

January, 2003

Making a Difference: Linda Barton and the Importance of Mentoring by James Burger



Photo: Joseph Mehling '69

A slight grin appears first. Then, slowly, a dynamic smile begins to effervesce. Soon, I'm speaking with someone who's downright beaming, as she relates an episode that happened to her over 30 years ago: "You're the worst secretary I've ever had," she recalls Walter Wright affectionately telling her. In an office filled with autographed photos of politicians, civil rights activists, and artists, it's clear that the occupant's unbounded energy is matched only by her determination. She's obviously inspired by challenges.

Education has always been a part of Linda Barton's life. She grew up in rural LaFargeville, New York, where her dad, Romain "Spide" Barton, was on the Board of Education, and her mother, Camilla ("Cammy"), was an active member of the PTA.

Originally hired at Dartmouth in 1971 for a two-year assignment as a personnel clerk for Walter Wright, who oversaw the Library System's Special Collections, Linda and her family then moved briefly to Boston. But she would soon have the opportunity to work with three women who were to have a substantial impact on her career. Each was to become a mentor and a role model for her.

Returning to the Upper Valley in 1974, Linda was offered a job by Adelaide Lockhart, Director of Library Services, as her assistant. It wasn't long before she became responsible for managing the Library System's budgets and personnel matters. "Ms. Lockhart was one of the most outstanding women I've ever had the opportunity to work with. Her integrity and professionalism have profoundly affected my life and career. She opened many doors on my behalf and inspired me to provide opportunities for others."

In 1979, Linda became the Executive Officer for Development and Alumni Affairs. There, she met Lucretia "Lu" Martin, then a director in Development and one of only two women in a management role in the department. She would have a meaningful influence on Linda's career. "As a respected leader in fundraising, Lu exemplified the importance of being an expert and knowing one's field," Linda recalls.

"Linda worked hard to bring women and minority group members into Development and Alumni Affairs," says Lu. "Women were very supported by her. She went out of her way to make sure that they were treated fairly in the hiring process."

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Her dedication to diversity led to her involvement in the recruitment of minority candidates. On that score, Linda fondly recalls the leadership of Errol Hill, John D. Willard Professor of Drama and Oratory, Emeritus, when she worked with him and others to broaden the College's recruitment program and to encourage a strong commitment to affirmative action. Nels Armstrong, Director of Alumni Relations, whose return to Dartmouth Linda helped facilitate in 1987, speaks highly of her. "Lots of people talk about diversity, but Linda *does* it. She is sincere with everyone and is a strong contributor to the community," he says, proceeding to describe a very memorable evening: At one of his recent dinner get-togethers, Nels noticed that virtually every one of the dozen or so people present had been recruited, hired, or helped by Linda. Movingly, he raised a toast to her, acknowledging Linda's prominent role in attracting minorities to Dartmouth and in "contributing to the dynamism and diversity at the College."

In August of 2000, Christine Chevalier, Associate Vice President for Human Resources, offered Linda a position as Director of Employment. As a believer in the concept of transferable skills, she saw in Linda an experienced individual who combined openness to change with a strong understanding of the Dartmouth culture. As Linda puts it, "Christine offered me the biggest opportunity of my career. Her powerful yet nurturing style has inspired me as a professional and as a human being."

A contributor to the book *Attracting and Retaining Good Staff* and a member of the International Who's Who of Professionals, Linda Barton retired from Dartmouth College on December 31, 2002, and the next phase of her life's experience has begun. She will have more time to spend with her sons, Sandy, Shane, and Scott MacDonald, their families, and her close friends. And she'll enjoy tennis, kayaking, and playing the piano, to name but a few of her many interests. Her longtime friend, Barbara Gerstner, Executive Director of the Montgomery Endowment and Assistant Provost, observed that "it has been such fun to watch Linda's conversion from hard-working, dedicated employee to a hard-playing, exuberant retiree. She has approached retirement with the same vigor and enthusiasm as she did her job. Look out, world!"

"By the way," I ask Linda, "how *were* your secretarial skills?" She puts her hand to her chin, looks me in the eye, and says, "If I had not left to move to Boston, I'm certain I would have been transferred, shall we say!" She laughs and muses, "Strange how things work out sometimes, huh?"