



Alumni Spotlight

Ronald Burger '70

April 2020



Lancaster native, Ronald Cary Burger, graduated from Millersville in 1970 with a Bachelor of Science in Education. Millersville has remained foundational in Burger's work. He has applied what he learned on campus to a 50-year career in education, public health and emergency preparedness and response.

After graduation, Burger became a Peace Corps volunteer in Ghana and taught science at Winneba Training College. During the first holiday break from classes, a severe outbreak of cholera—a devastating gastro-intestinal disease—spread around Winneba. Thanks to his training with the Center for Disease Control (CDC), Burger was assigned to lead the Ministry of Health team in charge of controlling the outbreak and realized that he had found his life's work. Upon returning from Ghana, he taught at Downingtown Senior High School for a few years, turning his biology classroom into a representation of a cell.

“Small world” is how Burger explains President Daniel Wubah's affiliation with what is now known as Winneba University. Not only is President Wubah working on a memorandum of understanding with the university, coincidentally, he and his wife also happen to be from the fishing town of Winneba, where Burger was living and teaching during his time in Ghana.

Thanks to persistence, patience and teaching experience, Burger became an epidemiologist and Disease Control Program Coordinator with the CDC. Back in the mid-90s, he participated on a Pandemic Planning Task Force to try to bring light to both public health and emergency management. Officials were thinking that it was not a matter of if but when, as they say. Upon retiring from CDC after 35 years, Burger became a volunteer member of the National Disaster Medical System within the Department of Health and Human Services and continues to respond to major public health incidents. Burger just recently returned from a deployment with the National Disaster Medical System to assist at one of the quarantine facilities, which housed the guests of a cruise ship that was monitored for the incubation period, as he and the rest of the team remained on alert to deploy if needed to help support some of the mobile hospitals and alternate care facilities in many states.

Burger and his family reside in Tallahassee, Florida where he is a full-time contractor with the Department of Homeland Security as the jurisdictional coordinator for the BioWatch Program in Florida, which safeguards our country from biological attacks.

“With an office in the Florida Department of Health, I am on call to assist locally and am constantly receiving data of Florida's morbidity and mortality. My spouse is a State Health employee, so at this point we continue to work our jobs from home as we support our two 5th and 6th graders as they both participate in “quaran-teaching” through the teachers at their school, Florida State University Lab School,” he says.

With this global pandemic, families all over our nation are feeling the effects that COVID-19 are having on humanity. “It is quite a challenge as most of us face working and keeping our children at the same time, but social distancing does work along with good personal hygiene and that is all we have right now,” he advises. “Medical countermeasures will soon be available in the very near future.”

Until then, he is pleased to see what lengths the essential stores are taking to promote social distancing and good hygiene. Positivity and optimism are especially important in times like these and his family members are always looking for those silver linings. After the day's work is completed and plenty of fresh air breaks have been taken, the members of Burger's family spend quality time together walking their two golden retrievers. Burger leaves us with an uplifting message, “The COVID-19 virus, SARS-CoV-2, will get under control thanks to all following the CDC guidance, the health care and first responders, and our state, local and federal health officials. Public Health, Everywhere, Everyday.”

To read more about Ronald Cary Burger, please see our [2019 Distinguished Alumni Award Recipient](#), thank you.