a degree in history. It was recommended I get a master's in history."

"So that's what I did this year," she said.

Her master's thesis, prompted by a letter she found in a book at an antique store, is on the Illinois Sanitary Commission that was organized during the Civil by women for the relief of sick and wounded soldiers and the care of their families.

Dunn said she thinks she's through seeking college degrees.

"Eighteen hours a semester last year pretty well wore me out," she said. "I'll continue to take and I'll continue to learn."

"I want to learn that which makes me happy," she said. "If I'm excited about history, maybe I can excite someone else."

Chris Detro can be reached at 788-1510.

Copyright 2010 The State Journal-Register. Some rights reserved

Loading commenting interface...



**Obama Approves Credit Card Bill**  
Do You Qualify for a Credit Card Bailout? Find Out if You Can Get Help  
[Discover more...](#)



**Make Your Home the Envy of Springfield**  
Find Top-Rated Contractors Today! Up to 4 Free Bids.  
[Get details...](#)

[Contact us](#) | [Privacy Policy](#) | [Terms of Service](#) | [About our Ads](#)

The State Journal-Register | Springfield, IL 62701

Copyright © 2006-2010 GateHouse Media, Inc. Some Rights Reserved.

Original content available for non-commercial use under a [Creative Commons](#) license, except where noted.

SEO by eLocalListing | [Advertiser profiles](#) | [Cherrp Local](#)