

Through military
and civilian life,

Kate McGraw '85

has maintained
an appreciation
for the arts

If you're interested in finding out how Kate McGraw '85 has spent her career, don't bother visiting her home in rural Maryland's historic Kent Country. That may turn out to be an exercise in frustration. There's a cornfield behind her house, but McGraw was never a farmer. There's also a vineyard, and while she does produce a sauvignon blanc, winemaking is really just a hobby. Her baby grand piano, a venerable old friend that her parents rescued and restored when she was a teenager, has a place of prominence in her living room, but McGraw does not earn any income from music, either.

A LIFE IN BALANCE





“Actually, I think there are clues all around,” she says, “You can make a lot of guesses.”

True. But you’d probably be wrong. Sure, there are books on psychology all around the place and commendations here and there from the government. But there are also her own framed pieces of artwork on the walls, photos of her grandchildren, and plenty of music books.

Bottom line?

You’d have to be quite the sleuth to figure out that McGraw is the deputy director of the U.S. Department of Defense’s Psychological Health Center of Excellence, where she works vigorously to help enhance the psychological well-being of our nation’s service members and their families.

McGraw has spent 30 years in a variety of military positions devoted to mental health research and treatment, mostly on behalf of the Department of Defense. These roles have included serving as one of the first female intercontinental ballistic launch officers for the Air Force; aerospace psychologist for the Euro-NATO Joint Jet Pilot training program; leadership of the team deployed to provide mental health support for the department’s mortuary affairs operations following the September 11 terrorist attacks and the explosion of the Space Shuttle Columbia; and many other parallel tasks and responsibilities.

McGraw has served both in the uniformed and civilian sectors, the latter of which has included adjunct professor at Washington College, management consultant at a psychiatric hospital, and co-developer of Delaware’s first suicide-prevention program.

Some may speculate that a career of such momentous consequence is precisely why her home can be considered somewhat of a refuge—what with the watercolors, the ivories, and the grapevines. But there’s more to it than that. The fact is that McGraw has always had more interests than can typically be

explored in a single career, from music and mental health to art and poetry, from landscape architecture and astronomy to athletics and biology. Perhaps McGraw’s sole problem is that there are only seven days in a week and 52 weeks in a year.

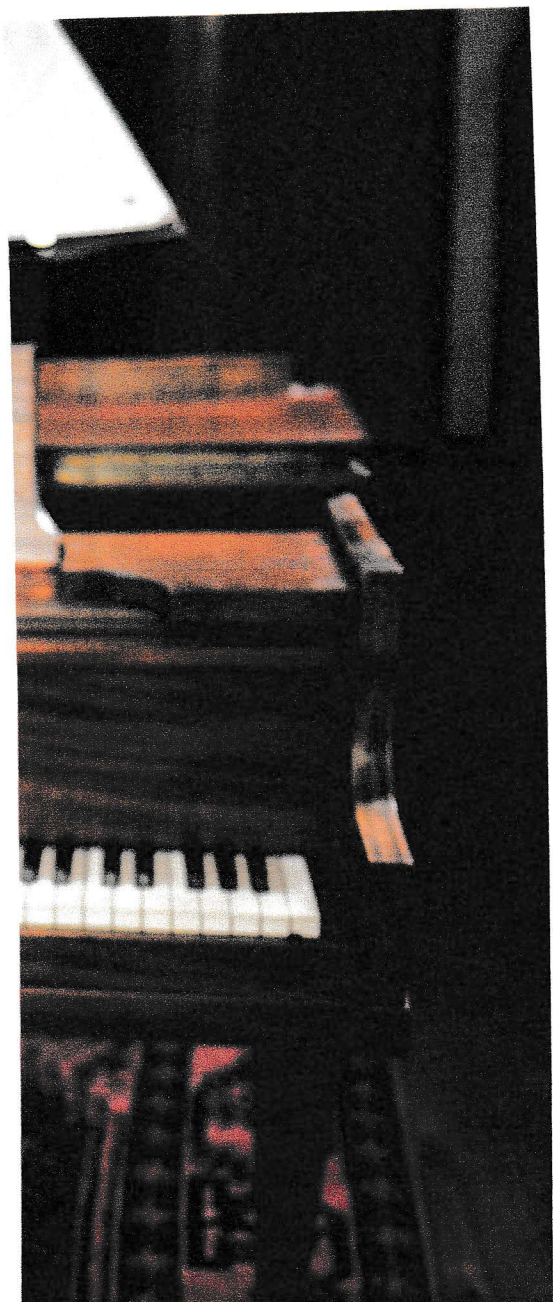
“I have so many ways to explore my creativity that I often find myself working on one kind of project to the exclusion of everything else—at least for a while,” she admits. “The world is full of interesting things.”

McGraw grew up in Cleveland, Ohio, and was drawn to music, particularly the piano, from the age of five. As a preteen,

she attended the Cleveland Institute of Music. She also loved to paint, look up at the stars, run cross-country, play basketball, and survey a dozen other endeavors having to do with the arts, science, and physical endurance. As college age approached, she decided it would be wise to see more of the world before setting her sights on a specific professional course.

“So I went to the Netherlands as an exchange student and tutored with a concert pianist,” McGraw explains. While there, she also studied art, Dutch literature, English, geography, biology, and history.





In 1981, she applied to the University's The Hartt School, and soon after, joined the student ranks on Bloomfield Avenue. She graduated with a bachelor's degree in piano in 1985, went on to get her master's in human services from the University of Great Falls (Montana), and later her PhD in clinical psychology from the University of Texas Southwestern Medical Center in Dallas.

How does a student life immersed in music and art develop into a career as a psychiatric expert for the U.S. military? The answers come to light once you can travel back in time and discern McGraw's innermost perspectives. "I didn't think

that being a performing musician would be the healthiest thing for me," she shares. "It may not have been the best life for me. When you decide on a career after you invest so many years in perfecting an art, it's a tough decision. But it doesn't mean that music is over. It just ceases being the primary focus."

It was McGraw's brother who may actually have planted the seed that grew into a psychiatric career in the military. Early on, he reminded her how interested she had always been in affairs of the mind, how patriotic she was in spirit, and how she always had a robust sense of adventure.

To some, it may sound as if McGraw led two lives—one devoted to music and art throughout her years of schooling, and another devoted to mental health once her career got underway. But what makes her such a distinctive personality is the fact that there are plenty of virtually seamless connections between the two.

"Throughout my military career, I've been asked to play piano for distinguished visitors quite a number of times," McGraw says, acknowledging just one of those seamless and very advantageous connections. "The Department of Defense also works with the National Endowment for the Arts to see how music and art can be healing for traumatic brain injuries or psychological health problems."

Yet another connection is her support of a program with the Naval Academy and George Mason University called Coming Home Dialogue, in which facilitators and groups of veterans look at war-time literature, poetry, short stories, and narratives to find common psychological threads and inner experiences that can be shared as a way to promote healing and healthfulness.

McGraw's devotion to the arts has never diminished. Despite her hectic work schedule, she finds time to work with a local arts council, donate her time to musical theater groups, give an occasional recital, and much more. "I hang out with a lot of actors, musicians, and poets," she states proudly.

To be sure, McGraw's memories of classmates and instructors from her

UHart days are never far behind. In particular, she remembers with great fondness both piano professor Margreet Pfeifer Francis and the late Moshe Paranov, a co-founder of the school who spent five decades inspiring students. "In addition to teaching the craft," McGraw says of Francis, "she really cared about us as humans. She was awesome."

McGraw also highly valued the assemblies for which Paranov was responsible, at which Hartt graduates talked to students about the realities of life as a professional musician. "It wasn't to dissuade us," she recalls, "but to make sure we were prepared for how competitive it is." McGraw appreciated how Paranov and his graduate guests confirmed that a life with music is always a life with skills that can be used and experiences that can be shared and enjoyed.

That's precisely the kind of practicality she offers to young people today who may face similar decisions. "If you don't follow your heart, you might live a life of regrets. But if you don't balance it out with pragmatism, you might also have regrets."

McGraw's life in Kent County, which she shares with two dogs, a cat, and visits from her three grown children and five grandchildren, is fulfilling. Also gratifying is the quality of the teamwork that has helped her make such a positive impact. "I really appreciate the professionals I've worked with throughout my career," McGraw notes. "We've always been focused on such important missions. If, in the course of our work, we help one person feel better after they've served their county, then we did our job, and it was entirely worth the effort. That's why I continue to commute the long distance to Washington, D.C. The work is invaluable."

McGraw makes that 85-mile journey from Maryland's eastern shore to the nation's capital several times a week. As everyone knows, it's not exactly easy to sit in a car for two straight hours unless you have some good music playing for company, inner peace, and motivation.

Without a doubt, Kate McGraw's commute is filled with music each and every mile. **H**