

## VIMS alum juggles teaching career with tennis

By Erin Kelly

(December 5, 2012) In the words of tennis champion Arthur Ashe, “From what we get, we can make a living; what we give, however, makes a life.”

VIMS alumnus Marvin Hedgepeth (M.A. '75) has created a life based on the influence of two great men—Arthur Ashe and Jacques Cousteau. Hedgepeth says inspiration drawn from Cousteau’s scientific explorations, and Ashe’s superb tennis skills, have made him who he is today.

The 1968 graduate of Denbigh High School attended Virginia State University where he began pursuing a degree in medicine. That was until the fateful day when he caught an episode of *The Undersea World of Jacques Cousteau*—a television series following the scientific expeditions of renowned sea explorer Jacques Cousteau and his crew aboard the *Calypso*. From that moment on, Hedgepeth knew he wanted to pursue marine science.

Growing up in such close proximity to Gloucester Point, Hedgepeth was familiar with VIMS and its reputation. “Once I was influenced by Cousteau, and made the decision not to go to med school, I applied to the graduate program at VIMS and was lucky enough to get accepted,” he says.

Hedgepeth studied biological oceanography during his time at VIMS, with the main focus a study of enzymes in clams and oysters. “I was very involved in my research,” he says, recalling a favorite memory of spending 20 hours at a time in the lab, with his wife having to bring him his meals. “It didn’t seem so fun at the time,” he laughs, “but that is one of my fondest memories.”

On graduation, Hedgepeth knew his days in the lab were behind him. He served as Marine Science Coordinator at the Math and Science Center in Richmond before realizing that his real passion was to share what he had learned about the ocean with young people.

A recent retiree from the Newport News public school system, Hedgepeth has spent more than 38 years as an educator, teaching marine biology, marine ecology, and oceanography in local classrooms, including stints at Menchville High School and Hampton University.

After making the tough decision to retire, Hedgepeth’s found himself back in the classroom. He currently teaches marine biology and life science at Hampton Roads Academy. “I’m having a ball at HRA,” says Hedgepeth. “It’s like a close-knit family here, much like VIMS.”



*State Champions: Hedgepeth led the HRA girls tennis team to win the state championship in their division in 2012. Photo by Ashley Hedgepeth*

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With a sincere passion for his students and the subjects he teaches, Hedgepeth also takes pride in his second career as a professional tennis player. A certified tennis instructor since 1988, Hedgepeth still plays competitively, and was once ranked as the third best tennis player in the state of Virginia for his age group.

“My tennis career has been very fulfilling,” he says. “I’ve had great success with the kids I’ve taught, with a number of them playing college tennis and becoming coaches themselves.”

Hedgepeths’ biggest success as a coach thus far happened just this year when HRA’s girls tennis team—which he just began coaching this past August—won the state championship. “In my 30-plus years as a coach, this was my first state championship,” he says. “I’m really proud of that.”

Though he couldn’t always find time for a tennis match during his years at VIMS, Hedgepeth is grateful for the experience he gained and the relationships he formed. “I feel that getting a degree at VIMS gives you a pedigree that is recognized worldwide,” he says. “The reputation of the graduate program is renowned, and the family atmosphere helps you get to know the people you are working with quite well.”



*Hedgepeth (2nd row, center) was the first African American to graduate from the School of Marine Science at VIMS.*

*Photo courtesy of VIMS*



*Hedgepeth with Jacques Cousteau in 1982.*

While juggling two careers, there isn’t ample time for Hedgepeth to come to VIMS to visit old friends. However, each year he brings his students to the Gloucester Point campus to learn about his alma mater, and the groundbreaking research happening so close to home. This year, he plans to take his class to the VIMS Eastern Shore Lab in Wachapreague to give them an even broader perspective on what VIMS is all about.

The first African American to graduate from VIMS’ graduate program, Hedgepeth is an accomplished science teacher, successful tennis professional, avid bass fisherman, husband, and father. “The satisfaction I’ve gotten from doing what I do for so many years—and still having a passion for it—is my biggest accomplishment,” he says.

The influence Ashe and Cousteau had in shaping Hedgepeth’s career is apparent. Though he never had the opportunity to meet Ashe in person, he was able to meet Cousteau—during a tour of the *Calypso* no less—at Norfolk’s Harborfest in 1982. To this day, a photo of him shaking the Captain’s hand decorates his desk at HRA.