

Worker Portraits **Faces of Strength**

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Tidying Up

by Megan Douglass

Kathy Murrell likes to keep busy and it shows. She is often told that she keeps up DeBartolo Hall better than other janitors on YSU's campus.



Kathy Murrell is the janitor who single-handedly keeps the six levels of DeBartolo Hall on the Youngstown State University campus clean. She's also a friendly face amongst a sea of stressed-out students and professors, speaking with everyone who passes by, giving them a smile. She is rarely seen sitting down or resting and always makes sure to keep up to date with the goings-on of anyone who will let themselves warm up to her. "I'm a people person. I get along with everyone, don't matter who it is," says Kathy.

Swiftly moving around the lobby, dusting tables, picking up the full trash bags and shaking out a new one, Kathy says that she enjoys working alone in the building. That way, she has just enough work to keep her happy. "If three people were working in one building together, you're going to be short [work] and have to sit down," says Kathy of her desire to stay busy. She moves her cart full of trash bags, brooms, dust pans and an endless supply of spray cleaners from floor to floor, sliding in and out of study rooms and into restrooms to "tidy up."

Kathy found out about the job through her boyfriend, who she lives with on the Southside. He works in Tod Hall, as a janitor during the night shift, and had heard about some openings. Kathy inquired and started working in Kilcawley, but found that she couldn't get enough hours working there. She threatened to quit because she needed more money than she was making for her bills. "Once they take out taxes, I wasn't bringing home nothing. But [my boss] said, 'Don't quit. When we get another opening, you can have it.'"

After that, she was given DeBartolo Hall as her domain, and she found it to be the perfect place for her, especially because the work keeps her busy.

Students and faculty who witness her hard work often tell her to sit down and relax, but she doesn't want to be bothered. "I like to take my coffee break now and then, but I mostly keep busy because it makes the day go quicker."

Her hard work pays off and she takes pleasure in getting compliments from those who appreciate her work. She is often told that she keeps up the place better than other janitors. People from other buildings have even told her that she does one of the best jobs on campus.

She also takes pride in the fact that she's in such great shape at 52 years old.

"People say 'You're so quick. You move around so fast,'" she says with a big smile. As a non driver, she walks just about every place she goes with the exception of the occasional ride she hitches with a friend. Walking, she claims, is her secret to staying young.

Her acquaintances at DeBartolo have more to offer than the quick hellos and compliments, however. Last Christmas, the Philosophy and Religious Studies department faculty members all contributed to a gift for Murrell. "Ms. Joan set it up. She put out a notice for anyone who wanted to give anything to me for Christmas. It totaled up to almost 600 dollars they gave to me last year. That's more than what I get on my job for a month."

The department also invites her to all of their parties and gatherings throughout the semester. Kathy has found that working in her building has become more than just a job; her place of work has become as comfortable as her home. "They say I'm part of the family now," she says of the warmth she's shown by her fourth floor friends.

Kathy had a long line of jobs leading up to her current position as janitor for Youngstown State. A resident of Youngstown her whole life, she has been a part of the Valley's most well known businesses. "I'm a Jackie of all trades," she says as she describes her previous jobs.

She worked in sales as a cashier for Wetherby Coats, BJ Allen's, Moyer's and Cantar. She has had a job since she was in ninth grade. Now, at 52, she proudly says that she has never had more than a couple of days between jobs. "If one job didn't work out, I didn't wait for another place to call me. I'd put applications in before that week was over," she says. When her son was born 32 years ago, she took off one year to be with him. That was the only time she didn't have a paying job.

Before becoming a janitor she worked for four years as a cashier at the Village on the West Side . She enjoyed socializing with the customers and ringing out the big orders. Trying to sell behind the jewelry counter in the back of the store didn't work well for her because there was too much idle time between customers. She wasn't able to keep busy enough for her taste. She prefers positions that require her to work at a steady pace, much like her current job.

Kathy also keeps moving by doing some volunteering on the side. She helps out elderly people around town who need someone to assist them with everyday things. She generally helps out on the weekends, when she doesn't have to work. However, she makes sure to let them know that if they need her during the week, she is always available for them.

She started out by helping an 80-year-old woman whose son used to be a minister on the East side of Youngstown . He moved to Baltimore and asked Murrell to stay with his mother because she was ill and unable to get around easily. "So, when I get off of work, I go over to her house. She can cook and everything all right, but she doesn't want to be in the house alone at night, just in case something happens," says Murrell.

She enjoys helping out the elderly and has many clients now. She understands that it can be difficult to be alone and unable to do things for yourself, so she wants to help out people while she can, knowing that she might need help someday too.

After she helped out her friend on the East side, other people, having heard about the great job she did in providing companionship and doing little jobs around the house, started calling her. People ask her to do work in their homes from around campus too, because they like the work that she does in DeBartolo. Besides work and volunteering around town, Murrell wants to find another part time job to support her bingo habit. "I can either go to bingo or pay my bills. If I go to bingo, I gotta borrow money to pay my bills. It's not worth it. A girl gotta do what a girl gotta do," she says of her current dilemma. She thinks that finding another job will make it easier for her to have some spare change so

that she can still participate in her favorite hobby.

However, since she already keeps busy with her job and helping people in town, getting a new job wouldn't leave much time for her boyfriend who sometimes feels that she isn't around enough. "The only thing is my boyfriend complain because I don't spend enough time with him, 'cause when I get off work at 3:30, he gettin' ready to go to work," she says.

Despite her busy schedule, Kathy looks forward to finding another place to work in addition to her job as a janitor. Like she says, "A girl gotta do what a girl gotta do."

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