

9-1-2010

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Recommended Citation

Stewart, Jim (2010) "2010 retirees: Professors, colleagues, mentors and role models," *Furman Magazine*: Vol. 53 : Iss. 2 , Article 13.
Available at: <https://scholarexchange.furman.edu/furman-magazine/vol53/iss2/13>

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2010 retirees: Professors, colleagues, mentors and role models

FIVE FACULTY MEMBERS with a combined 146 years of service to Furman retired at the close of the 2009-10 academic year.

Doug Cummins (theatre arts), Cheryl Patterson (business and accounting), Bill Rogers (English), Bing Vick (music) and Veronica Yockey (health and exercise science) were granted emeritus status by the board of trustees. With the help of some of their colleagues, *Furman* magazine has compiled the following tributes to this distinguished group.



WHEN DOUG CUMMINS applied to be chair of what was, in 1996, the drama department, his cover letter stated, “I am 52 years old with much yet to contribute.”

“Doug wasn’t lying about his age,” says Jay Oney, current department chair. “He was understating exactly how much energetic work he would contribute to Furman students, colleagues and audiences over the next 13 years.”

Cummins, who holds undergraduate and graduate degrees in music education, divinity, acting and theatre, made his

presence known both behind the scenes and on stage at Furman, where he acted in a number of shows, directed many others, and steered the department through a name change (to theatre arts) and major curricular revisions.

As a director, Oney says, “Doug challenged himself and his students, and never played it safe. He was equally at home directing recent works like ‘Proof’ or ‘Picasso at the Lapin Agile,’ or classics like ‘Spoon River Anthology,’ ‘Hedda Gabler’ or ‘Waiting for Godot.’ Quite often he wrote incidental music for the shows he directed.”

When Cummins taught directing, he typically assigned the 10 or so students in his class to direct both a 10-minute and a one-act play. Oney says, “Doug would find time, often after one of his own rehearsals, to see and comment on a rehearsal of every play.

“Having those 20 plays buzzing all over the Playhouse, with Doug constantly encouraging the directors and casts, made theatre majors feel appreciated and helped many students from other departments understand what a welcoming place the Playhouse was under Doug’s leadership.”

Cummins and his wife, Jacqui Brandli, will retire in Arkansas, where they have many family ties.

CHERYL PATTERSON holds two distinctions that few other Furman faculty members can claim: She was the last chair of one department (economics and business administration, which split in 2004) and the first chair of a new one, business and accounting.



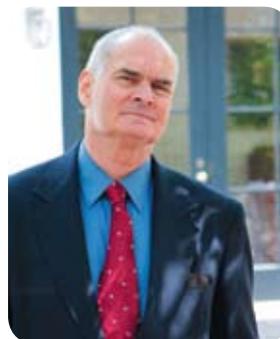
Departmental colleague Marianne Pierce notes that Patterson, a Phi Beta Kappa graduate of the University of Alabama who came to Furman in 1986, was the ideal person to lead the transition: “Cheryl played the pivotal role in successfully establishing the new department and taking us forward during the critical formative time.”

Kirk Karwan, current department chair, describes Patterson as “the unique academician who could function simultaneously as leader and consummate team player.” He points out that she developed and taught in study away programs in Jamaica and Ireland with colleagues in computer science and sociology, thereby setting an example for interdepartmental cooperation on campus.

Former students frequently express appreciation for how well Patterson’s courses prepared them for the professional world. Her classroom approach, which featured experiential exercises and group projects, is now standard in most business administration courses.

In retirement, Patterson will no doubt enjoy having more time to spend with family — and given its makeup, she’ll likely stay in close contact with Furman. Her children, Mark ’90 and Kristen ’95, were both chemistry majors who married Furman chemistry majors — Trisha Enloe ’89 and Joey Skelton ’95, respectively. They have four children between them.

She and her husband, Wayne, will also devote more time to the humanitarian work they began in Mississippi and Louisiana almost five years ago, after Hurricane Katrina.



DURING HIS 36 YEARS in the Furman English department, 32 of them as the Bennette E. Geer Professor of Literature, Bill Rogers established himself as both a Renaissance man and an indispensable university citizen.

Gil Allen, a longtime departmental colleague, praises Rogers as “an internationally renowned medieval scholar, a teacher who personified ‘tough love’ before the phrase had even been invented,

a brilliant literary theorist, and one of the best ‘close readers’ on the planet — of imaginative literature, scholarly essays, departmental memos and university policies.”

Rogers, a former chair of the faculty, has written several books and, with Allen, co-founded Ninety-Six Press, which promoted South Carolina poets by publishing a number of collections over the last 19 years. He also made time to pursue interests ranging from painting to book design, ballroom dancing and Tae Kwon Do, in which he holds a black belt.

Moreover, Allen says, “No one at Furman has been more highly principled, more persistent, and more eloquent than Bill in speaking truth to power. Whenever an emperor had no clothes, Bill’s words could be a chilling wind indeed. But his criticism, however pointed, was always based upon meticulous research and a commitment to fairness.”

Stan Crowe, who joined the department the same year as Rogers (1974), echoes Allen’s comments. “Every university needs a person like Bill Rogers,” says Crowe. “He has a clear idea of what a liberal arts college should be, and he wasn’t afraid to hold Furman to the highest standards at a time when institutions of higher education seemed to be spending more time, resources and energy on public relations than on their core mission.”



IF IT WEREN’T FOR BING VICK, Lisa Browne Barksdale ’84 says that she would not have been brave enough to try the diverse musical experiences of her life.

“When I was a student, he selected me to sing solos and encouraged my leadership skills, and when I left Furman he had instilled so much confidence in me that I was unafraid to take on any music job,” she says.

Now a lecturer at Furman, Barksdale recalls how Vick, conductor of the Furman

Singers for 40 years, “expressed his philosophy of music and goals for his students through rules of three. Students in the 1980s were held to the Singers’ standard of ‘discipline, perfection and beauty.’

“He now encourages his students to ‘pursue excellence and beauty through discipline.’ The refining of the motto surely occurred after many tours where Dr. Vick had to ‘adjust, adapt and accept’ — another of his rules of three for college students.”

Vick built on DuPre Rhame’s legacy as the Singers’ conductor and expanded the group’s reputation. Former Singers are now building an endowment to name a professorship for Vick and his wife, Judy.

During his Furman career Vick earned a number of honors, among them the Alester G. Furman, Jr., and Janie Earle Furman Award for Meritorious Teaching, the Order of the Palmetto (South Carolina’s highest civilian award), and the Elizabeth O’Neill Verner Governor’s Award for contributions to artistic life in the state.

In retirement, Barksdale predicts the most likely place to find Vick will be on the golf course and in his garden. He will also continue to conduct the Greenville Chorale, which he has led since 1981.

IN HER 33 YEARS at Furman, Veronica Yockey has, in her colleague Frank Powell’s words, “demonstrated the importance of lifetime wellness to thousands of students and colleagues. She is a mentor and model of balance in physical activity, diet, emotional health and spiritual discipline.”

One example Powell offers: At a faculty meeting in 1979, Yockey, still a junior faculty member, stood and stated, “I move that all smoking be banned from Furman University faculty meetings.” Her motion, Powell says, set off a long and contentious debate — the result of which was that faculty smokers were thereafter relegated to the back row.

“By this gutsy action,” says Powell, “Veronica illustrated her unflinching commitment to the preservation of human health.”

Yockey also developed the department’s first study away program, “Community and Environmental Health in Chile.” Powell says it “helped pave the way for the evolution of the department’s focus toward health sciences by integrating public health content with cross-cultural awareness.”

Throughout her career she has promoted wellness both on and off campus, developing courses, organizing summer conferences for South Carolina teachers, and providing support and leadership to the South Carolina Alliance for Health, Physical Education and Dance, of which she is a past president. She sponsored the Furman Fencing Club and was instrumental in bringing major fencing competitions to Greenville.

“Most importantly,” says Powell, “Veronica has always taken the time to demonstrate deep care and concern for the welfare of others. She is interested in what students are doing outside of class and takes time to celebrate milestones in their lives, often by writing personal notes.”



Compiled by Jim Stewart from contributions by Jay Oney, Kirk Karwan, Gil Allen, Stan Crowe, Lisa Browne Barksdale and Frank Powell.