For 55 years, Helen Williams has served the residents of Amherst County by LAURA NEFF-HENDERSON

Helen Williams has dedicated her life to serving the community in Amherst County, Va., and in the process, she’s earned the distinction of being the longest serving employee at Virginia Tech, an institution with more than 7,000 employees across the country.

Born and raised in Amherst County, a county of about 32,000 people just north of Lynchburg, Va., Williams was born in 1939 to Raymond Williams, a chef at Sweet Briar College and his wife, Mary.

“Miss Helen,” as the 73-year-old is affectionately known to others, has a slight southern drawl and a grandmotherly warmth that her customers love.

“It’s not uncommon for individuals to call, or walk in, and, surprised to see Williams behind her desk, say, ‘You’re still here!’” her supervisor, Kevin C. Irvin, said laughing.

Williams, who only lives about a mile from the office, came in on weekends to add water to the incubator babies all over her newly painted desk, with small paint brushes in their hands, so she would see their handiwork when she returned from vacation. The office staff had actually painted the desk as a surprise for Helen.

“After graduating from the former Central High School in 1957, making 75 cents an hour, she began working as a general typist in the Amherst County Virginia Cooperative Extension office. Back then the office was housed in two separate facilities – an office for blacks on Main Street and an office for whites in the courthouse building. She moved six times since then and says that her desk, now, in the basement of a small white cinderblock building beside the town courthouse, is the best yet.”

Kevin C. Irvin, a senior Extension agent and the unit coordinator for the Amherst Extension office, is just one of the many wonderful people who make her job so enjoyable, says Helen B. Williams. The two are shown here working together at Williams’ desk.

Although her title and salary have changed a few times in the 55 years since then, one thing has remained the same – her commitment to the only community she has ever called home.

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In August, Williams rode a horse for the first time at the Central VA Agriculture Appreciation Day. That day, she says, was among the most memorable work experiences.

“Boy, have we come a long way,” said Williams. “The computer is a fantastic machine. But, I believe it has invented more work for us,” she said laughing.

Williams does not plan to retire anytime soon. Her work keeps her healthy and happy and allows her to fulfill her purpose in life – to serve others.

“Although she never married and doesn’t have any children (she just never met the right person, she says), Williams has a passion for helping the children in her community. The third oldest of six children and always mature beyond her years, Williams, spent much of her childhood helping her mom around the house.

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“Those who visit the Amherst County Extension Office learn quickly about what’s important to Williams – the children in her community and service to others.

“Visitors to the office also learn quickly that Williams is proud of her Hokie heritage. If she doesn’t have the opportunity to tell you how great Virginia Tech is and how much she enjoys watching the football games on television the maroon and orange clothing she wears and the knick-knacks that adorn her work space give it away. “Win or lose, they’re my teams,” she says.

“On most days her responsibilities as the unit’s administrative assistant includes providing clerical support for all of five of her colleagues. Some days that means lots of paperwork. Other days that means helping facilitate the county’s youth programs, including the Amherst County Apple Harvest Festival and the 6-H Haunted Trail each October, as well as the Pursuit for Presidens Early Childhood Educators Conference.”

“Execute” the Beanie Bear.

“Throughout her career, Williams has held many wonderful positions. Among them, service awards for five, 10, 15, 20, 25, 30, 35, 40, 45, 50, and 55 years, several 4-H All-Star awards and two Alpha Gamma Chapter awards for outstanding achievement in Virginia Tech Extension Service, 4-H gold and silver clover awards, and a 1985 plaque for outstanding contributions to the Central Virginia Livestock Club.”

“Beyond the work day”

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