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A Furman legend

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A Furman legend

Peggy Park steps down after 40 years in the dean's office

Peggy Park and the men with whom she has worked so closely, from left: Ray Roberts, A.V. Huff, Francis W. Bonner, John Crabtree and David Shi.

As Peggy Park begins listing the historical documents that have crossed her desk since she began working at Furman on February 1, 1961, you realize that she's a talking encyclopedia of the university's last 40 years.

The first sabbatical leave program . . . the first faculty handbook . . . reports on integration and the hiring of the first non-Protestant faculty . . . creation of the study abroad program . . . Phi Beta Kappa proposals . . .

Suddenly she stops and shakes her head in wonder.

"At this point in Furman's life, to reflect on these things and realize their importance — it's just remarkable," she says. "At the time we probably didn't recognize their full significance, but thinking back,

it's hard to believe what we've gone through to arrive where we are now."

It's also hard to believe that the university will have to carry on without Peggy Park, who has served as secretary, administrative assistant, confidante, advisor and friend to five academic deans — Francis W. Bonner, John H. Crabtree, David E. Shi, Ray C. Roberts and A.V. Huff. But after 40 years as the point person, liaison and occasional buffer between the deans and the faculty, she has decided it's time to start a new phase in her life.

A.V. Huff, a Furman faculty member since 1968 and dean since 1995, describes Park as "a Furman legend" who "has maintained a phenomenal work load and can be characterized by two words — caring and helpful." Mathematics professor

Doug Rall, chair of the faculty, says, "Because of Peggy's wisdom, personal values and experience, numerous faculty members and administrators have sought her advice and help over the years. Someone may be hired to do her job, but no one can replace her."

As for Park, she says, "I've always thought of myself as the voice of this office, and that people calling in or visiting often just needed someone to listen to them, whether they were faculty, staff, parents or students. That's what I tried to do."

Of her five bosses, the first — and the man for whom she worked the longest (1961-82) — was Bonner, who hired her when, she says, she was "as green as the grass." She credits most of her professional development to him and adds, "I didn't think this office could go on without Frank Bonner. It seemed he handled everything. But I was wrong."

Just don't ask her to compare the deans. "I've never done that; they're all so different," she says emphatically before adding, "Each has been the right person for his time and for Furman. Every dean has brought about changes that needed to be made. And all of them have had the faculty as their primary concern, even if some faculty have found that hard to believe."

In retirement, she looks forward to spending more time with her children and grandchildren, especially at the Park family's 78-acre farm in Greenwood, S.C. She also relishes the chance to catch up on her extensive collection of novels and to pursue her love of state history with her husband, J.D., a veteran of 39 years with the South Carolina Highway Patrol.

— Jim Stewart

An indoor amphitheater?

Not exactly — it's actually a spookily empty McAlister Auditorium. In late December, Furman shipped the 1,300 floor seats to Country Roads, a furniture restoration company in Greenville, Mich., where they received their first makeover (in dark green velour) in the building's 40-year history. KM Fabrics of Greenville and its founder and CEO, Dick Heusel, donated the material for the \$200,000

project, which included new stage draperies in forest green velvet, with burgundy and cream accents. Alumni and friends helped out by "sponsoring" seats for \$250 — to the tune of \$90,000 by mid-January. During the month the seats were gone, the auditorium was also spruced up with a paint job. The balcony seats will be refurbished at a later time.

