

Remembering Joan Sweeney, Beloved UW Employee of over 40 years By Will Hoverman

To Joan Sweeney, work study jobs meant a lot more than just a paycheck.

She helped pay for her own education at UW-Madison as a student employee in the Work Study office. And she stayed in the office for more than 40 years, touching generations of students with her advocacy, advice and good humor.

“Joan was passionate and charismatic. She cared deeply about helping students, particularly first generation students and ones from socioeconomically disadvantaged backgrounds,” says Cori Splain, who herself was hired by Joan as a student and now works full-time as business analyst in the Office of Student Financial Aid. “She utilized her commanding presence to advocate for such students on campus whenever possible.”

Sweeney, who retired as the university’s Work Study Coordinator in December, passed away on Sept. 21. She was 59.

She began working full time for the university in 1978. Her primary job duty was to run the off-campus Work Study Program, which coordinates the employment of more than 300 students each year at non-profit organizations in Madison. In addition, she mentored many students, receiving accolades from the Center for Educational Opportunity and the POSSE Program for her impact on students.

Sweeney always had an open-door policy for students looking for advice on work, life and anything in between, Splain says. Through the Office of Student Financial Aid, Joan helped students find employment across campus.

“In the age of email, she believed being able to make a personal connection with a possible employer by delivering your resume in-person could set you apart from the rest. Not only did Joan give this advice to students looking for jobs, she abided by its wisdom,” Splain says.

Beyond being a champion for students, Joan also had a deep love for Rottweilers, she was fostering 30 of them when she passed. She directed the Wisconsin Rottweiler Rescue for more than 25 years.