Six Service Awards honorees mark 50 years

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More than 1,000 faculty and staff members marked milestone service anniversaries this year, including six employees who have been at the University for 50 years, the highest number of golden anniversary recipients in one year on record.

In lieu of making remarks at the Service Awards ceremony that is usually held in the spring, which was canceled this year due to COVID-19, President Robert C. Robbins expressed his congratulations in a video.

"It is my great hope and intent that we will continue to make the kind of impact on the University community, our state and the world that motivates many more of you to stay on through your golden anniversary," Robbins says in the video, which is posted on the Division of Human Resources website.

The annual awards recognize employees who have worked at the University for 10, 20, 25, 30, 35, 40, 45 and 50 years. (See the names of all the honorees in this PDF).

Among this year's 1,067 honorees are 312 employees marking 10 years and 113 employees marking 25 years.

Among the 50-year service award honorees is George Rieke, Regents Professor of astronomy and planetary sciences, who says he was hired in 1970 through a "rather strange accident" involving the late Frank Low, Regents Professor emeritus.

"I went down to talk to Frank one day, and he was having a furious argument with somebody over the telephone," Rieke recalled.

He quickly realized Low was speaking to someone Rieke was planning to work for as a postdoc at Goddard Space Flight Center.

"After the argument died down, I said, 'It's a funny coincidence that I'm probably going to be working for that guy in six months.' Then Frank said, 'Oh. You want a job?''

Rieke says he has valued watching the University take a leading position in astronomy throughout his career. He has been no small part of that growth. Rieke currently serves as NASA's science team lead for the James Webb Space Telescope's Mid-Infrared Instrument.

The University, he says, provides a culture that will allow the next generation of scientists to build on that momentum.

"We've had good leadership and an atmosphere where everyone is encouraged to be an entrepreneur," Rieke said. "You can basically create your own opportunities if you are skillful
enough, aggressive enough, determined enough and lucky enough."

His wife, Marcia Rieke [6], Regents Professor of astronomy, has also made the University a long-term home. She marks 45 years of service this year.

Madelyn Mock, coordinator of federal excess property in the Office of the Vice President of Agriculture, Life and Veterinary Sciences, and Cooperative Extension [7], began her University career in 1970 working at the key desk in the Physical Resources office, now Facilities Management. That office is where she formed one of the most vivid memories of her 50-year career.

"When I was in facilities and was secretary to the director, I was working one day, and a crew was working above us in the rafters on the HVAC system," Mock said. "All of a sudden, one of the workers fell through the tiles and crashed onto my desk! Luckily, he wasn't hurt, but that created quite the commotion."

One of the major reasons for her longevity at the University has been the opportunity for her to continue her education, she says. Tuition benefits have helped Mock earn her bachelor's and master's degrees.

Her advice to those early in their University career: Be a lifelong learner.

"Take advantage of training that is offered through HR and your department, whether that's taking classes or going to conferences, to make yourself a more competent professional," Mock said. "Learn everything you can on the job. If you work hard and progress in your own knowledge, you always have the opportunity to advance at the University."

The other employees marking 50 years of service are Roger Dahood, professor of English, Victor Jimenez, 4-H youth development agent at Cooperative Extension's [8] Pinal County Office, Rodger Thompson, professor of astronomy, and Marlys Witte, professor of surgery.

The full list of recipients and the video message [1] from Robbins can be found on the Human Resources website.