



## For Marsha Wright, commitment to land-grant mission is one constant in 35 year career

by LAURA NEFF-HENDERSON, APR

When Marsha Wright began working for Virginia Tech in 1979, the cost of a First Class postage stamp was 15 cents, a loaf of bread was \$1.58, and a gallon of gas was 86 cents a gallon. The same year, McDonald's introduced the Happy Meal and Michael Jackson released his first breakthrough album "Off the Wall."

At Virginia Tech, William Edward Lavery was the university president, the \$175 million complex to house the Virginia-Maryland College of Veterinary Medicine was still a year away for classes, and students were turning their attention to university policy, pushing for changes in the policy that prohibited the infirmary from prescribing birth control pills.

A lot has changed since then, but one thing has stayed the same, according to Wright, the unit administrative assistant for Frederick County Cooperative Extension.

"Our programs have changed and the way we handle our reporting has changed, but our land-grant mission to serve others is still our guiding principle," said Wright.



Marsha Wright, an administrative assistant in the Frederick County office of Virginia Cooperative Extension works tirelessly to support all of her Extension colleagues in surrounding counties. She is seen here receiving the 2013 College of Agriculture and Life Sciences Employee of the Month award from her supervisor, Mark Sutphin, associate Extension agent, Agriculture and Natural Resources, Horticulture and unit coordinator (Frederick).

### ▲ AT HOME

During her first 31 years at Virginia Tech, Wright was the administrative assistant for the Clarke County Virginia Cooperation Extension office. In 2011 she moved into the same position in Frederick County.

Frederick County is home to 78,000 people and is Virginia's northernmost county.

In addition to her day-to-day clerical responsibilities and her accounting responsibilities to maintain county, state, local agency, and five foundation accounts, Wright works tirelessly to support all of her Extension colleagues in surrounding counties.

She also supports programming for Agriculture and Natural Resources (ANR), Family and Consumer Sciences, and 4-H Youth Development programs run by the Frederick County Office of Virginia Cooperative Extension.

One of the things she says she most enjoys about her job is the opportunity to get into the community and work alongside the Extension agents. Some of her regular responsibilities include registration and event logistics at several of events each year, including the Clarke County Fair, Safe Drinking Water clinics, Commercial Pesticide Applicator Recertification, and the Commercial Tree Fruit Production School.

She said she particularly enjoys working with the master gardeners and food safety programs and is proud of the work the agents in her office do to carry out Virginia Tech's land-grant mission.

"Marsha is always kind, courteous, and helpful to all around her," said Mark Sutphin, associate Extension agent, Agriculture and Natural Resources, Horticulture and unit coordinator (Frederick). "She is willing to offer assistance far above and beyond her job requirements and always performs every task with a

smile. She is one of the most enjoyable people I have the pleasure of knowing and I am so fortunate to have her as a colleague."

In 2014, Wright was selected as the College of Agriculture and Life Sciences Employee of the Year. She has a number of other awards and recognitions to her credit as well.

- ▲ 2013 - College of Agriculture and Life Sciences Employee of the Month
- ▲ 2013 - Epsilon Sigma Phi Meritorious Support Staff Award
- ▲ 2007 - College of Agriculture and Life Sciences Employee of the Month
- ▲ 2000 - Virginia Honorary 4-H All Star Award
- ▲ 1999 - President's Award for Excellence Nominee

"Marsha has always been willing to help. She regularly volunteers to help out other counties or the district when we have support staff shortages or an extra need and has been selected to represent our district on committees at the state level," said Cindy Gochenour, district administrative assistant for the Virginia Cooperative Extension Northern District Office.

"She has a super positive attitude, which is something that cannot be taught and she exemplifies what Extension is," said Gochenour.

"The people are the best part of my job," said Wright. "I've been very fortunate to work with great people and understanding bosses in both offices I've been in."

The work life balance has been vital to allowing her to manage her personal and work life, especially during the years that she was a single mom, she said.

"The people I work with have always understood that there are times when you have to be a mom, and other times when you have to be an employee."

### ▲ IN THE COMMUNITY

Though she was born in Winchester, Virginia and lived briefly in Baltimore, Maryland, she's been in Clarke County since she was nine years old and considers Northern Virginia home.

Before coming to Virginia Tech, Wright was a teller and loan department payment processor at the Bank of Clarke County, where she still banks today. When the opportunity to move into a state position with Virginia Tech presented itself, Wright applied for the position and never looked back.

Her commitment to her neighbors extends beyond her day job.

In her free time, Wright and her husband, Peanut, are active in their community. He coached the local Little League baseball and softball team and the couple has been fundraising for the past three years to raise money and materials to install lights on a baseball field in in Berryville, Virginia. Marsha has assisted with the organization of several dinners and actions, recruited community and business support, and performed financial and clerical activities to ensure this endeavor is a success.

She has also been involved with the Cub Scouts and Relay for Life and helps with the Clarke County Kiwanis Club's annual casino night fundraiser.

The commitment to serve others is a value the Wrights have instilled in their children as well. Together, the couple has five children – all boys who are grown, and live in the area. Three of their children work in public service positions. One is a firefighter, one's a fire marshal, and one is a high school history teacher.

Wright also enjoys reading, crocheting, and cross stitching and finds joy in making scarfs and other items for her grandchildren.

She plans to continue working as long as she enjoys the job and is healthy enough to do so.

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[www.hr.vt.edu/extraordinary\\_employees/2015/marsha-wright/](http://www.hr.vt.edu/extraordinary_employees/2015/marsha-wright/)

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

### 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.