

Kevin Heffler's Letter

In 2006, the Erickson School at UMBC became operational, thanks to the generosity and extraordinary vision of Erickson Retirement Communities Founder John Erickson and UMBC President Freeman Hrabowski. John and Freeman, close friends, envisioned a future where management in the emerging field of aging services would not just be central to ensuring the continued growth of the profession in seniors housing and care, but central to American society as a whole, as older adults and Baby Boomers became an economic force that transcended retirement living as we knew it. It became increasingly clear at that time, as Jody Holtzman of AARP later quantified in his publication, "The Longevity Economy," that the older adult marketplace would be important to business innovation and growth no matter what the field of endeavor. In fact, as Jody outlined, the older adult marketplace would become the third largest economy in the world, behind only the United States and China's total economies.

That spring, I had the pleasure of meeting and working with Tony Mullen and Bob Kramer of NIC, as NIC's executive education migrated from Johns Hopkins to UMBC. The undergraduate and graduate programs in Management of Aging Services were under development, and the Dean of the School, Judah Ronch, had come aboard to add his visionary insights to growing the school's programs, and to developing leaders who would understand the integrated concepts of human aging, public policy, and business management. At the time, however, the NIC executive education program provided the school's primary enrollments, and Tony and Bob devoted much of their time to ensuring that the curriculum and the delivery of the executive education program would meet the emerging needs of leaders and emerging leaders around the country.

On March 10th, 2018, the world lost a true pioneer in the aging services profession with the passing of Tony Mullen. As Mike Hargrave recently noted in his guest column for McKnight's, "A Tribute to Tony Mullen (<https://www.mcknightsseniorliving.com/guest-columns/a-tribute-to-tony-mullen/article/751102/>)," "Tony was one of the original founders of NIC back in 1991. He worked alongside Bob Kramer (NIC's strategic adviser and former president and CEO) until 2007, when he became a senior fellow. Bob and Tony shared the same vision: that for the industry to become an accepted institutional asset class, it would require a similar level of data, information and transparency that already existed in other asset classes."

Among his many accomplishments and his tireless advocacy for better data and information, both for capital providers and business partners outside of the field as well as leaders within the field, Tony provided great insights for the Erickson School as it became one of the leading providers of talent for the field of aging services at all levels. Tony and Bob, through NIC, provided scholarship support and expert insights into what employers were looking for and what would be needed in the future. They also gave their time and talents as faculty members in many, many courses over the years, and they helped the school to continue to grow and prosper. Their contributions have helped to make the school what it is today, a unique resource for businesses in the Longevity Economy.

As Mike Hargrave noted in his column, I think many of us at this time reflect on how grateful we are to have known Tony and how grateful we are that he chose to pour so much love into the seniors housing and care industry. Tony was truly a man who cared deeply about the people in the seniors housing and care profession, the future of the field, and also about his family and the many charitable endeavors in which he was involved.

Following Tony's passing, his brother Jay wrote to the Erickson School to share the following:

"Tony was a faith filled man and a sports fan, so we don't think it was a coincidence that UMBC upset Vermont – just a few hours after Tony died – to make it into the NCAA basketball tournament for the first time since 2008 and the second time ever. Tony's Funeral Mass on Thursday was one of the most beautiful and inspirational events I have ever attended. On Friday morning, I said in a family text chain: 'Knowing Tony, UMBC, where he helped found the senior living graduate program, will be the first 16 seed to beat a 1 seed tonight.' We feel Tony played a role in orchestrating the biggest upset in NCAA men's basketball history. Congratulations to UMBC, we enjoyed the ride!"

President Freeman Hrabowski's response sums up the University's and the School's sentiments:

"What a thoughtful message to the UMBC community. We were so sorry to hear about Tony's passing. He played a special role in the founding of the Erikson School, and he will always be a part of us."

Safe travels, Tony. We have enjoyed the ride as well. We are grateful for your immeasurable contributions and, even more, for your friendship.