

## **Kathleen Demsky, Andrews University**

*By Nisha A. Fernando & Lynne C. Manzo*



*Kathy Demsky*

At EDRA, most of us know Kathleen ‘Kathy’ Demsky as the energetic, cheerful, and incredibly resourceful Coordinator of the Publication Display during the past 28 EDRA conferences. She, along with her husband Conrad Demsky, were two of the familiar faces that we eagerly looked forward to seeing again each year at the conference. Kathy has provided an exceptional service to EDRA by organizing the annual book display and creating a vast and comprehensive ‘EDRA Collection’ of books and bibliographies. With this inaugural EDRA Member Profile, a new feature to show our appreciation for long-term EDRA members, we introduce Kathy and share her story with the EDRA community.

Kathy Demsky is the Director of the Architecture Resource Center (ARC) at the School of Architecture and Interior Design at Andrews University in Berrien Springs, Michigan, where she has served since 1987. The official website ([www.andrews.edu/said/arc](http://www.andrews.edu/said/arc)) cites the ARC as “the

official repository of a special and growing collection of materials on environmental design research. This collection is made available as a result of our affiliation with the international group known as the Environmental Design Research Association (EDRA). The purpose of this collection is to advance the art and science of environmental design, to improve understanding of the interrelationships between people and the built environment and to create environments responsive to human needs. The interdisciplinary collection holds books, trade journals, EDRA proceedings, documents, technical papers, and multimedia materials supporting research in the discipline of environment and behavior. The collection has been developed over the past 30 years and will continue to expand, existing as the most comprehensive compilation in the world.” This incredible collection is the result of Kathy’s unparalleled dedication and involvement with EDRA during the past 28 years. When accreditation visits occur at Andrews University, evaluators state that it is the among the most unique library collections of books on environmental design and research. Kathy was awarded the EDRA Service Award in 1996 for her exceptional commitment.

How did Kathy first get involved with EDRA? She remembers it like it was yesterday. Dr. Neville Clouten, at that time an EDRA member and professor and Chair of the Department of Architecture at Andrews University, approached Kathy with the proposal that she would replace Francoise Szigeti as the new Book Display Coordinator for the EDRA Book Display. As a result of this invitation, Kathy attended her first EDRA conference, EDRA 18, in Cal Poly Pomona in 1988. She fondly recalls many prominent EDRAites from that first visit. She sat at the banquet with Sherry Ahrentzen and Karen Franck, who immediately made her feel welcome at the conference.



*The book display room was a central space in each EDRA conference*

After conversations between Neville Clouten, Francoise Szigeti, and Gerald Davis at the EDRA 18 Conference, it was decided that Andrews University would purchase the existing book display, the “TEAG (The Environmental Analysis Group) Collection.” From that point on Andrews University would be responsible for the Book Display. The negotiations were finalized and Kathy began the annual display preparations shortly thereafter.

Several years later, Kathy envisioned publishing an article which would include an extensive bibliography on the subject of environmental design. She recalls how Amos Rapoport and Rich Wener encouraged her with this idea. Subsequently she, Rapoport, Wener, and colleague Linda Mack co-authored the article with the bibliography. The piece was then submitted to the Journal of Architectural and Planning Research (JAPR). The work was peer reviewed and published, with Kathy as the guest editor. The publication was titled, "Environmental Design Research (EDR): The Field of Study and Guide to the Literature" (JAPR, Vol. 25, no. 4, Winter 2008.) The purpose of this publication was to acquaint researchers and planners with the field of Environmental Design Research and provide a basic guide to its core literature. The bibliography presented key works representing a variety of the aspects of this discipline through a classified list of monographs, pertinent serial publications, reference materials, and textbooks appropriate for study and research. Included in this work were three essays written by a researcher, a scholar, and a team of two practitioners with over one hundred and fifty years of combined experience in this inter-disciplinary field of study.



*The book display at EDRA conferences always drew in many EDRAites to not only to browse and order, but also to learn, analyze and discuss in true EDRAite spirit*

As shipping such a vast collection was very expensive, Kathy initially used a van rented through Andrews University to transport the books to the annual EDRA conference venues. However, to make the process even more cost-effective, Kathy and her husband Conrad eventually bought their own van for this very purpose and continued to transport the book display materials each year across the country at their own expense. The Book Display was also transported off-shore to

Mexico, Vera Cruz, and Scotland, U.K. The Demskys continued this faithful and memorable work for 28 years, not missing a single conference, and provided us with what we have now come to admire as the 'EDRA Collection.' The extent of Kathy's extraordinary commitment and dedication was remarkable. The quality of the display is also evident in the story she shared about Sage Publishers. Each year, Sage Publishers would send 30-40 books to Kathy to take to the EDRA conference. At one of the EDRA conferences, a Sage representative stopped by and commented to Kathy that it was the best conference book display she had ever seen. Long-term EDRA members would no doubt agree! The book display at the conference was a central place, not only for the wonderful books and the learning environment it created, but also for meeting people and engaging in captivating conversations. The silent auction and the authors' book signing were also great aspects of the book display. The 'meet the authors' event was another highlight that was initiated by Kathy, along with Sally Augustin, and one that we hope to continue in her honor.

Andrews University is the official repository for the EDRA Archive collection. Several EDRAites, such as Wolfgang Preiser, Willo Pequegnat, John Zeisel, and Jacqueline Vischer added their own personal collections to the archives. Additionally, Françoise Szigeti and Gerald Davis donated their personal library, a total of 95 boxes of books, making the collection grow even more extensively. The EDRA Archives also include the documents and technical papers of the TEAG collection. As a result, Kathy became the curator of a unique and comprehensive archive of books and journal publications on environmental design research for EDRA.



*Conrad and Kathy*

Kathy reminisces, not only on how the EDRA Collection was created, but also on what EDRA means to her. Both she and Conrad grew very fond of the EDRA 'family.' They admired what it stood for and became a part of the EDRA family. When asked what is most memorable to her

about EDRA, Kathy did not hesitate one second to name the people of EDRA. She described how EDRAites interact with each other with genuine care and concern for one another, being kind and encouraging, staying true to human aspects that are central to EDRA. She recalled with particular fondness the many special friends they made over the years – some who kept in touch throughout the rest of the year. The year that the EDRA conference was in Vancouver, BC, Kathy's father passed away shortly before the conference. Henry Sanoff lent his support and talked to her about grieving, and Janet Singer made sure a beautiful bouquet of white flowers were waiting for her upon her return home. For Kathy, EDRA has been a dear family. When she could not continue the book display last year, she sorely missed seeing the EDRA family.

Despite the astonishing amount of hard work she put in to create the EDRA Collection and organize the annual book display for nearly three decades, Kathy never felt that she did it 'for EDRA' or for any acclaim; she just did it out of her passion, love and dedication to the subject. As the curator of the collection, she also had the opportunity to learn much about human factors in the built and unbuilt environments and even passed on some of that information to students and faculty.

All the bibliographies in the EDRA Collection are now available through the Digital Commons at the Architecture Resource Center (ARC), at the following address: [digitalcommons.andrews.edu/edra-bibliographies](http://digitalcommons.andrews.edu/edra-bibliographies). Anyone from anywhere in the world can currently access them. Through the Digital Commons, Kathy can monitor PDF downloads to get a sense of the geographical range of the users. Thus far, the many locations include Iran, Russia, South America, the United Kingdom, North America, and many countries across Europe. This amazing accessibility ensures that the bibliographies are put to great use internationally.

In addition to online access to the digital bibliographies, Kathy welcomes any EDRA member who wishes to come in person to use the resources at the ARC. She will arrange for them stay overnight at the university's guest quarters.

In speaking about the accessibility of the bibliographies, Kathy maintains that they should be kept open to everyone, so that those with limited access to information at certain international locations can easily make use of it. Additionally, EDRA members within North America can request a book within the ARC through the Inter-Library Loan system. Allowable scanned items (for example, parts of a book) can be sent to any EDRA members outside North America. She envisions digitizing entire books as a possible solution for the future, which will help international EDRA members immensely.

Since 1988, Kathy has been an invaluable member of the EDRA family. Her single-handed commitment and brimming passion for creating an extensive research collection easily accessible to EDRAites has been nothing short of a Herculean task. Her amazing dedication is admirable, her cheerful personality and warm smile contagious, and her unwavering work enthusiasm truly awe-inspiring. On behalf of EDRA, we thank you, Kathy, for everything you have done for us!