

DULUTH. . . When Marian Kukkola was in the seventh grade, her parents -- Edwin and Nelmi Kukkola of Cromwell, Minn. -- decided that all three of them would graduate from college together.

That nine-year-old family dream -- which also became a challenge-- will come true Tuesday night (June 7) when mother, father, and daughter get their degrees at the University of Minnesota in Duluth.

For honor student Marian, 21, the bachelor of science degree means the start of a teaching career in English and speech.

She follows in the footsteps of her mother, Nelmi, who taught Marian in grade school and who now will receive the same degree as her daughter. Mrs. Kukkola's four-year diploma comes 28 years after her teacher's certificate from Duluth State Teachers college and follows 23 years of elementary teaching.

Accountant Edwin Kukkola, 48, has had to catch University extension credits on the run. He was prompted to go to college after World War II, using GI bill benefits. Since he had dropped out of Cromwell high school after two years, he got his high school diploma in 1951.

For Kukkola, the bachelor of arts in business and economics carries more personal significance than hope of advancement.

There is some amount of friendly family argument about this point. Mother and daughter urge him to get his CPA -- certified public accountant rating.

The Kukkolas consider their work-study existence an advantage rather than a hardship.

"We couldn't pass up the chance to go to UMD when it is so close," they say. (The parents commuted about 50 miles to classes; Marian lived on campus.) Kukkola said co-workers at Central Accounting Service in Superior, Wis., were anxious to lend a hand when he sometimes had to leave work to go to class.

Nelmi Kukkola lauds encouragement from former school superintendent J. P. Vaughn, Chisholm and W. L. Docken, superintendent at Moose Lake for renewing her interest in a college degree.

The going wasn't always easy, however. Father Kukkola needed 31 credits at the outset of the current school year. Mrs. Kukkola lacked one credit beyond an extension course this spring. Several dramatic and musical productions demanded Marian's time between English readings and graduation requirements.

Marian, who received the "Sieur du Lhut" award as outstanding student at UMD this spring, will teach in Mountain Iron next fall.

"Teaching," she says candidly, "keeps one young. -- well, just think of my mother," she says of Nelmi Kukkola's return to school.

"And, you can teach and have a family career too." Marian is engaged to be married next year.

The entire family chooses to work in this area because "we have faith in the future of northeastern Minnesota."

The older Kukkolos feel they have proven that money shouldn't stand in the way of higher education.

"Both of us earned our college tuition. later in life," Nelmi Kukkola said. Her husband considers his education a "satisfying experience;" he believes that adults go to college not just for a degree but to apply their knowledge according to their mature experience.

"Besides," he says, "I didn't want to be the only one in the family without college behind me!"

(more)

"The proudest ones Tuesday night, though, will be my parents," Nelmi Kukkola said. The 76-year-old Alex Anttilas of Chisholm, Minn., will be in the audience when the Kukkola family graduates.

After commencement, Marian leaves for the Black Hills, South Dakota, where she has a scholarship to act in a playhouse there. She is looking forward to applying her dramatics in Mountain Iron next year.

Nelmi Kukkola leaves the school room until the fall when she can return to Kettle River fortified with a four-year education diploma.

And Edwin Kukkola has the triple aim of keeping his accounting books, staying active in the Cromwell community where he has headed the volunteer fire department since 1953, and keeping a date with his fishing pole.