

Sue Presson: 50 Years of Service to the Commonwealth

(May 29, 2012) When Sue Presson began her career at William and Mary, John F. Kennedy was President, “Moon River” was album of the year, and James Watson, Maurice Wilkins, and Francis Crick had just won a Nobel Prize for revealing the structure of DNA.

Presson, who was recognized for 50 years of service to The College of William and Mary during the Virginia Institute of Marine Science’s annual Awards Ceremony on May 4th, began as a secretary for the Assistant Dean of Women at William and Mary in 1962.

After assisting 6 deans of Women and Students through their terms at the College, she served a brief stint in the Admissions Office at the William & Mary Law School before moving to the School of Marine Science at VIMS in 1981. After 2 years as an administrative assistant with professor Bob Huggett, Presson was hired into the new position of graduate registrar by the late Dr. John Zeigler—VIMS’ first dean of graduate studies.

Presson, who plans to retire from VIMS this May, has since won the respect and admiration of 7 graduate deans, 4 directors, and hundreds of students, faculty, and staff during her 31 years on the Gloucester Point campus.

Professor Linda Schaffner, VIMS’ current Associate Dean of Academic Studies, says “Sue is an incredible resource—she’s extremely knowledgeable about the policies and histories of our graduate program. She is nearly unflappable and has always been willing to pull together whatever information I need, answer any questions, do whatever she can with a moment’s notice to keep operations on track. She is also an incredibly caring and kind person.”

Professor Iris Anderson, Schaffner’s predecessor as graduate dean at VIMS, echoes Schaffner’s assessment. “The words that best describe Sue are caring, kind, humble, and competent,” says Anderson.

As graduate registrar at VIMS, Presson has been responsible for evaluating academic records and certifying that Masters’ and Doctoral students complete all requirements of their degree programs in a timely fashion. She coordinates the registration process; updates the Course Catalog and Student Handbook; and manages and analyzes data relevant to admissions, enrollment, academic progress, and graduation.

VIMS graduate students have gone on to leadership roles in academia, government, and private industry. A VIMS grad recently served on President Obama’s Deepwater Horizon Oil Spill Commission; and others head



50 Years of Service: Sue Presson, with VIMS Dean and Director John Wells, was recognized for 50 years of service to VIMS and the College of William & Mary. Photo by David Malmquist.

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Virginia Institute of Marine Science
School of Marine Science
College of William and Mary
Gloucester Point, VA 23062
(804) 684-7000

up the Southeast Fisheries Science Center, one of the leading environmental consulting and engineering firms in the northeastern U.S., the Virginia Seafood Council, and the Smithsonian's new Ocean Hall, among many other leadership positions.

Mark Henderson, a current VIMS graduate student who expects to earn his Ph.D. this fall, says "Sue has always been there to help out the graduate students with registration and make sure they reach their milestones towards earning their degree. Personally, she helped me make all the necessary arrangements so that I could participate in graduation this spring even though I wasn't officially graduating until August."

In 2007, Presson won VIMS' Outstanding Classified Employee for Administrative Support. During that awards ceremony, VIMS Dean and Director John Wells honored her service by stating "With Sue's long-term knowledge of our student body and history of our educational program, she has been instrumental in maintaining consistency and quality in the operation of the Graduate Dean's Office. She is a compassionate person who cares deeply for our students and is dedicated to helping them succeed in every way possible."

To honor Presson's retirement, members of the VIMS community were asked to sign a "memories card" with their thoughts concerning her long career. One response, from professor Deborah Steinberg, exemplifies the theme of imperturbable, caring, and dedicated competence that consistently appears in any discussion of Presson's service to VIMS, the College, and the Commonwealth.

"You have been a calm, steady support for myself, other faculty, and students for so many years," writes Steinberg. "Your institutional memory and proficiency have been a real asset to the grad program. It's been a true privilege to work with you, and I wish you a fabulous retirement!"

In an e-mail response to the outpouring from the VIMS community, Presson replied "Thank you... for the good wishes, the hugs, the smiles, the hand waves on campus these last few weeks. You all serve a special role on this campus, and the years working with you will long be in my memory... it is difficult to say goodbye when deep roots have been formed in one's work career... Even if we did not get to speak to each other personally, you're in my mind's eye."



Four Deans: Sue Presson (C) with the four most recent graduate deans in the School of Marine Science at VIMS: (from L): Iris Anderson, John Milliman, Linda Schaffner, and Mike Newman.