

## FROM THE CHAIR

The fall 2008 semester has been one of many comings and goings. Troy Brachey, a graduate of our master's degree program, joined the faculty this fall as a tenure-track instructor. Kenny Palmer and Shelly Forgey joined the department as instructors on one-year appointments. Kenny comes to us from Western Kentucky University. Shelly is a former member of the department who will serve as a replacement for Amy Chambers as Amy enjoys a leave of absence this academic year after the birth of her son.

We welcomed many students to the department. Eric Morgan, Leslie Moore, Russell Neely, Natalie Nicolay, and Lacey Beshearse are freshmen math majors, while Rachel Martin and Forrest Garwood have transferred into the undergraduate program from nearby schools. Lily Li, Stephenie Brown, Quinton Westrich, and Mark Van Buren enrolled as graduate students this fall. We also have a visiting graduate student, Andrea Colombi, from the Industrial Engineering program at Università degli Studi di Brescia. Andrea is visiting the department from November until February to learn about Hierarchical Matrices from Sabine Le Borne.

We anticipate at least 10 graduates from our undergraduate program during the 2008–09 academic year. This is the largest number of graduates since the 1976 academic year! Congratulations to our August graduate—Mark Van Buren, and to our anticipated December graduates—David Foster, Kyle Guillot, Aaron Hogancamp, Scott Young, Philip Maxwell.

I hope you enjoy this issue of Radical Times. It features an interesting interview with Mamie Burgess, who served as the department's secretary for over 30 years and witnessed the coming and going of many students and faculty.

## NEW FACULTY

Mr. Troy Brachey received his M.S. degree in Mathematics from TTU in May 2008. He also holds B.S. degrees in Industrial Technology, History, and Mathematics. Troy has previously taught engineering and developmental math courses at Volunteer State Community College in Gallatin, TN. The majority of his time away from work is spent with his wife, Sheela, and daughter Evelyn. In his spare time Troy enjoys sailing, golf, reading, and gaming.



Ms. Shelly Forgey is returning to the Math Department after a "retirement" in 2006 to finish home schooling her children.

She received a B.S. in Physics from TTU in 1984 and an M.S. in Mathematics in 1987. She previously taught in the TTU math department from 1989 to 1996 and from 2002 to 2006. Shelly and her husband, Steve, have three children, Stephanie, Amy, and Joshua. Stephanie is now married to Joseph Doster, and they are expecting their first child any day now! Amy is currently a math major at TTU, and Josh works in construction. Shelly has been active in worship music and theater in Cookeville for many years and has also served as a counselor at the Crisis Pregnancy Center. She is happy to be teaching again as part of the Math Department family.



Mr. Kenny Palmer is originally from Macon County, Tennessee. He received his B.A. and M.S. degrees in Mathematics from Western Kentucky University, and also received a M.S. in Aeronautics and Astronautics from Purdue University, where he was part of a research team which created, built, fired, and occasionally blew up small rocket engines. He spent a year working as a propulsion research engineer for Swift Enterprises, Ltd of West Lafayette, Indiana before returning to academia. Since then, he has taught at a variety of universities and community colleges before coming to Tennessee Tech.



## INTERVIEW OF MAMIE BURGESS, I

conducted by Richard Savage, Fall 2008

*Mamie Burgess was secretary in the Mathematics Department for over 30 years, beginning in 1966 and retiring in 2000. She also worked in the department on a temporary basis three times after that. She is a wealth of knowledge of the department and its people. Professor Richard Savage interviewed her for Radical Times. He obtained so much material that the interview is presented in two parts, the first part in this issue, and the second part in the spring issue.*

**R. Savage** Today I'm interviewing Mamie Burgess, longtime secretary of the Mathematics Department.

**M. Burgess** I was the first full-time secretary. There was a half-time person before me, but I don't know how long she had worked. We were on the third floor of Derryberry Hall. I

started working February 14 of 1966 and I just worked half-time. I worked in the mornings and then in the afternoon I went across campus and worked in one of the education departments. They would bring me mimeograph sheets and I would run their tests for them. Then the first of July, a new budget year, I started full-time.

**R.S.** So at the first you had to do part-time in math because they didn't have enough work or they just didn't have enough money?

**M.B.** I don't know what the reason was, but it was just a half-time position at the time I started. I was the first full-time secretary and the only one for many years. Except for one year when they hired a second secretary during the time when math and computer science were together, I did everything by myself as far as clerical work was concerned in the department until 1988. Lynn (Lovell) worked in 1988 and then Vickie (Mayberry) came in 1989.

**R.S.** That's over 20 years that you were the only secretary.

**M.B.** Yes, and most of the time we were math and computer science. Even with just the math faculty we were the second largest faculty on campus. English had the largest faculty, and we were second. When we were math and computer science we had always had like had 30 something in the department. Yes, the reason we got the second secretary was because of the extra work involved because of the larger faculty and the dual discipline. And Vickie has just been an absolute jewel, absolute jewel from the day she started. She was just so pleasant, easy to work with, so eager to learn. I've really admired her work. She's always been, she wants to do it right, do it on or before time. She's just very good. Obviously from the award that she's gotten again this year. I did a good job, didn't I?

**R.S.** You did very well, that you did. How big was the department when you started?

**M.B.** I never remember having fewer than 20 faculty. We have had as many as 24 and 25 mat faculty back in the days when we didn't have nearly the student body that you've got now. In fact, it was only after Rafal (Ablamowicz) took over as chair that we had fewer than 20 faculty. In fact, if my memory serves me correctly 21 is the smallest number that I every recall in all that time. I started working February of '66 and I worked through December '67. We moved into Bruner Hall January 1 of 1967. I moved to Nicaragua in December of '67 and lived down there for a year and a half; I came back to work in June '69, I took a 10 month leave of absence for the 80-81 school year, and I retired the end of January 2000. All together I worked 31 years two months and then worked close to another year in a temporary status in the last few years.

**R.S.** Yes, you've been back with us.

**M.B.** Yes, at least three different times.

**R.S.** When you started, what were things like? I guess it was quite a bit different than today.

**M.B.** As I said, we were on the third floor of Derryberry Hall. My entire office equipment consisted of an electric typewriter, a pencil eraser, a mimeograph machine, and a ditto machine. That was it. No liquid paper, no correction tape, none of

this. It was just the old pencil eraser, that's it. We moved to Bruner Hall in January of '67. This was the end of the campus. Clement Hall was here, but this was the end. The agriculture farm was across the street from the corner where the library is now, and the Ag students would walk the cows down the sidewalk to a pasture somewhere during the day and they would bring them back at night. Yes, things were very different. I ordered all the original furniture for this building, a lot of which is still in use. The file cabinets, the bookcases, the clothes tree, coat rack, most of the desks, the classroom desks, and the student desks. I ordered all that.

**R.S.** Tell me about the chairmen you worked for.

**M.B.** There were six of them. Dr. Ralph Boles was the first.

**R.S.** I remember him.

**M.B.** I worked for him for 13 years. He was a retired Lieutenant Colonel from the army, but he didn't run the office like a military person. He was very calm, very laid back. Very pleasant individual. He was forced to retire in 1978 because of his age. He did not want to retire, but at that time chairs did not serve past age 65. He could have taught, but could not serve as chair after that time. He decided to leave and was very unhappy about having to retire.

**R.S.** I see.

**M.B.** Jake Beard was next. He was only here two years. I only worked for him for one year. The 10 month leave of absence that I took was during his second year. Then we had Ed Dixon for two years and Leland Long for two years, and it was during the time that Dr. Long was chair that the Computer Science Department came into being. Alice Mason was chair for 12 years and I worked for Rafal from September of 1998 through January of 2000 so I just worked for him a little over a year.

**R.S.** With these various chairmen was the way the department ran ... did that vary quite a bit?

**M.B.** It varied a lot.

**R.S.** Tell us about that.

**M.B.** Dr. Boles was very calm and laid back. Dr. Beard ran a very tight ship. He wanted to know everything that was done, and to have total control of every facet. Dr. Dixon, Dr. Long, and Alice were very easy to work for. Jake was the only one of those up to Rafal that was so meticulous in his care of the department. I was so blessed to have good chairs to work with all those years. Rafal came in 1998. He was not quite as strict as Jake was but he definitely ran a tighter ship than Alice did. He was new not only to the school but to the area. He came from Pennsylvania—things were different there. He had more control than Alice had. She had been very loose. Even with that, this is not a negative thing; he came in wanting to know everything all at once. After he got settled in he eased off somewhat. I liked Rafal really well. I worked with him well. He was definitely student oriented. He was very, very favorable to students and worked with them any way he could. I really respected him for that—still do. He really had the good of the department in mind.

**R.S.** You've seen several chairmen then.

**M.B.** And lots of faculty.

**R.S.** Well, I guess we could talk about some of the faculty members that you've known over the years.

**M.B.** From the ones that were here when I started, many of them were here for years and years afterward. And it's only been in the last ten or twelve years that the faculty has radically changed as far as faces.

**R.S.** Yes, my Dad (Richard Savage, Sr.) has come to parties and so forth and says he doesn't know very many at all.

**M.B.** No. I was trying to list the people that were here when I came and I could name a lot of them

**R.S.** That would be interesting.

**M.B.** In 1966 there was Dr. Boles of course. Dr. Moorman was still here. He had had a stroke and was no longer chair, but he was still teaching. Dorothy and Cecil Phipps, Ed Dixon, Ron Sircy, Reggie Mazeris, Jim Doran, Bill Badgley, John Owen, Jerry Powell, Evelyn Brown.

**R.S.** My dad would have been here then.

**M.B.** Yes, Richard Savage Sr. September of '66, before we moved to Bruner Hall, is when Steve Khleif, S.A. Patil, Khyson Swong, Herbert Willcox, and Roger Lessman came. Dr. and Ms. Phipps retired not too long after the move over here. That left Evelyn Brown and Barbara Briggs as the only females on the faculty for many years. I guess Madhu Gandhi was probably the next female on the faculty. Of course, Ron, Ed, Reggie, Evelyn, Barbara, and Richard all stayed until retirement. We didn't have a big faculty turnover at all, with that core faculty and the few new people that came and went over the years it was still basically like working with a family. I feel so blessed to have been in this department. I really do because there was never confusion, fussing, bickering, fighting; everybody seemed to get along well. I'm speaking basically up to the last 10 or 12 years because I'm not in on it now. Richard, I remember you when you were an undergraduate, when you were a child. And that makes me feel kind of old.

**R.S.** I sort of grew up in the department. You were telling me about Ron Sircy.

**M.B.** Of course, you know his nickname was No Mercy Sircy. Ron was a good teacher, but he was very exacting and he had very high expectations, the same as Claude McHenry. They both had bad reputations, bad in the sense that students didn't want to take them because they were hard. Well, they were hard because they wanted the students to learn. It wasn't being mean or a personality thing. They just had very high expectations for students and they wanted their students to learn. I think Ron's students were in two categories. They couldn't stand him or they loved him. I've had students come back years later and say "I didn't like him when I had him, but I really appreciated him after I got out and started working, because he made me learn what I needed to know to do my work."

**R.S.** I had Jim Doran my first course. It was a geometry course at the 400 level. I enjoyed it. I thought he did well.

**M.B.** Jim was another one who had high expectations for his students and I really never knew why students disliked him as much as they did. Before Claude came, it was Ron and Jim and Bill Badgley that were the nemeses of the department. Evelyn (Brown) was always one of the most popular teachers

we ever had - consistently popular with students. She was always, from the time I started until she retired, one of the most favorite teachers in the department.

**R.S.** She seemed to be interested in those students.

**M.B.** She was. It was I think we had some excellent teachers along the way. We've had some really good teachers. Oh, Freeman Ward was another.

**R.S.** Oh yeah. I liked Freeman.

**M.B.** Freeman was another one that did enjoy an excellent reputation. So did Dr. Dixon and for the most part Dr. Mazeris. After Madhu got here she was for years one of the most popular teachers we had. Most people liked Steve Khleif. He was hard, but students liked him.

**R.S.** I had him.

**M.B.** Of course, then Bob and Barbara Briggs came—I was in Nicaragua all of '68 and the first part of '69. I think they came the year before I went to Nicaragua, the late 60's or early 70's. They were both very popular teachers too. Bob taught part-time even after he became Associate Dean. He taught for a couple of years—it might have been two or three years - part-time after he became Associate Dean and then he just quit altogether. Jerry Powell left probably the year after we moved over here. He didn't stay long.

**R.S.** I had him though. I had him for Calculus II. He was going to run the class mostly for engineers. He told me since he was doing that, I didn't need to come to class. He'd just give me this book and have me come talk to him once a week. And when we had the final exam I would come in for that. Whatever I made on the final would be my grade.

**M.B.** Wow! Did that work for you?

**R.S.** It worked all right. It put a little pressure on the final though. I remember Bill Badgley, and sometimes you could hear him way down the hall.

**M.B.** He had a habit of yelling and sometimes he'd get up and stand up on top of the desk and yell. I remember one time he had a summer class in Room 211, which was just around the corner from the office. The classroom door was closed, my office door was closed, and I heard yelling. It just went on and on. I went out in the hall, I went to the classroom door, and looked in the window. He was just standing there yelling at his students and they were not the least bit upset. People came down from the third floor and up from the first floor to see what was going on. That's how loud he was. That's probably the biggest tale I can think of on any faculty member.

**R.S.** He was still here teaching after I came, I guess as a retired faculty. I heard him yell down the hall.

**M.B.** I don't know why. I don't think he was angry. Sometimes he would be irritated, but I think sometimes he was just trying to get their attention.

**R.S.** I guess he did.

**M.B.** I really don't have any outstanding tales on anybody. As I said before, it was just more or less one big happy family for many, many years until people started retiring and new faculty started coming in. That's not to say anything negative about the newer faculty, it was just different. It just didn't have

that old camaraderie that we had had before. Of course, with a younger faculty, you have newer ideas and more recent college training and, it was just different from then on. The face of the department began to change at that point. Of course, when Brian O'Connor came then that was a new era in the department. He's a trivia person and he's always so interesting. Brian is an intellectual giant and he was always coming in and starting my day with a joke or a trivia fact. I learned a lot from Brian with his trivia. He's just such an interesting person. Such a pleasant individual. Another thing: at the time I started there were no international faculty members. Dr. Patil, Dr. Swong and Dr. Khleif were our first international faculty. Then in subsequent years we had

people from many parts of the world. I think I grew as an individual by knowing all these different not only the different personalities within the older faculty, but when the newer people started coming in I grew personally from learning customs and just branching out. My area of expertise grew with knowing these people from different ethnic backgrounds and different cultures.

**R.S.** That's an interesting change in the department. We don't really think much of it today because for years we've had people from all backgrounds.

**M.B.** For years afterward, they were still the only ethnic group for quite some time after they came.

**R.S.** I had all of those as a student.

*to be continued ...*

## CONGRATULATIONS!

*Peter Woerner*, a junior mathematics major and member of the TTU Cross Country team, was named the *Wendy's Scholar Athlete* of the Game at the December 1<sup>st</sup> men's basketball game. Peter received a plaque from Athletic Director Mark Wilson and Associate Athletic Director Dr. Lance Jasitt at half court and was introduced to the crowd.

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## MATH CLUB NEWS

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The first Math Club meeting this semester the math club elected new officers, Jere Bowen (President), Eric Morgan (Vice President), Ryan Gregg (Secretary), and Lacey Beshearse (Treasurer). The first event we planned was our annual fall picnic and despite the rain we ended up having around 15 people. Later in the semester I got an email from Lee University's Math Club that had just started back this semester. They wanted to come visit Tech and our Math

club to find out what we have here at Tech and what kind of things our Math Club does. After they showed up we had pizza answered most of there questions and showed them around campus. After being President of the Math club this semester I found out that it is harder to plan for meetings and other events than it looks. Even so, we had a good semester and I can't wait to see what happens next semester.

**Jere Bowen, President, TTU Math Club**