

Debra Jacks - Oct. 2015

A Fulfilling 36 Years of Helping Students Achieve Their Dreams

When Debra Jacks got a call in 1981 from then-Peralta District Chancellor Donald Godbold, she thought it was a prank. She had worked at Merritt in a grant-funded, student services-related position for two years. But when the grant wasn't renewed, she got a job in private industry and had been in it for six months.



“I didn't know why he would be calling me,” says Debra, and it took awhile before he convinced me it was really him. It was so embarrassing!”

In fact, Chancellor Godbold was calling to offer her an opportunity to work on a pilot project at Merritt helping disadvantaged youth. She accepted the offer and never left. Until now.

After 36 years of helping students fulfill their educational dreams, Debra will retire on October 30, leaving behind decades of a truly gratifying career. “I get thankful cards and letters and I run into students all the time who I've assisted and they tell me how they attribute their success to our relationship on one level or another. It's a wonderful and satisfying feeling.”

Though Debra claims she doesn't really want to retire, the broad smile she's walked around with for the past few months belies that statement. Ask her what she's going to do when she retires, and she reels off a long list without hesitation. “I love to cook, and I have a folder of recipes I want to test out on my friends and family,” says Debra, who has seven brothers and sisters-in-law, multiple nieces and nephews, and a 94-year-old father she is looking forward to seeing more often.

“I want to have time to spoil them all with my pies and cobblers because I am overdue. They are always saying, “You owe me a cheesecake, you owe me a sweet potato pie.” Debra says she will also find time to exercise, garden, read, and take the time to pamper herself.

But she will never forget about Merritt. In fact, she'll soon be back to volunteer two days a week helping with in-reach services and then work part-time to help support Sankofa's efforts.

“I've had some awesome opportunities at Merritt both professionally and personally,” says Debra, who has done everything from edit and proofread catalogs to write press releases for events. “I've had wonderful administrators and supervisors, and I've learned a lot from my colleagues. “My position through my entire career has always been, whatever needs to be done, as long as I have the skill set, I will do it, and it makes us all look good.”

—Susan May