



EXTRAORDINARY EMPLOYEES

Commitment to others brings Douglas Proffit to work at 3 a.m. seven days a week

by LAURA NEFF-HENDERSON, APR

Deep behind the scenes in Dietrick Hall, Virginia Tech employee Douglas Proffit arrives on campus at 3 a.m. and gets to work cutting up all of the meat that will be used in the Dietrick dining facilities that day. On an average year, Proffit processes more than 61,000 pounds of beef sirloin tips, boneless pork loins, and boneless chicken breasts.

He also handles special cuts of meat for special events such as graduation and customer appreciation dinners, and works closely with the chef at D2 to process large cuts of beef or lamb from Virginia Tech's Meat Processing facility.

Proffit works from 3 a.m. to 8 a.m., seven days a week. It's a schedule most people would do anything to avoid, but Proffit says these hours allow him to take care of his family responsibilities, work 13 hours a week stocking the meat case at the Christiansburg, Virginia Walmart, and meet the university's needs.

Proffit is of the only meat cutter at Virginia Tech, and his work is vital to maintaining food services for thousands of students and employees. Dietrick Hall houses D2 and DXpress, which serves about 6,000 snacks and meals each day.



Douglas Proffit cutting meat. In an average year, Proffit processes more than 61,000 pounds of beef sirloin tips, boneless pork loins, and boneless chicken breasts.

"Doug is integral in helping D2 offer students the choicest cuts of proteins at an affordable cost and has done so his entire tenure here," said his supervisor, Amanda Snediker, food production manager. "His diligent planning and expert cuts continue to entice and please our guests' discerning palates."

The New River Valley native has spent his 57-year career working in the food industry. At age 15, he landed his first job at Myers Grocery, where his family shopped, after they just began showing up in the mornings to help out. He never filled out an application, but soon he was making 25 cents an hour and working behind the counter. Nine years later the store went out of business and Proffit went on to work for Angles Grocery and then Mick or Mack IGA, both in Christiansburg.

His hard work paid off when he was hired to cut meat at Western Sizzlin Restaurant. He said he enjoyed his job there. Proffit stayed for 22 years before the rumors about the chain going out of business began and he looked to Virginia Tech for a position with more stability. That's when he took on the job at Walmart, as well.

When he came to the university in 1990, he took a wage position in the food service warehouse and worked his way up into a salaried supervisory staff position. Before Dietrick,

he spent eight years in the kitchen at Shultz Hall, which closed in 2012. When he moved to Dietrick, where he's been for 18 years, he took a position as a stock clerk. About 10 years later, he began cutting the meat that's used in the dining hall, and in 2004, he was promoted to meat production supervisor.

His job at Virginia Tech has been a blessing, he said. And, while he can't put his finger on what it is that makes the university so special to him, it just is.

"I just enjoy it – I can't give you a reason," said Proffit.

▲ AT HOME

Proffit's schedule allows him to take care of his wife of 51 years, Dianne, who has some health issues as a result of a heart attack she suffered in 2007. The couple is raising their 17-year-old grandson. Proffit himself had a heart attack on Nov. 12, 2014, but he recovered and quickly came back to work quickly.

Even when his family and friends urged him to retire following his heart attack, Proffit resisted.

"I don't have any desire to retire," said Proffit. "I've been working and earning money since I was 9 years old."

And, said Proffit, he can't retire anyway. He's got to train one of his colleagues to take over his job responsibilities first.

The Proffits have three adult children and five grandchildren between 7 and 19 years old. Their youngest child, their only daughter, Whitney Jones, 39, is a housekeeper at the Sterrett Facility Complex. Their daughter-in-law Sharon Proffitt is a fiscal technician in the College of Liberal Arts and Human Sciences.

"Doug is extremely kind and helpful to everyone he meets," said Sharon. "He is willing to sacrifice time, money, and possessions to help others in need. Doug and his family were there for me and my family when my mother passed away in 1994, before I married into the family. He has a heart of gold."

▲ IN THE COMMUNITY

When he isn't working, Proffit is active in his church community and helps with the local Boy Scout pack. Scouting, and the values it teaches, are important to Proffit, whose grandson Austin earned his Eagle Scout award at 14 years old.

Those values are also important to Proffit's oldest grandson, Tyler Proffit, 19, who volunteers his time running the sound equipment and teaching classes at Seneca Baptist Church in Elliston, Virginia.

Proffit's well known in the Shawsville community for his outdoor Christmas decoration display, which was featured on the front page of the New River Valley section of the Roanoke Times on Christmas morning this year. A few years ago, WDBJ7 broadcast its morning show from his front yard. People come from all over the area to see the display which he continues to do each year, he said, because of the joy it brings to others.

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Laura Neff-Henderson, APR, is the employee communications manager at Virginia Tech

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About this series

The Extraordinary Employee series highlights the achievements of Virginia Tech employees who go above and beyond, making a difference in the lives of others on campus and in the community.