

Penny Parsons

CUSTOMER CLOSEUP

When Penny Parsons was in high school, she had what teenagers seldom have—a clear-cut vision of what she wanted to do in life and a plan for achieving it. What she wanted was to work at a college in her community and what she did was get a job at Amherst College before graduation, thus avoiding competition from post-graduation job seekers. Almost 31 years later, Penny is still enthusiastic about her career choice and clearly loves working at Amherst. It is not surprising that she feels this way. Amherst, one of the premier liberal arts colleges in the country, has a small student body, allowing Penny to know many students by name.

Penny began her career in the accounts payable department and later was promoted to the position of student accounts bookkeeper. In 1986, just as the school was converting from an in-house system to our company's system, Penny was promoted to the position of Student Loan Administrator. Administrators at the school had decided that it was too difficult to keep up with ever changing federal regulations, so they decided to outsource student loan billing activities. "I joined the student loan office just before the conversion started and I needed a lot of help during the process. Kathy Jo Roberts was our contact for conversions and my true salvation." When informed that Kathy Jo was still handling conversions, Penny remarked, "She was so knowledgeable then, I can't imagine what she is like 20 years later!"

Penny's job duties now include administering the Perkins and Institutional loan programs from disbursement through collections, as well as overseeing their monthly tuition payment plan.

She also supervises three staff members who work with general and student accounts receivable and other organizational accounts. After 20 years in the student loan office, she is the Comptroller's Office resident student loan expert, but still knows she can call on Campus Partners whenever she needs help. She has many words of praise for her current Customer Service Representative, Debbie Fallin, and other Campus Partners staff members. "These days I usually e-mail my questions to Debbie, and I know she will help with the simplest to the most complicated requests. Over the years, my representatives have been the lifeline of my position."

She was also pleased to read in last month's *Update* newsletter that Paula Hall had received the Anne-Marie Miller Service Excellence Award. Paula was Penny's representative for many years, and the two developed a close relationship over the phone. "I adore her," Penny simply stated. They both have sons about the same age, which deepened their bond. In fact, Penny still has pictures of Paula's children on her wall at work. Penny also is very impressed with LaShonda Hairston, her Account Manager of over 5 years. "She's my Johnny-on-the-Spot and is always ready to help," Penny stated. "Because she has been my Account Manager for so long, she knows my needs and issues."

Over the years, Penny has progressed in her career, and has moved from the background to the forefront of the action. Because she is very much a people person, she enjoys working with student borrowers and their parents. She also finds it very rewarding to answer their questions. "When they are new to the school, they have questions about their loans,

deferments and cancellations, and payment plans, and I enjoy being able to provide them with answers on a one-to-one, person-by-person basis," she related in our interview. "Students have told me how impressed they are when I ask them for their name instead of their number. It just makes it more personal," she continued.

Penny is a native of western Massachusetts and now lives in Williamsburg, Massachusetts with her husband, two teenage sons, Josh and Jared, and their 12-year old German shepherd. She is the only female in an otherwise all-male household (the dog is also a male), but she schedules a "girls night out" trip to the movies each week to get away from the boys for a couple of hours.

She also enjoys gardening, but most of her free time centers on her sons' activities. They play many sports, including baseball, golf, and basketball, and she has been taking them from practice to practice and from game to game for years. She is not complaining, though. She thought she would be relieved when her older son started driving, but instead misses the time in the car spent interacting with him. She still shares many activities with her sons, and they have gotten her started watching reality TV shows with them. The whole family, of course, are big Red Sox's fans, and they still cherish the memory of their World Series championship in 2004. With fans as nice as Penny, they couldn't help but overcome the curse of the bambino.

So here's to Penny...Congratulations on your upcoming thirty-first anniversary at Amherst in May!