

Mike Pigg

A College of the Redwoods Success Story



Sometimes getting a degree at College of the Redwoods is secondary—or may not happen at all, but students use their campus experience to discover a passion that forever shapes their future. “CR was the perfect place to take general education and dabble in other interests,” observed former College of the Redwoods student and world class triathlete Mike Pigg.

Pigg graduated from Arcata High School in 1982 and enrolled at College of the Redwoods. He started taking the prerequisite classes for a degree in engineering but sitting for hours focusing on bookwork had never come easy for the active student. As a child, he had turned to sports to “get his yayas out,” he said. “In class you had to sit for six or seven hours but then you could run and do other activities before you had to go home and do homework.”

At ten years old, the active youngster started swimming competitively and “got the bug.”

While Pigg said he enjoyed the physical challenge of competing, he said he was also motivated by the opportunity to travel throughout northern California and socialize with his friends.

In high school Pigg participated in basketball, cross country, and track & field. After enrolling at College of the Redwoods, he joined the cross country and track & field teams to keep active. He also swam in the campus pool and biked to school from Arcata whenever he could, averaging the 17-mile one way trip in about 45 minutes, even with heavy textbooks in his backpack.

Not long into his time at CR Pigg started rethinking engineering as a career choice, as he knew it would keep him at a desk when he preferred to be outdoors and moving. “Engineering also required calculus and physics,” he admitted. “Which were not my thing.” As Pigg reassessed his career options he happened upon an Ironman Triathlon World Championship on television and was instantly intrigued. Competitors swim 2.4 miles, bike 112 miles and run 26 miles in succession- a competition widely considered to be one of the most difficult one-day challenges in the world. The idea fit his personality, he said, as he liked to work hard and enjoyed the physical and mental process that came with preparing for any competition. He also enjoyed pushing his body to its limits with every challenge. He had already completed in a local triathlon and knew that despite some unique personal challenges, he had found his sport. “I was actually a mediocre athlete in many ways and not super great at running or swimming,” he admitted, though he found both sports conditioned his lungs, and his body was uniquely suited for cycling. Combining the three, he believed, was his path to success.

He had completed most of his general education requirements at CR when he dropped out to pursue professional competition full time. “College of the Redwoods really made it possible,” Pigg said. “At universities, coaches are always on the players to show up, practice and perform, but at CR there was less of that sort of pressure. But it also meant you needed to be self-motivated to succeed, which worked well for me.”

His sweet spot

Pigg began training in earnest and placed seventh in the 1985 Ironman in Hawaii. In 1986, Pigg began capturing headlines as he won race after race and by 1988, the then ranking national champion beat out the world’s finest swim-bike-run competitors to become the best triathlete in the world, a title he would hold for several years. From 1985 to 2002, he competed in more than two hundred triathlons and won more than eighty, leading to his 2014 induction into the USA Triathlon Hall of Fame.

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End of Sports - New Career

In 2002, a desire to spend more time with his children and the simple fact that he was becoming an older competitor in one of the most physically demanding sports in the world prompted Pigg to end a career that had spanned the globe and begin another in Humboldt.

"When I came back home, I enrolled again at College of the Redwoods to complete the classes I needed to take my real estate exam," Pigg explained. After securing his license in 2003, he went to work for Coldwell Banker Cutten Realty, where he says the skills, he learned as a student and athlete continue to support his success today. "It is really about working hard, building a team and fostering relationships," he added. His job also allowed him to support local sports events, like the Humboldt Tri-Kids Triathlon, and coach youth sports for years.

"My decision to go to CR launched a 17-year career," he said. "I am so thankful for College of the Redwoods and that I had an opportunity to engage in sports while I was a student there. My life experience may have been a completely different story otherwise. The environment on campus was also a gift. I was surrounded by redwoods, Humboldt Bay, and the bottoms—and not in Los Angeles on a campus surrounded by concrete. I like to say the county, with the fresh air, trails and more, is my playground. We are so fortunate to be here."