

“The Mayor of Garden Terrace” Helps Young Nursing Students Flourish

An easy walk to restaurants, shopping and Freedom Park, Garden Terrace is a street anyone living in Charlotte would be lucky to call home. Runners, walkers and strollers pass under stately oak trees, their roots tied to the land decades ago. Lining the sidewalks in front of the craftsmen cottages and historic bungalows are young crepe myrtles – recently planted – full of potential and ready to branch out.

It may be life imitating nature, but the students of Carolinas College of Health Sciences are just as poised for growth, and thanks to the help of Netherlands native Maarten Pennink, they’re sure to flourish.



Tarmarcus "Marcus" Kornegay and Maarten Pennink.

“Maarten has earned the student-bestowed title of ‘Mayor of Garden Terrace,’ by representing the Dilworth community as open, caring and supportive,” says **Ellen Sheppard, EdD**, president of Carolinas College. “For that, I and Carolinas College are most grateful.”

After a stint at a prestigious engineering firm and his graduation from school, Maarten endured a leaky apartment in Dilworth before settling in a house on Garden Terrace. Entering the front door, Maarten stopped in the entryway and proclaimed “This is my house,” without seeing any other parts of the home. “It was just me,” he explains. So in 1991, he moved to the neighborhood. “An intuition that proved to be exactly right,” he says.

In the years that followed, Carolinas HealthCare System helped convert all but a couple of homes, duplexes and apartments on the block into student housing for Carolinas College students. Garden Terrace changed into more of a transient neighborhood, with most CCHS students spending a year or two there before moving on.

Tamarcus “Marcus” Kornegay, RN, was one of these students. After graduating from the University of North Carolina at Greensboro, Marcus came to Charlotte to pursue his nursing degree, encouraged by his mother, who is a nurse. He looked at the nursing programs at Central Piedmont Community College and Queens University, but eventually settled at Carolinas College after visiting their open house and experiencing a real “family” atmosphere between students and staff. Eligible for student housing, Marcus took an apartment across the street from Maarten on Garden Terrace.

Before Marcus even finished moving in, Maarten welcomed him to the neighborhood. After that meeting, Maarten and Marcus would run into each other several times a week, either while Marcus was walking to class or Maarten was admiring his birds. The two also ended up having numerous conversations on Maarten’s front stoop.



Maarten is surrounded by current and former students he befriended including George and Tiffany Wentworth, Marcus and Amanda Graves.

He wasn't sure what made him reach out to Marcus, but Maarten felt obligated to help this new college student discover Charlotte. They explored the city's culinary scene together, and Marcus often joined him for coffee, tea and conversation.

"It's really how I got to learn about Charlotte," Marcus says.

When it came time for Maarten to have his knees replaced, he relied on Marcus to help him get back on his feet. Marcus would run errands or help Maarten with household chores. And before he knew it, Maarten was back on his beloved bicycle again.

And when Marcus completed his degree last year, Maarten attended his graduation. Marcus now works in cardiac telemetry at Carolinas Medical Center and often pops in to see Maarten before or after his shift.

"My time on Garden Terrace will always be special to me," Marcus says. "Just look at where this area is – Dilworth, lots of families, greenery, (Freedom) Park is right down the street. I'd love to live in an area like this. Maarten is like family now. I only spent a couple of years here, but I made a lifelong friend."

Dr. Sheppard says that the bond Maarten and Marcus formed warms her heart.

"Their relationship crossed the chasms of age, class, race, religion, privilege and even the 'town vs. gown' divide. Yet they connected based on common goodness and humanity."

Marcus may be a little jealous of Amanda Graves (also a recent graduate of Carolinas College) who gets to stay on Garden Terrace for a couple more years as she earns her BSN online through Cabarrus College of Health Sciences, Carolinas College's sister institution up the road in Concord.

"This school is my family. I still go and volunteer to help them out, because they've done so much for my family," Amanda says.

After she settled in on Garden Terrace, she baked a plate of cookies for Maarten to introduce herself, but he wasn't home – a pattern she began to pick up on.

"Mr. Maarten likes to challenge himself and not get into a routine. He forces himself outside the house and loves to meet people and hear their stories and share his," Amanda says. "In the first several months we were here, he was never home. He has more of a social life than I do. I can't keep up with him."

Maarten volunteers with Friendship Trays (Meals on Wheels), the Shepherd's Center of Charlotte (a learning and enrichment program for older adults) and has also been asked to participate on area boards concerning issues of aging and cycling.

"At the end of the day, you need to know why you're tired," Maarten says. "That means that you have to get up and get out of the house and do something. I don't have Wi-Fi in this house. Reason? I'm an older man and I love TV and I love Wi-Fi. But if I had it at the house, I would never get out. People call it the golden years. Baloney! They're only golden if you do something with it. You have to work hard to maintain your friendships."

Whenever Marcus or Amanda or any other friends that Maarten has collected throughout his life need a sounding board or want to hear an amazing story from one of Maarten's previous adventures (or just a good restaurant recommendation) they know they can turn to Maarten.

"I think from very early on I had the realization that in a community, there is a need to interact. And there seems to be; generations have trouble connecting with one another. And I think that's one of the tasks that I would like to deal with," Maarten says. "I think it's important for the younger generations to learn from me, and I from the younger generations. Isolation is not the way to do it."

Maarten adds that community is about people, not buildings, and that is why he remains a beloved figure for students past and present on Garden Terrace.