Michael Lilly is living proof of the Menlo Advantage.

The former attorney general of Hawaii, Lilly entered the College with little idea of what to do about his future beyond enlisting in the U.S. Navy. By the time he graduated, however, Lilly gained the skills needed to further his education, enter the Navy and build a successful career in law.

“I wasn’t that great of a student, but what Menlo gave me was discipline,” Lilly said. “You had to do the work, but they made sure you were going down the right path.”

Ironically, Lilly had never even heard of Menlo before his parents settled on his plans for college.

“I wanted to go to the University of Hawaii but my parents said, ‘You’re going to Menlo,’” Lilly laughed. “I said, ‘What’s a Menlo?’”

He said his parents were attracted to the school because of its good reputation among their friends and acquaintances. “It wasn’t my choice,” Lilly said. “My parents made the decision on where I would go. That’s what happened in those days.”

Lilly didn’t know what to expect at Menlo College, but received far more than he thought possible.

“When I went to UCSC after two years I was told all my basic courses had been completed,” he said. “Menlo gave me everything I needed.

“My aloha is for Menlo”

Mike Lilly, former Attorney General for the state of Hawaii with his son, Alex (left) and wife Cindy (center)

“I learned the skills that I was later able to apply very successfully to law school, where I graduated with honors.”

After graduating from University of the Pacific’s McGeorge School of Law, Lilly embarked upon a distinguished legal career that included a four-year stint (1981-85) as Hawaii’s attorney general. In private practice, he argued and won several landmark cases before the Hawaiian Supreme Court on such issues as wrongful termination, the right to campaign for political office, land reform and open government.

Lilly successfully argued that guide dogs be exempted from Hawaii’s fourth-month animal quarantine, and received the national Access Partners Award from Guide Dog Users, Inc., and the Helen Kinau Wilder Friendship Award from the Hawaiian Humane Society.

He also was awarded the National Society of the DAR’s 1999 Outstanding Community Service Award at an awards ceremony in Washington D.C.

Lilly is a Vietnam War veteran whose personal decorations include the Legion of Merit, Defense Meritorious Service and two Meritorious Service Medals. Lilly retired as a Naval Reserve captain after more than 30 years of service, including five reserve commands.

Lilly, who received a bachelor’s degree from the University of California at Santa Cruz, counts his time at Menlo as one of the most memorable experiences of his life.

The key? According to Lilly, Menlo’s personal touch makes all the difference.

“There was an open-door policy that applied to everyone, including Judge Russell,” he said. “He welcomed you to come in and chat.”

The experience was a marked contrast to his time at the larger UC campus.

“I felt like a number at UC Santa Cruz and I have no personal connection with the school at all,” he said. “It was just a place where I went and got a degree.

“I had a great experience at McGeorge. My time there means a lot to me,” Lilly added. “But I have very warm feelings about Menlo.

“ Mostly, my aloha is for Menlo.”