

FOCUS ON... DON THOMAS

(Vol. 3, No. 1, September/October 2001)

During the construction of the new Southeast building at the Wilmington campus, Don Thomas was fond of drawing his students' attention to the tradesmen who were building it. Young or old, rain or shine, blistering heat or shivering cold, they had to be on the job. "That's not something you want to do for the rest of your life," he would tell them.



Don Thomas

Don was speaking from experience: while earning his bachelor's degree in accounting from Delaware State College (now University) he put himself through school working a construction job. Once he achieved that degree, he was able to land a job with Hercules, working in their accounting department.

He fell into teaching by happenstance: a friend and mentor of his, who was teaching in the evenings at Delaware Tech, was traveling one time and asked Don to fill in for him.

At the time, Delaware Tech's Wilmington campus was still in its infancy, operating out of a converted building on Governor Printz Boulevard.

It seems that this accidental experience was fateful: it propelled Don toward what ultimately became a major career change. While continuing to work at Hercules by day, Don began teaching at the college in the evenings. Then, in December 1976, a full-time teaching position opened up, and Don was able to move into it. His adjunct experience made the transition relatively smooth.

Now an educator, Don became interested in continuing his professional development in that direction, eventually completing an M.Ed., also from Delaware State.

Despite his move out of private industry, Don has maintained his professional contacts there, a practice that he believes benefits his teaching by providing a wealth of real-world examples. To this day, he consults with small businesses and nonprofit organizations in an advisory capacity.

Don's respect for his students is clear from the way he talks about them. Not only does he strive to help them understand what can at times be extremely dense material by drawing upon his experiences in the private and nonprofit sectors, he always encourages them to continue their educations.

These days, Don, like a lot of his colleagues, is taking courses in the Educational Technology Certificate program run by the College. He has completed the first four, and is always looking for sensible ways to use these technologies to assist the learning process.

His greatest challenge as an educator occurred over twenty years ago. He had to teach

accounting, a very visual subject matter, to a blind student. He had to carefully develop ways to describe in words these visual elements. The reward was not only that the student earned a good grade, but that other members of the class participated in helping to teach this student; it was a positive experience for them as well.

One thing Don believes more strongly about than any other is the issue of respect for students. If ever there is a forum for discussing this issue, he is ready to share his views and approaches.