



EXTRAORDINARY EMPLOYEES

Commitment to service and others is a way of life for Tim Sheppard

by LAURA NEFF-HENDERSON, APR

Tim Sheppard is a self-proclaimed ordinary guy. But the story others tell is something different. He's extraordinarily well loved by his friends and colleagues, as well as the dozens of community members he impacts each year.

Sheppard, who oversees campus mail operations, came to Virginia Tech in 1988, after a semester at New River Community College. College, he says, was getting in the way of him fulfilling his lifelong dream to work at Virginia Tech.

"Virginia Tech has been a part of my family for generations. It's in our blood," said Sheppard. "It's more than a place to work for our family; it's a way of life."



His dad, Frank Sheppard Jr., retired from the university in 2011, after 47 years. He worked as a warehouse supervisor. Diane Sheppard, his mom, retired after a 20 year career as a residential hall custodian. Sheppard's sister used to work at the snack bar in Dietrick Hall. And, his grandfather, Frank Sheppard Sr., was involved in the construction of Lane Stadium and Cassell Coliseum.

When Sheppard came to Virginia Tech at 18-years-old, he worked in the stock room for the Virginia-Maryland Regional College of Veterinary Medicine. In 1997, he transitioned to the Surplus Property Department. Eight years later, in 2005, he accepted his current position in Mail Services.

"Our customers love Tim," said Ginny McCoy, associate director of Mail Services and Sheppard's direct supervisor. "He's very outgoing and incredibly dedicated to the university and the employees we serve."

On campus

The best part of his job, and the reason he's stayed so long, says Sheppard, is the amazing people he's gotten to work with along the way.

In this current role, Sheppard supervises a team of nine employees who are collectively responsible for accepting, sorting, and delivering more than 3.8 million pieces of mail each year. On any given day, the team delivers mail to 410 different campus locations twice a day. As new buildings are built and new departments formed, the number of mail stops continues to increase.

Betty Scott has spent the last 20 years of her 30 years career at Virginia Tech in Mail Services and says Sheppard is one of the best supervisors she's ever worked for. Scott, who is a postal carrier, and Sheppard share a route and deliver mail together every day. In addition to being easygoing and funny, Scott says, he's also very approachable and supportive.

"Tim's dedication to Virginia Tech is evident in the care he takes with every task, no matter how small," said Catherine Chambers, director of printing and mail services. "He's an ideal employee - a self-starter with a great work ethic."

Mail Services also receives deliveries from, and makes deliveries to, the Blacksburg office of United States Postal Service on a daily basis.

Some months, Sheppard says, are busier than ever - with February being the shortest and busiest month each year.

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- Catherine Chambers, Director of Printing and Mail Services

In February 2014, the mail services team delivered 200,000 pieces of mail, including about 10,000 packages.

June and August, he says, are also incredible busy times. In June, when departments across campus are ordering equipment and supplies before the end of the fiscal year, his team handles thousands of extra packages.

In August, student textbook orders flood the mail services space located at the back of the Printing Services space at 1425 North Main St., in the shopping center across from Kroger.

While mail delivery may seem non-essential, it's anything but that, according to Sheppard. The Mail Services team works rain, snow, or sleet.

"What we do is very important to the life of this university," said Sheppard. Applications for grants, tax documents, class registration information, tuition, billing, and diplomas - all of that information comes to us and we deliver it to students and employees.

"These diplomas signify four years of hard work for our students and the sacrifices their families have made to make it possible," said Sheppard.

While the volume of mail that comes through his shop has increased drastically in recent years, their team has gotten smaller due to the retirement and attrition. No longer do his employees have set roles - they each do a little bit of everything now - sorting, metering, loading, and delivering.

"We're doing much more with less people but everybody pulls together and does it," said Sheppard of the team effort. It's no sweat though, he says. "We're a land grant university - growing is what we do."

"The people are part of what keeps me here," said Sheppard. "You won't find a harder working, more dedicated group of people anywhere at Virginia Tech."

In addition to the day-to-day "craziness," Sheppard also enjoys working with the Virginia Tech Police Department. Every so often, officers come by with the narcotics and explosives canines to inspect mail.

In the community

Family and tradition, are very important to Sheppard. He and his German Shepherd, Lucky, live in the house his grandfather built in 1945, and he also spends time helping his family run their cattle farm in his hometown, McCoy, a small town about 10 miles west of Blacksburg, Va.

He's a pretty big sports fan too. Sheppard has been attending Virginia Tech football games religiously since he was 10-years-old. Back then, he says, tickets to a football game were general admission. These days, he and his friends attend all of the home football games and at least one or two away games each year. They also travel to a bowl game every few years.

On the field

In service to his community, Sheppard serves as an assistant coach to the New River Valley Thunder (14 and under) girls' travel softball team. When a friend asked him to help with the coaching seven years ago, Sheppard admits he hesitated a bit. He had coached boy's football and baseball previously, but had never coached fast pitch softball and he had certainly never coached a team of girls.

And, while it involves quite a bit of traveling, "It's the best move I've ever made," he says.

The team practices several days each week and travels each weekend, from March through September.



He's enjoyed watching the girls grow up and perfect their skills on the field. And, just as importantly, he admits he's also enjoyed the opportunity to get to know the girls' families and has come to think of them all as part of his extended family. □

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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.