A tribute to Joyce Iannuzzi, or “just Joyce”

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Guest Columnist

Chances are, the name Joyce Iannuzzi does not ring a bell. That is because if you ever asked her, it was “Joyce. Just Joyce.” So many people had mangled her last name over the years that she gave up even trying to spell it to them.

The odds are good that you have talked with Joyce at some point in your time at the University of Alabama at Birmingham, especially if you called 934-3540 after hours, when you forgot your BlazerID password, could not read your e-mail, or if your online course was not working.

Even without knowing the name, you could recognize her by the fact that she probably would not let you off the phone until she was absolutely sure you were fixed up, unless of course she had to make some calls to get to the root of the problem.

Little did you know that this person who was so concerned about your password, or the fact that you had waited until the last minute to do your class assignment, was a cornerstone of Information Technology at UAB.

Joyce came here in 1975 to work in the User Services group. This was the age when computers fit in small buildings instead of your lap and when (long before Jean-Luc Picard) a “Ready Room” was here you punched cards and picked up green-bar computer printout.

If you think your dial-up is slow now, imagine it a few hundred times slower, if you had it at all.

From this beginning, Joyce embarked on a long career at UAB, serving as customer support, advocate, and champion for thousands of students as they worked through the maze of computer services here.

Along the way, she also helped pioneer, encourage, incubate, and improve a number of the IT resources you probably take for granted today.

Jokes about Al Gore inventing the Internet aside, Joyce was instrumental in bringing the first true network link into Alabama back in the mid 80’s, when UAB joined NSFnet, the precursor of the Internet. If you look up uab.edu, you will find her name there (spelled incorrectly, as usual) and the activation date: May 8, 1986.

Later, in the 90’s, Joyce was the key force in establishing the Data Post Office so that every person on campus could have their own e-mail and Web homepage. If you have ever seen the letters DPO in a UAB Internet hostname, that is how it came to be. She was adamant – in the face of some resistance – that these facilities should be available to students as well as faculty and staff.

The past few years have seen a blur of new developments and advancements in computer and network resources here at UAB. In almost all of them – Internet2, ResNet, BlazerIDs, the fiber campus backbone, gigabit Ethernet, just to name a few – Joyce was a major influence.

Why did she devote so much time and energy to UAB? And why was she answering your call at 1 a.m. in the morning after doing all this for over 28 years, some of it perhaps even before you were born?

She did it because she loved UAB.

She wanted the students, and the faculty, and the researchers to have whatever resources and facilities they needed in order to be and become the very best. She could not give less than 110%, as with everything else in her life, until that goal was reached.

Joyce Ann Walker Iannuzzi passed away May 7 – a day shy of exactly 17 years after uab.edu officially came into existence.

It was sudden and unexpected, though thankfully peaceful. It has saddened everyone who was a friend and colleague, those who admired and respected her for dedication, intelligence, and wit.

She was much too modest in life to take any credit for all that she did and how far UAB has come as a result. Nevertheless, the next time you access a UAB computer for business or pleasure, family or school, you should take the time to say a word of thanks.

Say it to Joyce. Just Joyce.

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