Commencement is a beginning, and it’s not just students who will be embarking on new adventures next week. Thirteen faculty and staff members will be commencing new stages in their lives as retirees.

The retiring faculty and staff have various lengths of time at Highline, but their reasons for being here are all the same. They say they loved their experience and their decision to make Highline their home.

Professor of history and anthropology, Emmanuel Chiabi, spent his first 13 years teaching in Yaounde, Cameroon. He thought of Highline as a mere stepping stone when he arrived to teach part-time in 1997.

That soon changed.

“I really enjoyed the students, teaching, faculty and staff,” Chiabi said.

Chiabi received tenure in 1999 and planted roots in Des Moines despite having the opportunity to teach at four-year universities.

“I am helping someone and am appreciated,” Chiabi said. “To teach is to touch and change a life.”

Chiabi derives his motivation to teach from the impact he makes on his students.

He will continue his passion of education after retirement by opening a research and reading library in Belo, Cameroon.

“The culture of reading is not yet embedded,” Chiabi said. “My goal is to inspire [people] to read.”

Chiabi is collecting books for the library, but he’s not the only one continuing the passion of education.

Professor Rosemary Adang has spent the past 26 years here at Highline, including one year teaching English in China as part of a teaching exchange program. She’s also the Pacific Northwest Writing Center Association president.

Adang has taught English and Diversity and Globalism, but focused her career on the Writing Center and Women Studies.

She helped to establish the Writing Center in 1997. Over time she developed writing workshops and trained students to tutor in the Writing Center.

“What stands out most is the increasing diversity and integration of that into the curriculum,” Adang said. “Keep supporting each other in our differences, including making the most of all the languages spoken on campus.”

Adang has adapted and improved the way writing skills are taught at Highline for its vast multi-lingual population. Writing is a part of her and retirement just means she’s turning the page to a new chapter in her life.

She is taking retirement as an opportunity to focus on writing her first novel and creating a local community writing center.

Rather than the art of writing, Professor Bob Bonner spent his career teaching a technical field.

After starting off as Highline’s youngest faculty member, Bonner has been teaching Paramedical Respiratory Care at Highline for more than 36 years.

“It’s great seeing graduates 20 years later at conferences and professionally,” Bonner said.

Teaching a professional technical program is more than just academics to Bonner. He tries to develop good employees as well. He works with his students on finding the perfect-fitting position and professional aspects of respiratory care.

“[Highline] has been able to adapt to a changing environment,” Bonner said. “Culturally responsive education is important.”

The mix of student population and diversity has greatly increased over the years. Technology and medical practices have also greatly advanced.

“There has been good administrative support and services,” Bonner said.

Bonner said he has enjoyed seeing new faculty over the years. His program is only as good as its graduates and the whole school has helped with that, Bonner said.

After years creating respiratory care graduates and professionals, Bonner is using retirement to get some much needed rest.

“It’s been a long time since I’ve woken up in the morning with nothing to do that day,” Bonner said. “Might be fun for a while.”

One retiring staff member who has helped professors such as Bonner to be successful is senior secretary Marsa Mair.

Mair started part-time after graduating from Highline in graphic design in 1982. A few months later she became full-time, accumulating more than 24 years here.

“I love the people here,” Mair said. “The people here are like family to me.”

Mair also began employment at Highline with the expectation of it being a simple stepping stone. After experiencing such a professionally welcoming and supportive community, like many others, she stayed.

“Any student who wants to get an education, from any country, can be supported here,” Mair said.

The amazing personnel, students and environment inspired her to make a career at Highline, Mair said.

Mair’s late husband Bill also taught at Highline for 30 years.

“You can see some of his paintings around on campus,” Mair said.

Bill Mair’s paintings can be found in the Library and various offices on campus.

Marsa Mair used her graphic design knowledge to help tackle the increasing advances in technology. Early on she created document templates using one of the few and non-user-friendly computers on campus. She also began her position spending half her day answering phones.

“Now faculty and staff have their own phones and PCs,” Mair said. “Now they have the capability to do things on their own.”

In Mair’s retirement, she will be focusing on spending time with her family. She met her birth family at 40 years old. Her sisters are in Louisiana and she plans to visit more often.

Mair will also be learning to play the piano and spend time reading.

Other faculty and staff retiring are:

Ruth Windhover, Nancy Allen, Angi Caster, Tam Duong, Juana Lackie, Jo Sears, Joy Smucker, Susan Taylor and Andrea Tompkins.