

Narrative: Kristen Jones, Housekeeper Supervisor, Virginia Tech

Blacksburg, Virginia

Interviewers: Lauren Kennedy, Katie Herber

10/13/2010

I've been working as the housekeeping supervisor at Virginia Tech for about five and a half years now. When I was younger I wanted to be a vet, but that didn't end up working out, so later on I found out I really like to drive trucks and run equipment and things like that, so I decided to go get my CDL [commercial driver's license] and eventually I started working for VDOT. After a while I decided I needed to do something different and started putting applications at different places, and found the housekeeping job at VT online and applied. Right now I have seven buildings and nine employees. I'm responsible for public areas, restrooms, offices, classrooms. Then we take care of any extra needs that the university might have, like commencements and different open houses and ceremonies that happen throughout the year. On a typical day we start working at 5 a.m. on the first priority, which is the classrooms and restrooms. Then we move on to our public areas, hallways, steps, and then we go on to take care of trash and cleaning offices and conference rooms and such.

But the hardest part about this job lately has been figuring out how to deal with the budget cuts and employee shortages. If I could change anything it would be to be able to hire all of the employees that we need so we can take care of everything. We started off several years ago having 168 or 169 employees, then the budgets were cut. They froze our hiring. Now we're down to like 103 people. This side of campus has the largest classroom facilities and it's just really hard to take the number of people we have and take care of everything we need to accomplish. So up until recently I've been covering the same amount of work with 100 people as I was with 170 people. We went to what we call frequency. So where we used to go through an entire building, pull every trash can in every office and everything, now we only do that on certain days. We have community areas that are done daily now, and the people in the offices can bring their things and put them in the ones that are to be removed that day.

Even though things have been harder since the budget cuts, one thing I really enjoy about my job is interacting with the Tech students. Most students I've encountered over the years have been really cool. They're very talkative, they're open, they're friendly. They're very polite, surprisingly. I deal with the Cadets a lot and they're just so polite. I've actually had people come by and offer to help me with whatever I'm doing.

One of my most memorable encounters with a student was when one of my custodians called me over to McBryde Hall around 5 a.m. because a fellow was acting really weird. When I actually got up to the floor he was on, he was urinating in a trash can. [Laughs] He was a tad bit inebriated. He wasn't quite in the dorm he thought he was.

I feel like I am a part of the university community for the most part. I say for the most part because some people have generalized opinions about housekeeping. The word "housekeeper" or "custodian" just has that effect when someone hears it. Once everyone gets to know how we are and interact with us and stuff like that then we are generally accepted.

As a supervisor, one of my biggest fears for my employees is their safety. I kind of mother 'em some because I have three children of my own and five step children. I'm constantly checking up on my employees and pitching in to help them out. I have a lot of female employees that work in buildings like McBryde that are open 24/7. I worry about them working by themselves really early in the morning so sometimes I try to pair 'em up with somebody else or make sure I'm with them while they're doing their jobs. Luckily, I've never had any real safety issues with my employees so it's been a pretty good five and a half years so far.

I mentioned before that I have 8 children and stepchildren. Obviously family is really important to me. My husband and I have been together for 10 years and he used to work at Virginia Tech's rock quarry. My three children are all still in school so it's important for me to have a job that doesn't interfere with my family life. My shift ends at one in the afternoon so I'm able to be home with my family in the evenings and go to sporting events with my kids. We have leave set aside for us so if they have programs or field trips or something like that, I can leave work to participate at the school functions without it interfering with my job. My benefits are pretty good, too.

The best thing about my job is the different people that I get to meet. It's such a diverse crowd, all the different backgrounds that each person has is really interesting. One of my favorite memories while working here was the convocation after everything that happened on April 16th. We were on campus taking care of everybody's needs and I actually got to meet the governor [Tim Kaine] and the president [President George W. Bush]. I just thought that was wonderful.

I really like my job so I see myself still working here in the next 5-10 years, hopefully moving up to a higher position as an area manager or something like that. I think President Steger is doing a great job. We have a beautiful campus that is well-perceived, and it's such a

great group of people that work here. The only thing that would cause me to leave Virginia Tech would be a better position that offered more money and better benefits, which would be pretty hard to find.

To read the complete conversation, please see the transcript.