

Harriet Weinrieb Retires *by James Howell*

The support staff of an academic department is very important, frequently serving as the link between the students and the faculty and making each more understandable to the other. One person who did that with wonderful ease and charm was Harriet Weinrieb, who retired from the department last year.

Harriet started working part-time in the purchasing office of the college in 1978, transferring to Chemistry in 1980. Soon after, she moved to the front office and began working full time. Harriet's outgoing personality made her the ideal person to greet students and triage their problems. She always had a smile and was genuinely interested in helping all those who came to the office. My own memory of Harriet's philosophy is that "students can come into the office feeling happy or angry, disappointed or enthusiastic, but they should all leave happy — or at least cared about." Leon Gortler, one of the department chairs during Harriet's tenure, recalls, "She made everyone know that she was there to help". He added, "She always made you feel as though she was happy to do whatever you asked her to do."

Many people have their favorite "Harriet Stories". Dave Goldberg, another chair with whom Harriet worked, was impressed with Harriet's shopping acumen. "She is the only one I know who can go into a supermarket with a large shopping bag and \$5 in her wallet and emerge with the bag full of groceries and \$7 in the wallet." Gary Mennitt, an early chair, recalled, "Several years after I had retired, my niece,



Harriet and the chairs with whom she worked. Left to right, Mark Kobrak, Jim Howell, Maggie Ciszowska, Harriet Weinrieb, Dominick Labianca, David Goldberg, Seymour Aronson and Gary Mennitt. Not present were Norman Indictor, Evan Williams and Leon Gortler.

fresh out of college, got a position as a textbook salesperson. When she came to the office and introduced herself, Harriet immediately treated her as one of the department family." He added, "This is Harriet to me, a caring person always concerned for your welfare."

Leon Gortler said it well. "She was the most thoughtful individual that I knew. Besides the warm greetings and the willingness to help, she could be counted on to remember birthdays, anniversaries, births, deaths and holidays. She kept small toys and books in the office in case someone brought in a child or a grandchild. Even in retirement she sends a card or makes a call for special occasions." In my own case, Harriet found kitchen linen that could be used on my sail boat. It serves to this day.

Harriet, indeed, had two families. One was her husband Cliff and her daughter Pam, and the other was the department. Sometimes conflicts occurred particularly when Harriet would remain late in the office. Apparently this would be a cause of some concern to Cliff. Harriet attempted to smooth things over by telling him that the buses were not running on time or had an accident.

When asked what were her favorite memories of the department Harriet recalled the feeling of family, the pride in her job and the recognition she received. Harriet received Merit Awards for her work and served on the Strategic Planning committee for the college. She had a more substantial relationship with Christoph Kimmich, president of the college, than many faculty members had. The president's regard for Harriet was evident when he came to her retirement party.

Harriet's retirement party last summer was attended by the entire department and various administrators in the college. Both Cliff and Pam came to the celebration. There were many testimonies to the contributions she made to the college. Since retirement, Harriet and her husband Cliff have spent a good deal of time in Florida, enjoying the company of their daughter.



Harriet Weinrieb retired in July 2009 after almost 30 years in the department.