

Coding, students, books and music

Steve Sowder, Mildred McGrath & Wanda Cantrell retire after years of dedication

MANY YEARS AGO STEVE SOWDER

took his first computer programming course in the second semester of his senior year at Southern Adventist University. “That was it, that’s what I wanted to do,” he says. “I never looked back. I always got paid to play.”

After working at both Southern Adventist University and Southwestern

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Steve

Adventist University, Steve found himself at Andrews University for the first time to interview for a systems librarian position at James White Library. Now, over 20 years later, Steve has served as an associate professor of library science, head of systems and media services, and as the liaison librarian for business, computing, aviation and technology.

During his time at Andrews, Steve was instrumental in setting up the poster printing service and creating an e-books system for over 400,000 titles. He wrote code to maintain the system so the library could track how many times each book was checked out. As the systems librarian, Steve’s main job was to maintain and

create web pages and databases to satisfy the library’s needs. “I wrote code to do that and had fun doing it,” he says. “When I get something done and it’s completed, I’ve created something that works. If it doesn’t work I’ve got to work on it some more.”

By far, Steve’s favorite part of working at Andrews was the ability to code. His wife used to tell him that he didn’t go to work, he just went to go play with the toys. For him, coding did not even feel like work.

While he did not interact directly with many students, Steve had students come and pray with him. “Sometimes we meet on the sidewalk or in the hall somewhere and they say hello, they remember me.” He also helped students find resources or learn about the 3D printer.

When he was not working in the library, Steve enjoyed volunteering as a court-appointed special advocate (CASA) in Cass County. Appointed by a judge, CASA volunteers get to know abused or neglected children so they can then advocate for the child’s best interest in court. The goal is to make each child more than just a name on the paper to the judge and other members of the court. “We are kind of a helper for the case workers,” he explains. “We go see the schools, visit the teachers, guidance counselors, whatever we need to do to find out information about the child. In the

process we are also officers of the court.” As of April, Steve has been serving as a CASA volunteer for 22 years. He recently completed the training for Berrien County and is planning to transition from Cass County to there.

Now that he is retired, Steve also plans to enjoy the freedom to work in his yard, be out in nature, and watch technology, nature and news programs.

ANOTHER HELPFUL INDIVIDUAL AT THE James White Library is Mildred McGrath. By the time she retired as the Patron Services manager, Mildred had worked at Andrews University for 21 years. She joined the team in 1997 as a circulation assistant and later became the Patron Services manager.

Prior to coming to Andrews as an undergraduate student in 1985, Mildred worked as an accountant at a photo company in Canada. In 1987, she began working as a secretary for Adventist Information Ministry (AIM) located on the Andrews campus. While at AIM she also served as a shift supervisor and associate operations manager. In total, she has served the Seventh-day Adventist Church for 31 years.

During her time at the James White Library, Mildred mainly supervised Patron Services and hired, trained and supervised



Steve Sowder



Mildred McGrath



Wanda Cantrell

students and staff at the front desk. She also worked with students and faculty as they came into the library seeking resources. The later part of her work was more involved with listening to student complaints—whether it was fines, damaged books or lost books—and managing book preservation.

Mildred’s favorite part about working at Andrews was interacting with the people. “I love people. I work well with people,” she says. “There are some difficult people to work with, too, but I am able to get through it by patiently working and talking with them. I love working with the student assistants. I do miss them a lot now that I’m retired.”

Throughout her years here, Mildred spent a lot of quality time with students. She has had students come into her office to ask for advice about personal issues. Whenever possible, she shared her own experience with the students and did her

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best to help them out. “That was my major thing—being able to encourage students in what they do no matter what they’re going through.”

Mildred’s favorite Bible texts are Psalm 119:105 and Romans 18:14. During challenging times when she struggled with illness these verses were quite encouraging to her. “I’ve learned to depend on God, trust God for everything,” she explains. “Working at Andrews has helped me to see how great God is and how He leads His people.”

Mildred’s experience with illness has given her even more opportunities to connect with students, staff and faculty members. Mildred has fond memories of morning workshops at the library with her coworkers. “We would share with each other experiences and we would develop bonds with each other because of talking about our lives and things we were going through.”

In addition to ministering and sharing with the students and her coworkers, Mildred worked to improve and develop

processes that benefited those around her. Her goal was to make the environment more accommodating so that everyone could accomplish their tasks in a timely, efficient manner.

Mildred plans to stay in the area now that she is retired. She is looking forward to spending more time with her husband and sons.

Overall, Mildred’s reflection captures her thankfulness for the friendships she formed and the support she received while working at Andrews. “I had great support at the library...I really appreciate everyone.”

WANDA CANTRELL HAS DEDICATED years of her life serving Andrews University in the James White Library and other areas on campus.

For as long as she can remember, Wanda Cantrell wanted to work in a library. “When I walk into a room of books, I feel at home immediately,” she says. Naturally, when Wanda came to Andrews University as an undergraduate, she took the first class for the library science bachelor’s degree. To her surprise, she was bored to tears and ended up earning a bachelor’s degree in music instead. Little did she know that years later she would end up working for the James White Library for 27 years—four years in the periodicals department as a student and 23 years and nine months as the office manager.

Before working at the library, Wanda held a number of other jobs on the Andrews campus. During her undergraduate years she worked for Dining Services, Custodial Services and the Department of Music. After graduating, she worked at the Apple Valley bakery and as an assistant proof-reader at the Press. She also worked as a phone/data operator and office manager at AIM for 12 years. While working, Wanda earned her associate degree in secretarial studies and her master’s in business education with a minor in library science.

Throughout her entire adult life, Wanda only spent seven years working outside of Andrews. When asked what makes Andrews stand out to her, she says, “I love being able to talk about what I believe. I’ve been sitting in my office and a student will come in and say, ‘Would you pray with me? I’m having a hard time.’ I love that

that’s available and that people can feel free to ask that of you. When I first had my job at the library, I wasn’t always sure that that’s where I was supposed to be. We’ve been taught that we’re supposed to go out into the world and evangelize the world. I think I’m still evangelizing the world.”

“You just get a whole different view of life by interacting with the students.” *Wanda*

In addition to the faith-filled atmosphere, Wanda also loves how her job at the library allowed her to continue with her love for music. When she was a student here, Wanda sang with a group called Collegiate Action for Christ and then a trio called God’s Voices. Even after graduating, she continued to sing with numerous on-campus choirs. For the last 15 years Wanda sang with and served as a manager and sponsor for the musical group, Journey. In 2015, Wanda worked with Journey to start a program called Operation Student Care where they made packages for students who were overwhelmed, homesick, depressed or suffering the loss of a loved one. As of last year, the program expanded to become Operation Campus Care in order to serve the campus more broadly. She hopes that the program will continue to operate in some capacity.

Now that she is retired, Wanda will be moving to Washington state with her sister. Her hope is to rest, cook, knit, crochet and maybe write. “I have lots of possibilities, but I know I want to be involved in some kind of ministry. I’m just going to trust the Lord to show me where I need to be,” she admits.

In the end, Wanda acknowledges that she will miss the people and the music on the Andrews campus, specifically the students. “Students bring perspective to your life, and I think they keep you young. You just get a whole different view of life by interacting with the students. We as staff and faculty should be more in tune with the students, trying to encourage them, help them, and be there with them when they need it,” she says.