

## WCU Unsung Hero: Joan Robertson



Joan Robertson began working at West Chester University on August 26, 1974. When she retired last week from her role as an administrative assistant in the Counseling Center, she did so with the distinction of being one of just a handful of staff members who have served this

University for 40 or more years.

When Robertson started at WCU, she recalls: "Everyone knew each other. We got together at lunchtime regularly and after work for birthdays, baby showers and parties."

The University is a lot larger today than it was in 1974 – currently there are 735 permanent staff members, 630 faculty members and almost 17,000 students. Yet despite tremendous growth, WCU is still a close-knit community, which has retained its friendly, welcoming feel. And Robertson is one of the reasons why. She has been unfailingly kind and approachable to the legions of students, as well as staff and faculty, who have needed her help in some way.

"Joan has been the first to greet me every morning with a smile – so I will definitely miss her warmth and kindness," notes Julie Perone, director of the Counseling Center.

"Joan Robertson was an exception member of the Division of Student Affairs, who quietly served students using the Counseling Center with distinction, professionalism, and genuine care," notes Vice President of Student Affairs Matt Bricketto,

"She knows everyone and never forgets a face," says Janelle Silbert, the Counseling Center's case manager and referral coordinator. "In an environment that is often very stressful, she has been able to greet students with warmth and welcome, while allowing them to maintain their privacy and giving them space. This is a very delicate balance, but Joan is able to maintain it very well."

"Joan was one of the first people I met on campus," adds Silbert. "I started out working part-time as a front-desk assistant at the center while completing my graduate program in clinical psychology. Immediately I felt comfortable with Joan. She has been such a source of strength and encouragement to me as I've finished my course work and became the full-time case manager here."

Robertson was 17 years old, and just two months out of Bishop Shanahan High School, when she began working in WCU's philosophy department. "But I wanted to work here even before that," she

says. "As a small child, I remember being in the car with my parents on High Street. After seeing Philips, I told them I wanted to get a job here when I grew up."

In addition to philosophy, over the years Robertson has worked in the departments of speech, communication and theatre; communication studies; and English. She also was in the Dean's Office of what was then the School of Arts & Letters. For the last 10 years she worked in the Counseling Center.

Rachel Daltry, a WCU assistant professor and licensed psychologist at the center, marvels at Robertson's "uncanny ability" to remember students' names and faces. "If she sees a student once, she remembers them," says Daltry. "I often joke with Joan that this is her super power - the 'super duper face recognizer.' This allows her to connect with students, meet their needs in a swift manner, and make them feel welcomed in our center. This also allows her to get a read on students and how they are doing on that particular day in that specific moment. This not only helps her respond to students appropriately but it also gives us, as counselors, valuable information."

Now that she is retired, Robertson is enjoying down time and getting together with friends. She has a part-time job as a receptionist at St. Joseph Parish of Downingtown. She plans to get involved in volunteer work, perhaps at a hospital or a pet rescue facility. (Robertson has three cats that she dotes on.) She has visited England – her mother was born in London – and she would like to return for another visit.

As she looks back at her 41-plus years of service, Robertson says her job has had many rewards but best of all have been the intangible benefits.

"It is gratifying to feel like you are helping someone," she says. "Making the students' path at WCU a bit easier makes it all worthwhile."