

Thomas A. and Michele M. Lewis Family Endowment



Both the Lewis (Thomas) and Mercier (Michele) families hail from very humble beginnings. Each of the family's paths mirror the immigrant experiences from the late 1800's, making their way to the new world to build a better life. The families found that embracing higher education was the avenue to become successful and create a strong foundation for

financial progress. Growing up, both Tom and Michele were blissfully unaware that they were growing up in lower middle-class households with limited financial means but, on later reflection, there was clear evidence of financial struggles in both families. Yet, both Tom and Michele were told at a very young age that they were expected to get good grades and go to college. Michele's paternal grandfather moved to the United States from Saskatchewan, Canada after the family attempted to become homesteaders in an unforgiving environment. Settling in Baltic, Connecticut, he worked for many years in the textile mills to support his family. Michele's father graduated from high school in 1938. After graduation, he worked for minimum wage as a dispatcher at a trucking firm before being drafted into the army at the beginning of World War II. After the war, he used his military benefits to go back to school and ultimately received his doctorate in English Literature from the University of Connecticut. He began his teaching career at Dean Junior College in Massachusetts, before spending 27 years teaching college level English at E.O. Smith High School in Storrs, CT. Michele's maternal grandfather's family came to the United States from Ireland. Her grandfather worked for many years at the Boston Navy Yard with just an eighth-grade education. Michele's mother graduated from high school in 1951 and, much to her father's dismay, enrolled at Framingham State College. At that time, it was not expected that a young woman would go to college. It was Michele's grandmother who insisted that each of her daughters pursue higher education and careers. Ultimately, Michele's mother would earn her master's degree from the University of Connecticut and spend most of her career teaching and advising at UCONN, finally retiring as the Associate Dean of the School of Family Studies. Tom's paternal grandfather's family also came to the United States from Ireland in the late 1800's and settled in Fairfield County, Connecticut. He spent most of his working life doing numerous odd jobs from being a gardener on private estates, a chauffeur for wealthy families, and finally retiring as a custodian for the local elementary school. Tom's father graduated from high school in 1945 and immediately enlisted in the US Army. World War II was coming to an end so he never made it out of the United States to the war zone. He spent the better part of 3 years at Fort Bragg, North Carolina, being honorably discharged as a sergeant in the military police. Tom's father had wanted to go to college, but he was told that his family could not afford it. After working in a bank for a short time, he became the youngest person to be hired

as a police officer in the town of Greenwich. He retired after 30 years on the police force having risen to the rank of sergeant in the detective bureau. Tom's maternal grandfather's family has roots dating back to colonial America. His grandfather was the son of a protestant minister and grew up, like many, with little money. During the Great Depression he only had his job as City of Stamford Building Inspector when the correct political party held office. During other times, he did a number of odd jobs but mostly tended bar. Upon graduating high school, Tom's mother enrolled in the nursing program at Stamford Hospital. After being a stay-at-home mother for many years she went back to work in 1975 as a nurse in an allergist's office until her retirement. Tom and Michele met while enrolled at the University of Connecticut. Both graduated in 1981, with Tom majoring in Economics (even though Michele tells family that he actually majored in swimming) and Michele majoring in Mechanical Engineering. Both Tom and Michele earned a master's in business administration from Northeastern University in 1987, early in their careers, while working full-time. After graduation Michele would spend over 40 years in the aerospace industry, working for General Electric, General Dynamics, and Raytheon Technologies in roles with increasing responsibility. She is currently Senior Director of the Global Chemical Substances Program Office for Collins Aerospace. After graduation, Tom would work for 14 years at the IBM Corporation as financial analyst and management roles. Tom left IBM in 1994 and went back to school, to obtain the credentials for a new career as an educator. He earned his master's degree in Education and started his 25 year teaching career in the Westfield Public Schools. Tom spent 7 years teaching World Geography and US History at North Middle School. He spent his remaining 18 years at Westfield High School teaching US History, Financial Literacy, Advanced Placement Government and Advanced Placement Macroeconomics. In the classroom he was most happy the years where he taught both AP classes at the same time and was able to see the same students as juniors and seniors allowing him to develop rather strong relationships with his students as they were making their own college decisions. As well as his long teaching career, Tom has spent more than 20 years as the swim coach at Westfield High School. All three of Tom and Michele's daughters attended the Westfield Public Schools and graduated from Westfield High School. They were taught at a very young age the expectation of graduating from college as a path to a successful future. Caroline graduated from Bentley University with undergraduate and master's degree in accounting. She is a CPA working for Moderna as the Manager of Revenue and Collaboration. Bridget graduated from Hamilton College with a degree in Biology, and just finished her master's degree in International Education from Boston College. Erin also graduated from Hamilton College, earning her degree in chemistry. Upon graduation Erin worked for several years at Brigham and Women's Hospital doing allergy research before entering osteopathic medical school last year. The basic family premise is one where we, the next generation, should benefit from the example and knowledge of the generation before, and are expected to work to be better off than the generation before. Success in that endeavor usually has higher education as the backbone of that path. It has also been a family premise that the best way to achieve this is by focusing on careers in either STEM or Business. As Tom retires from his teaching career, the family has decided to create scholarships to help others to find success for their family. It is very important for the Lewis family to continue the legacy of supporting those who choose higher education as the basis for their future success. The family has decided to assist students of need who have declared a course of study in Engineering, Accounting, Economics, Nursing or other STEM majors. Congratulations to the scholarship recipients!

Written by: Tom Lewis May 27, 2021