

# Press Release

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September 19, 2005

## **From Corporate Life to Education: IBM Exec Finally Fulfills Teaching Goal By Becoming SJRCC Instructor**

St. Augustine resident Bill Kiernan's dream to teach began thirty years ago. In August, Kiernan, now a business instructor at St. Johns River Community College's St. Augustine campus, took his first step in front of a classroom. A graduate of the community college system, Kiernan said the transition from thirty years as an IBM executive to academia has been a smooth one. And, while he admits it sounds corny, Kiernan said he is excited to share his real life experience with someone else and to finally realize his dream. "It was a journey back to a promise," he said.

Kiernan, originally from New York City, earned his A.A.S. from Nassau Community College, his B.B.A. from Hofstra University and his M.B.A. from Indiana State University. It was at this time in 1976 that Kiernan shared with one of his graduate school professors his dilemma between going into the corporate world or teaching. His professor encouraged him to experience the business world first, adding that he could later teach from a real world vantage point. Kiernan took that advice and joined IBM as a sales representative in Indianapolis. "In those days, everyone began in sales," said Kiernan. Over the next 30 years, Kiernan traveled across the United States to Texas, California, Florida, North Carolina and New Jersey.

Kiernan worked his way up as an Advisory Forecaster, Senior Planner, Program Manager and so on until he reached his most current position of Senior Consulting I/T Architect, Customer Executive Education in North Carolina where he became the top requested educational speaker, leading about 200 events per year. Kiernan also nurtured ongoing customer relationships with hundreds of accounts worldwide with documented success in winning millions of dollars of revenue for IBM. While Kiernan enjoyed his job and the success of his many years with IBM, he was beginning to miss time at home with his wife, Sandra. The couple, who have two grown sons, also wanted to move back to Florida. And then there was the teaching promise still in the back of Kiernan's mind. So, Kiernan and Sandra pulled out a map of Florida and began researching all community colleges in the state and writing letters to the Human Resources Departments and the Presidents of the colleges, seeking employment. He found the perfect match at SJRCC on the St. Augustine campus.

“It is such a refreshing change to be in a smaller community,” said Kiernan, adding that SJRCC’s HR process was much more user friendly than larger schools in the state.

Now Kiernan concentrates on bringing IBM into the classroom, giving his students real world projects and ethical dilemmas to unravel. He teaches Finance, Introduction to Business, Marketing and Excel classes. Students, he said, are interested in hearing about his days at IBM, and they also enjoy talking generally about the company and getting his feedback. Kiernan said he often breaks the class into groups, presents real world exercises and then he role plays as the company chairman. “I like to see some competition between the groups,” he said. Kiernan said his last position with IBM involved him spending one to three hours a day with customers, convincing them that both he and IBM knew the product and the technology. Now he approaches the classroom the same way, using charts and graphics to illustrate various lessons. He also remembers what it was like to attend community college as a non-traditional student while working during the day. “The first thing I tell my students is that I know how it feels,” Kiernan said. “That seems to put them at ease right away.” As for Kiernan and his journey back to education, he located his professor from 1976 and let him know that he took his advice and finally made it back to the classroom.

Caption: Headshot of Bill Kiernan