

TONY HAMPTON - February 2019

Nearing Retirement, Tony Hampton Looks Back on His Career and the Merritt Family He'll Miss

Tony Hampton grew up taking things apart and putting them back together. He started with doorknobs and toasters, graduated to stereo systems and auto wiring, and, in the late 1970s in Southern California, discovered a new phenomenon called computers which he thought were interesting but never would be useful.

“I started taking apart hard drives, hooking computers together across phone lines, and staying up all night playing video games,” he says. “There weren’t any programs or hardware, all the things we take for granted now. There were mainframes and punch cards, and it would take 40 hours to teach a computer to do something in only slightly less time than a human being could do it.”

Along with his computer hobby, Tony spent a couple of decades trying to decide what he wanted to do as a career. He started earned a living doing factory work, held a security job, and then was trained to do high-voltage electric work which he did for 10 years. In between he went into the Marine Corps Reserve where he held several jobs and worked his way up to becoming a sergeant. At one time he thought he wanted to be a police officer, but then decided against it.

All of his work experience made him realize what he needed in order to be satisfied in a job. “I discovered three things that would make me happy: Helping people, fixing things, and learning new stuff,” says Tony. “So I decided to go back to school at Merritt, and that’s where I eventually found all of them.”

In 1997 Tony was a student assistant working with now-retired anthropology instructor Barbara Joans, and he wanted to upgrade her computer with more memory and a better version of WordPerfect. When he went to the CIS office to see if they could help, they directed him elsewhere.

“I remember walking down a dark hallway and knocking three times on a steel door, and a woman opened it and then suspiciously peeked at me from behind it,” says Tony. “We chatted for 20 minutes and she asked me for my resume and then hired me as a student worker. At the end of the summer, she said ‘I have to cut back your hours or hire you as an hourly employee and pay you twice as much.’ It took me about a nanno second to figure that out.”

The woman was Patricia Rom, and she and Tony have been Merritt’s dynamic tech support duo ever since. “At the time, Merritt was about to upgrade the network campus-wide and people were requesting computers left and right,” says Tony, who was hired two years later as a Computer Network Technician (and is currently Network Support Services Specialist). “We had 290 computers when I started and there are well over 1,500 now, along with the 80 Smart classrooms which added a whole new level of complexity to the job.”

Today, with retirement looming somewhere between now and June 30 and a newly purchased home waiting for him in Arizona, he looks back fondly on having spent the past 20+ years meeting his three goals, especially the “helping” part. “The people are the heart and soul of Merritt,” says Tony. “Taking care of them has been the best part of my job. It’s all about being kind and supportive of each other. It’s been a great family.”

When Tony was interviewed by Chancellor Jowel Laguerre on C-Direct TV as one of the District’s outstanding employees in 2017, emails began pouring in with praise from the Merritt community that he can carry with him on his retirement and remember his Merritt family as they will always remember him. (See samples below).

- *“A well-deserved honor...Merritt appreciates all you do for us.”* –Dr. Marie-Elaine Burns
- *“Sweet! I think Tony deserves a big raise!”* –Jennifer Yates
- *“Tony has been there for me, through thick and thin.”* – Lee Peevy



- *“Thanks for everything you do, Tony!”* –Jason Holloway
- *“A well-deserved recognition for someone who works so hard and has an invariably positive attitude.”* –Ann Elliot
- *“Well deserved! Thank you, Tony, for all you do!”* –Inga Marciulionis
- *“Kudos to our wonderful Tony who does so much for our college each and every day!”* –Mario Rivas
- *“You always go the extra mile, keeping us up and running across this busy campus.”* –Denise Woodward
- *“Tony is a gem. He’s immediately responsive and always maintains a pleasant demeanor. How does he do it?”* –Maril Bull
- *“Tony has been a solid rock to me and our students. I appreciate everything he has done for us!”* –Barbara Dimopoulos

—*Susan May*