

Anaconda Job Corps names building after long-time employee

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Rosemarie Thomas, seated at her desk in the administration building soon to be named after her, is retiring from Anaconda Job Corps Civilian Conservation Center after more than 45 years of service. Anaconda Job Corps is declaring next Wednesday "Rosemarie Thomas Day" and dedicating the building in honor of the long-time employee. Leader photo by James S. Rosien

When Rosemarie Thomas accepted a 90-day temporary job at Anaconda Job Corps Civilian Conservation Center 45 years ago, she never expected the building she works in to be named after her.

And even now after that temp job had turned into a career she's still surprised, but that's exactly what the Job Corps Center has planned, designating next Wednesday as "Rosemarie Thomas Day" with a lunch in her honor followed by the building dedication.

"It's overwhelming. I would never have expected something like that. Really all I've done is work here. Just to receive something like that is overwhelming," said Thomas, 67, a lifelong Anaconda resident.

"Rose has been an excellent employee for a long time and

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we're very proud of her. I have her signature on some of my paperwork from when I was in my early 20s," said Ray Ryan, Anaconda Job Corps center director, referring to when he first started doing summer teaching at the center, located west of Anaconda in the Beaverhead Deerlodge National Forest.

Thomas has been at Anaconda Job Corps since the doors opened to greet its first students in 1966, starting as a clerk typist and gradually moving up the ladder to Support Services Supervisor. She will retire from her position on Dec. 31, leaving behind a place and a career that had become her home away from home.

"When I was growing up, you just stayed in an area and got your roots planted. It's different now; young people are more mobile now so they can go wherever they want to go," Thomas said.

After more than 45 years at Anaconda Job Corps, Thomas had seen numerous changes, mostly in the makeup of the student body.

"Back when it opened, we were receiving students from the southern and northeastern states. It was a different type of student, a lot of 'streetwise' students. This was part of President Lyndon Johnson's War on Poverty and it was a real advantage for them to come here," Thomas said. "When the regional office changed to Kansas City, we were able to

get students from Montana, Wyoming, Utah, Colorado, North and South Dakota, and some from Idaho, Washington and Oregon, and that works better. It's less of an expense for them to travel, and it's easier to adjust. We get local students now, too."

The biggest change she saw at the center, though, was when it went co-ed in 1982: when it first opened, only men were admitted.

"We emptied one dorm by attrition a year in advance, in order to get the male students out from one of the dorms. And we brought in business education a year in advance as well, which is more of a traditional field of study for women," she said. "We did like getting more women in the non-traditional female trades though, it's good for them and good for businesses to have them at job sites."

Another change came in the form of technology, as when Thomas started everything was done on manual typewriters with carbon paper, all of which was made obsolete with the introduction of computers.

"It was a difficult transition to computer technology, but for the kids it's second nature," she said.

As she now gets ready to leave Job Corps, Thomas said she hopes more students will take advantage of the program.

"The Job Corps program is like a scholarship for these kids, it gives them a second chance. They can go out and get a job

and become taxpayers and pay it back to society," she said.

"Now when it's hard to come by money, where else are you going to get something like this?"

As for her future plans, Thomas said the first thing she'll do is "find the directions to the stove" and learn how to cook, get rid of her wristwatch, and enjoy life around Anaconda with her husband, Jerry Thomas, who also works at Anaconda Job Corps. The couple has one son, Scott.