First Ever Festschrift Edition in Honor of Bill Bearden

December 31, 2018, was officially Bill Bearden’s last day as an employee of Stockton University. Bill retired after 31 years as a librarian. This edition of the library newsletter is in his honor. You will be missed, Bill!

Festschrift by definition:
“a collection of essays by notable scholars designed as a tribute to a scholar of eminence on his retirement or on a birthday.” - Oxford Companion to German Literature

“-ORIGIN late 19th century: from German, from Fest ‘celebration’ plus Schrift ‘writing’.” - Oxford Dictionary of English
IN HIS OWN WORDS

As part of the University Archives, we collect and record oral history interviews with people from Stockton – students, faculty, staff, alumni, board members, and community members who have been associated with Stockton over the years. Some of the interviews in the collection include our first two presidents, Richard E. Bjork, and Peter Mitchell. Recently, Special Collections Librarian Heather Perez sat down with retiring Associate Director of Technical Services, Bill Bearden, and recorded his reflections on his 31 years as a librarian at Stockton.

Some of his thoughts – and a few supporting pictures from the Stockton University Archives – are below:

Perez: What were your first impressions of Stockton when you first arrived? What had you heard about it before?

Bearden: It was a new school when I was still in high school. It was still being planned and built. I graduated high school in 1970. It was just coming online then. There wasn’t a lot of information I had about it. I had been out of the state for so many years. But, one of the news stories at the time was about a faculty member, Frank Ceretto, who is still here. It was a very inspirational story. He was teaching a class from his hospital bed. It was kind of a news feature story. I thought, “That’s interesting. Here’s a place where the faculty are committed to teaching their students. It would be interesting to interview there.” I got the interview, and I was hired.

Perez: What are some of the changes you have seen occur in the library at Stockton during your time here?

Bearden: In 1989 there was a bond issue voted on in New Jersey for higher education development – physical development of libraries and laboratories. Stockton – at least for the library portion - received $3.5M for a library renovation and expansion. It was one of the most exciting and important things that I did while I was here. I served on the committee for planning, design, and implementation for the physical expansion and renovation of the existing place...
IN HIS OWN WORDS, CONTINUED:

We worked with the architect; we made suggestions, we worked with blueprints.

One of the things we were adamant about were student study rooms – which we got, 15 or 16 of them. They were promptly taken away after the fact, but that’s another story.* The library was finally completed (we were under construction for almost two years) in October of 1996.

Since that time, in the last five years, for example, I’ve seen the physical change in the library is remarkable. Essentially, we’ve made space where we used to have shelves and materials for human beings. We have a quiet study area now, which used to be our reference collection. We have the learning commons, which is still a work in progress, which used to house our bound periodicals collections. Just as libraries have changed, the space use has changed.

Perez: Any parting words or hopes for Stockton?

I think that the staff...I’m delighted with their professionalism and their vision and also just their character. You have a good character basis for the people that are working here at Stockton. I’ve enjoyed working with them tremendously. I’m confident about whatever direction Stockton goes in. I think the staff here will make the right decisions. It won’t always be easy decisions. I think they’re mature enough and competent enough to do the best job. I have no doubts about the future of the Stockton Library.

*As of Fall 2018, many of the study rooms have now been returned to the library for student use.

If you are interested in hearing the complete interview or seeing other photographs of the library and the university over the years, please visit Special Collections, located on the Lower Level of the Richard E. Bjork Library, room E056.

-Heather Perez, Special Collections Librarian
Bill Bearden remembers things, lots of them: dialog from movies, characters, and narratives from literature, timelines of history and, my favorite, quotes from former bosses. He is an endlessly fascinating conversationalist. So it is curious that in my early years at the college, the two of us seemed unable to give Stockton’s institutional memory its due by making the development of the, now, university archives a priority.

We knew the archives were important for our young institution and would be increasingly important in the future, but due to a tsunami of government document processing and other pressing tasks, all we could do was collect stuff about the university and park it in a storage room. Park is the gentle term. Toss is really the better description. The publications, files, photos, and memorabilia from Stockton’s past were stacked to the ceiling, in no order whatsoever, with two claustrophobic paths carved into the room’s interior. It was ugly.

It was perhaps the summer of 2002 (Bill will remember) when he and I entered that monumental jumble of a storage room wearing our grubbliest clothing and began to clean and organize. At one point, I believe we actually used a shovel. We found amazing things: campus crime reports, personnel files, and court records, none of which should have been there. We also found wonderful reminders of the university’s early years. And from this cleaning and sorting project, the university archives grew into the significant collection and public service it is today.

Bill did it. His institutional memory and love of history were made manifest with this rebirth of the university archives. It is one of his many important contributions to Stockton. Thanks, Bill.

-David Pinto, Retired Library Director
BEST THINGS ABOUT WORKING FOR BILL ARE...

After 31 years, Bill Bearden, associate director of technical services, has retired. He will be missed.

It’s not easy to summarize in a paragraph what Bill was to the library. He was excellent in his profession & made a lot of improvements to bring the library up to date with the times. Bill was very professional, respected & well liked. He was also well known to the faculty. Along with help from other key people, special collections grew. We received a lot of donations, some good, some not as good! Boxes & boxes of books to organize, search, send to bindery & finally catalog. Special Collections & Archives shaped up to what it is today! Bill was the backbone. I enjoyed working for him & being part of the growing process.

As a matter of fact, here’s a top ten list of the best things about working for Bill:

10. He always had a joke.
9. I always learned something from him.
8. He was polite & respectful.
7. He quoted funny lines from old classic movies.
6. He always had another joke.
5. He told funny stories from the past.
4. He always had time to listen, even if he didn’t.
3. Communicated well with his famous eye roll.
2. He’d remind me of the differences between editions of books (before communicating with his famous eye roll).

And the number 1 reason of the best things about working for Bill is: donuts every Friday!

Just kidding, Bill, of course, we miss you way more than the donuts & hope you are enjoying yourself! You deserve it!

-Louise Tillstrom, Principal Library Assistant, Special Collections & Archives

Memories:

“Bill was quite a caring individual. But it was his civility that should serve as a good model. Whenever I was in the library within his view, he would approach me for cultural conversation with so much politeness. Time would pass quickly during these interludes. His knowledge of foreign films, French ones in particular, was impressive. I will surely miss him.”

-Jacques Press
BILL BEARDEN ADMIRED

Bill was such a shy and private person that our long and warm friendship must admit those descriptors for me too. We intersected geographically: his wife attended the same middle and high schools (in Yonkers, NY) as I did. We were stationed in Boston for similar lengths of formative time. We both enjoyed using the German Language (his undergraduate major), and European history and travel. And we were both librarians at heart, which means protectors of civilization and appreciators across disciplines.

We engaged at meetings of the Library Committee starting with his arrival at Stockton in 1987. Sad to say, few other faculty found fascination in building the collections, in the software used for cataloging, in archiving College history, in creating displays, or even in designing instructional guides for student use of the library. Bill was happy to guide and encourage my efforts, often devoting his last half work-hour on Friday afternoons to tutelage in his office. He was willing to supervise my service for seven years after I retired: organizing (for binding) the Minutes of the Board of Trustees, and many other collections in what is now the University Archives.

His lunch hours with his Library co-Director Rick Miller, and sometimes me, went off in all possible directions of human endeavor, not needing the use of a handheld internet. (But when Rick left, his shyness got the better of him, and I was never able to coax him back to the lunchroom.) I know that he served as interim Library Director after Eileen Dubin and perhaps George Grant and David Pinto, but the strain of responsibility was obvious, and I’m sure he welcomed his retreat back from the public eye.

I hope I can use this opportunity to note that the Library’s daily hard-copy provision of three important newspapers, The New York Times, The Wall Street Journal, and the Philadelphia Inquirer, were Bill’s personal gifts, brought from home delivery, as were many feature films and classic TV series on digital video disks. The expense of the newspapers is now beyond the Library’s budget capacity (e.g., $910 for an annual mail-delivered NY Times), so I suggest that the only way to restore access would be by private donations. (I think home-delivery — where available — would cost much less than $910.) In the early days of the College, there was an organization called “Friends of the Stockton Library,” consisting largely of community patrons, and led by a faculty spouse. It sponsored a variety of events in the Library, including lecture series. I’d be happy to collect expressions of interest in resurrecting such an organization for the purpose, at least, of funding daily newspapers. (Or has the internet killed that too?)

Bill told me, in reflecting on his years here, that he thought our Library extraordinary in its wealth of good relations between its staff, and their services to the public. He thought it a matter of good luck. I urged him to consider taking some of the credit for himself. It was like him to refuse such a suggestion. Shy and unassuming, but dedicated to service, and profoundly competent.

-Dick Colby, Prof. Emeritus of Cell Biology, sometimes volunteer College Archivist (dick.colby@stockton.edu)
We started off our exhibits by celebrating Hispanic Heritage Month in the library with the exhibit “La Cuidad Atlantica: Hispanic Heritage in Atlantic City” on loan from the Atlantic City Library.

Followed by our student-curated exhibits: “Remembering James Cooper’s Civil Rights Activism” curated by Brianna DeCicco and “A Century Later: The Spanish Flu in New Jersey” curated by Brendan Honick.

For more information and pictures from the exhibit opening go to: https://stockton.edu/news/2018/student-curated-library-exhibit.html or https://www.flickr.com/photos/stockton_edu/sets/72157703781586884

Don’t miss our newest exhibit “From DNA to Beer: Harnessing Nature in Medicine and Industry” on display from January 7th through February 16th, 2019. This exhibition was produced by the National Library of Medicine, National Institutes of Heath and the National Museum of American History.