

COMMUNITY

Son motivates Redmond mom to return to school, earn degree

by SAMANTHA PAK, Redmond Reporter
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Amy Ross (left) with her son Caleb, who motivated her to go back to school and earn her master of business administration. — Image Credit: Courtesy Of Amy Ross

For a long time, Amy Ross was content with her career.

Working as a specialty cruise travel agent for AAA Washington was an “awesome job” and she got to travel from time to time. But a few years ago, the Redmond resident suddenly found herself a newly single mother and realized that while she had a fun job she loved, it wasn’t exactly a high-paying job. It was more of a “second income job,” she said.

Ross was forced to look at her life and figure out what she really wanted for herself. She knew she wanted to stay in the travel industry and decided her next step would be to get into the management side of things.

So Ross went back to school to become more qualified to take on such roles.

She enrolled in Western Governors University (WGU) Washington to get her master of business administration (MBA) in March 2013, earning her degree in 12 months. Ross said her

goal was to earn the two-year degree in 18 months.

“I can’t say it was easy,” she said about juggling school, a full-time job and mommy duty.

Ross, who also has a degree in history from the University of Washington, completed her degree in

February — shortly after turning 40, making the MBA a special birthday present. On Saturday, she will be one of about 1,000 students — 214 from King County — to graduate from WGU Washington during the school’s third commencement ceremony at McCaw Hall at Seattle Center.

“I’m pretty excited about it actually,” Ross said about participating in the ceremony even though it’s already been a few months since she earned her MBA.

One of Ross’ main motivations for going back to school was her son Caleb. She said when she became newly single, she told herself they could just “get by” financially. But after thinking about it longer, she asked herself, “Why do I have to just get through?” Going back to school was a way for her to make things better for her and her son.

Ross said going back to earn her MBA was also to show Caleb the importance of hard work and how you can accomplish whatever you want if you put in the time.

WGU Washington Chancellor Jean Floten said many of their students are in similar situations as Ross was: mid-career working adults looking to earn an advanced degree while trying to balance family, work and other responsibilities.

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While WGU Washington is an online university, the school organizes social events to give students the opportunity to meet each other. Ross said during these get-togethers, it was nice to meet others who were like her, trying to balance their school with family and work.

"It was kind of nice," she said. "I'm not the only mom out here struggling."

Ross added that one of the reasons she did not choose to attend a traditional university for her MBA was because at 40, she would have been quite a bit older than most students and stand out in a way she didn't want to.

Floten said as an accredited online university with tuition set at \$6,000 a year, WGU Washington is affordable and accessible for students.

In addition, Ross said students can accelerate their learning or take as long as they need to complete their degrees at their own pace. She said she appreciated this as some of her classes were very easy; in other classes where she struggled, she was comfortable asking for extra help without worrying about holding up her classmates.

"I was able to get that individual attention," she said.

Since she completed her degree, Ross said she has a better understanding of the bigger picture at AAA Washington and has been able to apply what she has learned to her job.

"That was pretty cool," she said.

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