

Powell’s life, stories are indelibly woven into the fabric of UAB

Pam Powell has earned the right to tell stories about UAB. After all, the longtime editor of *UAB Magazine* has been on campus longer than the university itself.

“I first appeared at UAB in 1948, in the newborn unit of University Hospital,” she says. But technically that’s not true; the university was still an extension center then. By the time she became a junior writer in the Office of Public Affairs in 1971, UAB had been an independent campus for only two years. Other than a short hiatus in the 1970s, Powell has been at UAB ever since, explaining its research, promoting its programs and revealing its people.

Now, after thousands of stories, hundreds of publications and dozens of awards, Powell is retiring June 30. Her final UAB chapter features an appropriate ending: She has been named June’s UAB Employee of the Month.

A great communicator

“She has communicated the UAB story in captivating ways... and in doing so has contributed greatly to the growth of UAB’s reputation,” said Julius Linn Jr., former director of UAB Health System medical publications, in a letter supporting her nomination. “Had she not shed light on many of these stories, they would not have been known or appreciated beyond those immediately involved.”

The university “has benefitted immensely from her loyalty and the manner in which she has presented its faculty and other activities to the world,” adds Kenneth Roozen, former Graduate School dean and provost. He says Powell was “undoubtedly one of the best hires I ever made.” For **Max Michael**, M.D., dean of the School of Public Health, she simply represents “the best of UAB.”

That description would please Powell, whose career ultimately has been a labor of love for UAB. “I grew up in Birmingham during the days of smokestacks and Civil Rights struggles — not the best time in the city’s history,” she says. “UAB has redefined my hometown, and working here I’ve been able to promote the things I really believe in—education, health care and research — and tell the stories of fascinating people doing innovative things.”

Publications powerhouse

Powell is an innovator. She founded the UAB Periodicals Group in the early 1990s, eventually producing magazines, newsletters and multimedia periodicals for all of UAB’s schools, plus numerous centers and other entities, in addition to

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UAB Magazine.

“I don’t know of another department exactly like it in the country, and I certainly don’t know of another person who could have provided the leadership to pull this off,” says Mike Ellis, former associate vice president for Public Relations and Marketing. He calls Powell a “superstar.” And, he adds, “You’ll never meet or have a chance to work with a better superperson. UAB is a better place for her service.”

Powell’s publications specialize in fascinating, multi-layered features spotlighting UAB’s expertise in everything from AIDS research and eating disorders to the elusive quality of happiness. They regularly win national awards for writing, photography and design and have directly inspired several major donations to UAB.

A respected writer

As a writer, Powell specialized in inspiration herself. She spent hours interviewing some of UAB’s most recognizable characters — including John Kirklin, **Louis Dale**, Ph.D., and Ada Long — to uncover the people behind the personalities. “I learned so much from interviewing them,” Powell says.

The feeling was mutual. “I found that I was reading it as if it were about someone other than myself,” wrote Kirklin, the subject of a 1992 *UAB Magazine* cover story, in a letter to Powell in 1992. “I even looked ahead to see what was on the next page before I finished the page before. I shall treasure it.”

George Graham, the former chair of Philosophy, recalls Powell’s meticulous preparations for their interview that included auditing his class to gain insight into his teaching methods.

“Pam interviewed me in detail, helped conduct an elaborate photo session, spoke to a number of students and published the piece,” Graham says. “‘Was that me?’ I asked myself. It was, of course, but it was also Pam.”

A positive influence

In the words of **Erin Tapp**, director of Marketing Communications, “Pam has been the muse who so eloquently told the UAB story.”



STEVE WOOD

Pam Powell has told thousands of stories in hundreds of UAB publications throughout the past 30 years, explaining the university’s research efforts, promoting its programs and revealing its people. Powell, the director of UAB Publications & Periodicals, is retiring June 30 and is being honored as June’s Employee of the Month.

But Powell, in UAB’s great tradition, prefers the joys of collaboration to individual achievement. “What I love most is the creative process — working with others to develop ideas and concepts and then figuring out all of the necessary pieces and how to weave them together to bring the ideas to life,” she says.

“She has a great deal of humility, despite the fact she has amazing talent,” observes Tennant McWilliams, former dean of Social & Behavioral Sciences. “She’s able to bring out the best in people.”

This aspect of Powell’s work impresses her colleagues the most. “Pam has a wonderful creative vision,” says **Ron Gamble**, *UAB Magazine*’s art director, who has worked with Powell for more than 15 years.

“Her influence has made me a better designer.”

“A writer’s best friend is a good editor, and

an editor’s best friend is an even better editor,” adds **Jo Lynn Orr**, a Periodicals Group editor. “In Pam, I was very fortunate to have both.”

A beginning at the end

Powell may be retiring, but she doesn’t intend to stop telling stories. “I’m going to start a small business to capture the life stories of people whose voices and faces would otherwise be lost, such as aging parents,” she says. “It combines so many things I love — interviewing, writing, editing, photography, and videography. And I’ll be spending time with people, learning and telling their stories.

“Everyone has a story, and I want to capture as many as I can.”

If you know someone who should be Employee of the Month, e-mail letters of recommendation to Jason Turner at jturn1@uab.edu.

PORTFOLIO

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portfolio.

“A portfolio really gives you an opportunity to reflect on your teaching practices, challenges and successes,” Peel says.

It also provides faculty a vehicle to organize their materials effectively so they can adequately present themselves and their accomplishments as they pursue promotion and tenure.

“It certainly helps from the reviewer perspective when you have a well put-together section that demonstrates that you are an effective teacher and that you can reflect on what you’re doing and make adjustments as needed to show growth

and development,” Peel says.

Benefits more faculty

Portfolio workshops have been offered each of the past few years by Faculty Development. UAB has invited experts in years past to demonstrate how to construct portfolios.

That training has enabled UAB faculty to assume the management of this summer’s program. **Julia Austin**, Ph.D., director of Education Services for the Graduate School, and Abney are facilitators for the program.

“Peter Seldin, a national expert on teaching portfolios, came in for a couple of years, and we worked with Peter to train

our own folks to carry on this program,” Peel says. “One of the missions of our office is to help faculty grow as teachers, researchers and leaders. This is a nice model, and it benefits more faculty by training and developing our own folks to be mentors.

“We’re fortunate that even in these tight budgetary times we’ve really maximized our budget by using our local talent like Julia and Nancy to provide outstanding programming,” she says.

Faculty who participate will have the opportunity to learn from others who have compiled their portfolios. Each participant is assigned a mentor who can give

them one-on-one feedback and guidance.

“There is a commitment that faculty participating in the workshop have to make because there is work involved,” Austin says. “But it’s good work. They produce something that sets a foundation for continuing their growth as a teacher.”

The Teaching Portfolio Workshop may be offered again in the future, depending on the need for it.

Faculty members always are encouraged to provide feedback and ideas for educational programming. Visit www.uab.edu/facultydevelopment to learn more.