



Always willing—and able—to help

The Cincinnati State Foundation is accepting donations for a new scholarship fund honoring Theresa Johnson's long and unselfish service to the College

It was summer, 1976. The U.S. was celebrating its bicentennial, the movie *Rocky* was debuting in theaters, and the Big Red Machine was on its way to back-to-back World Series.

That same summer, 17-year-old Theresa Johnson made her first trip to Cincinnati State, then known as the Cincinnati Technical College. The newly minted Hamilton Garfield High School grad had a meeting with the program chair of the executive secretarial program.

As she walked down the long hallway in college's Main Building, her footsteps echoed. She saw a big wooden door that said Business Technologies.

"Who would have thought when I knocked on that door I'd be at Cincinnati State for 44 years," said Theresa, who retired in August 2020. "But whether I was a student or an employee, it never got boring for me."

Theresa grew up in a tight knit family in Hamilton as the middle of three daughters. Older sister Carolyn preceded her at Cincinnati State. When Theresa began classes in Fall 1976, Carolyn had already graduated and taken a job in the Registrar's Office. Carolyn also gave Theresa a ride to and from campus each day.

"After class I had to wait for Carolyn to finish work, so I started helping," Theresa said. "I just couldn't sit and not do anything. I'm that way at home, too. Things have to get done. Somebody's got to do them. So why not me?"

That proclivity to unselfishly pitch in led to a part-time job in the Registrar's Office for the young student. It has also made Theresa a highly respected colleague throughout her career.

"Theresa is smart, friendly and always willing to help anyone, anytime, who needs help. I don't know what else you could ask for," said John Dwyer '74, who has served on the Cincinnati State Foundation Board of Directors since 1996 and has been president of both the Foundation and the Alumni Association.

Theresa graduated Cum Laude with Honors from Cincinnati State in 1978.

"One of my instructors always emphasized that 'you need to be proud of everything you do,'" said Theresa, "That has stuck with me through today."

After Theresa graduated, Miami University accepted her into a bachelor's degree program, but she decided instead to accept a part-time job at Cincinnati State helping manage the Evening College office. Within a year she landed a full-time job at the college, as the executive assistant for the academic vice president and the director of continuing education.

From there, Theresa took a job in the President's office, and then in Marketing, Public Information, and finally in Development and Advancement, where she has worked since the late 1980s. Her varied experience gave her a depth of knowledge about the college that few have.

"I always knew if I had any question about Cincinnati State, Theresa was very knowing about the college and willing to give you the information," said Sharon Timon '95/'97, an executive assistant in Cincinnati State Financial Aid Office that has worked at the college for 25 years.

For Theresa, the opportunity to help others, whether they were students, presidents, or trustees, was one of the best things about working at Cincinnati State.

"My feeling has always been that if someone has a problem, let's see what we can do about it," Theresa said. "I'm going to treat you just like I'd want someone to treat my family."

While Theresa's family is still close knit, the past few years have not been easy for her. Her husband Charlie and her sister Carolyn passed away. She also had to endure a couple of back surgeries that required significant recovery times.

But she is not one to complain. Things have to get done.

At home, she looks after her mother Lois, who is 89. Her daughter Jamie lives nearby, and Theresa is helping homeschool her 14-year-old grandson Jackson during the COVID-19 pandemic. And whenever possible, the family packs up and goes to its summer home near Lake Cumberland that her parents built in the 1960s.

"Cell phones don't work there," Theresa said. "It's quiet, just nature."

Cincinnati State Foundation Chair Mike Haurert said Theresa's steady presence will be sorely missed by the foundation's directors, who are all volunteers. "For the 10 years I've been connected to the college, Theresa has always been extremely supportive, at every stage. I'm really grateful for that," he said.

Theresa said she will miss Cincinnati State, too.

"I met a lot of good people there," she said. "I'm also proud that the college is a real means to an end for students. The classes are small, the cost is low, and with co-op you can find out if this is what you really want to do. Students can come out with a good job, a good career."

That is certainly the way it happened for Theresa.

Like her footsteps on that summer day in 1976, Theresa's talents and dedication have echoed throughout the college ever since. And through the new scholarship in her name, Theresa's unwavering willingness to help others will echo in the lives of future students and graduates of Cincinnati State.