

BONNIE BROUDER: PRESERVING THE PAST FOR THE FUTURE

by LAURA DAUGHERTY
photos by L.G. PATTERSON

Even the grandest tapestry is first achieved by a series of small, calculated stitches that slowly evolve into something great. Likewise, first lady Bonnie Brouder has gradually pieced together a history and a culture at Columbia College that has culminated in a college transformed by her efforts.

When Bonnie and Dr. Gerald Brouder first arrived on the main campus in 1995, she didn't have a set agenda as to what her contributions would be,

only that she would make them. "It was a matter of how I could help my husband and help the college, and there were lots of things I saw I could do."

One of the initial ways she felt she could help the college was to establish standards for protocol, entertaining and food service. She bought books on etiquette and found ways to increase banquet space. With all the time Bonnie spent coordinating events and making sure every last detail was perfect, it soon became clear the college needed





a full-time employee in the field, and a new department was born. Sallie Coley was hired in June 2000, and the Events, Protocol and Design office now employs five full-time and three part-time staff members. “She was a godsend,” Bonnie says of Sallie.

At the same time Bonnie was helping with events and establishing standards of protocol, she discovered — quite literally — another way she could help the college.

“Before Jerry actually started working as president, he wanted to visit all of the college,” Bonnie says. She explains that he had a college key and on weekends they would walk around and look at the different departments, lounges and student areas on the main campus. The key also opened attics and basements, and it was what she discovered inside those spaces that prompted her to take action.

“I asked myself, ‘What’s here? What’s available?’ ... it was just like a treasure trove.”

Bonnie and her husband had discovered the college's history — books, paintings, photographs, silverware, newspapers — dating from the year the college opened its doors in 1851 to the present day.

Although the items were for the most part tucked away safely in various buildings on campus, nothing was organized. "There was just so much," Bonnie says, "but I thought it was really important. When people think 'archive,' they think, 'Oh, you found all this silver and everything.' Well, if we didn't have the silver, we'd still have a history of the college. And to me, that was the most important thing."

It was this desire to preserve the college's history that prompted Bonnie to dedicate countless hours sifting through boxes. "It was a matter of going through the boxes and putting a label on them,



figuring out what they were, figuring out what we should throw away," she says, "but in the mix of all this, in so many different areas, we were able to find all of the trustee minutes from 1851 through the present time. We were able to find all of the catalogs so we knew what all of the students were doing from 1851 to the present time. We were able to put together all of the newspapers that the girls printed from when they started printing in the 1920s to the present time."

"There were so many wonderful things," Bonnie says. "Every day, it was like, 'Oh, you're never going to believe what I found today!'"

One such discovery pointed to a different history in the early days of the college than what many had perceived. Bonnie explains that while some believed the college served as a finishing school for girls in its early days, her findings proved that theory wrong. "They (the students) were really receiving a four-year baccalaureate degree, the same education as MU (University of Missouri) students," she says. "It's documented in the books who taught the classes, and so I just took those names and found out they were teaching the same classes to men at MU because, at that time, MU did not admit women."

Other finds included oil paintings of all college presidents and their wives, a painting of Martha Washington by Vinnie Ream and hundreds of articles of clothing including an extensive Jane Froman collection.

"There are so many things that point to the history of the college that help us know who we were back then, how we were established, who our students were and what our administration did," she says.

Similar to her involvement in events and protocol, managing the archives eventually became too big a task for Bonnie to continue alone. In 2000, she asked Sallie to join the effort in managing and organizing the archives. The archives are now under the direction of Janet Caruthers, director of Stafford Library. Plans are in the works to digitally catalog everything.

"I probably had the fun part, the discovery part," Bonnie says. "But they're all rediscovering these things now."

As if piecing together a history and creating a culture of entertaining at Columbia College wasn't enough, Bonnie saw yet another need at the

school early on in her tenure, this one tied to her love of Christmas. She couldn't help but notice how dark the exterior of the college seemed during the holiday season, and a new tradition was born.

Bonnie consulted with the designer of the Kansas City, Mo. Country Club Plaza Christmas light display to help plan and power the lights. She explains that while the lights were powered as efficiently as possible, there were worries the added electrical cost might create controversy regarding the college's spending. Nervously, they turned on the lights, "and we got more positive press than we could have paid for and never even thought we would get," Bonnie says. "Radio and TV stations as far away as Kansas City and St. Louis were all talking about the lights at Columbia College."

The holiday lights have grown into an annual tradition. Each year, she and her husband hosted a lighting ceremony in early December for the entire community and a reception afterward for students, faculty, staff and their families.

Working with Sallie, Bonnie has added more elaborate lights over the years, incorporating additional buildings and even featuring a building with animated lights set to music.

"You look at what you did and ask how you could make it better," she explains of the evolution of her contributions. "Every year you fix it, you tweak it."

And while her steady, dedicated contributions have amounted to great things, it's evident her motivation simply was to care for a place she loved.

"It's my home," she says. "It becomes so much a part of your life, and it's nice to think about retiring, but then you stop and realize, it's like leaving home."

Fortunately for the Columbia College community, Bonnie has made it a home. *a*



STAFF SENTIMENTS ...

"I first met Bonnie when I interviewed for the special events coordinator position at the college. It was quite a surprise to me when the first lady of the college was present for the interview! From that conversation, I could immediately tell that she took extreme pride in guiding both college celebrations and the preservation of its history. We began working closely together my first year as the sesquicentennial included a full 12 months of festivities. What a year it was and we haven't stopped yet. I never dreamed I would have the privilege to work side by side with Bonnie all over campus, from the dirt basements to the cold attics of the college that brought me, as a student, to Columbia.

Bonnie and I learned quickly that it only took a small discovery to spark an idea and a project was created. From the stained glass we found in the basement of what is now Practice Hall to Bonnie catching sight of an animated lighting Christmas display while in St. Louis visiting her grandchildren. The first led to the stained glass display in the AHSC Billie Jo Wanink Lounge, and the second led to the well-researched, one-of-a-kind holiday lighting display on the Kirkman House. In Bonnie's tenure as first lady, Columbia College has received great attention to details and a high standard for campus protocol, serving as a perfect complement to her husband's impeccable leadership. She has always been a dedicated friend of the college, and I am proud to call her one of mine."

— **Sallie Coley**, DIRECTOR OF EVENTS,
PROTOCOL AND DESIGN