

comm·unity

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Bob Coleman, The “Will Rogers” of the Communication Department, Retires



by Jilleen Barrett

This semester, the communication department lost one of its original members. Coordinator of media technology and adjunct professor Robert Coleman — better known as Bob — retired September 1.

Bob was one of the few people in a newly instituted communication department at Manhattan College when he was hired by Thom Gencarelli, the founding chair. Bob previously worked at College of Mount Saint Vincent, which had a partnership with Manhattan College so students could study communication before it was offered as a major here.

Gencarelli reported that when he was hired to create a communication department at Manhattan College in 2007 — which then consisted only of him and 57 students — he started looking for an engineer to help build the television studio located on the second floor of Leo Hall. Mary Ann O’Donnell, a former dean of the School of Liberal Arts, introduced him to Bob.

“Bob was not an engineer ... and so [he] did not fully fit the original job description,” Gencarelli said. “But what he did do was provide the department, its faculty, and its students, with all of these other benefits that no one had anticipated ... wherein he made himself indispensable.”

Though he is still teaching one class for the department this semester, Bob’s efforts in the office are already starting to be missed. Not only was he an instructor, he designed posters for the department’s events and even decorated the office for all the holidays.

“I really enjoy using one of my expertise and what I’m good at to help out everybody ... if you ever came in the office around a holiday, there would be Halloween decorations, and I made this stuff,” he said, referring to the decorations. “Around Christmas, we made Christmas decorations and I’d show students how to make snowflakes ... I just love doing that kind of stuff.”

Gencarelli elaborated on Bob’s joy for helping others.

“He is one of the most naturally, if we’re a helping profession, he is one of the most naturally helping-oriented human beings I’ve ever met in my life. He will not only help anyone with anything that they need, whether they asked for it or not, but he will go out of his way to help you.”

Gencarelli also noted that Bob’s departure has to do with the way Manhattan College handled the financial crisis during the pandemic. Bob was furloughed in November 2020 despite the Communication Department’s need for his technical abilities. He was reinstated in July of this year.



“He would still be here if he did not feel that he was completely disrespected by the college for all that he did, in not just the years that he was here in this office suite, but in all of the years when he was technically housed at Mount Saint Vincent but worked with this college too,” Gencarelli said. “And that’s partly because the people who knew him all of those years are all gone. And it’s partly because of the way that the college, its administration decided to solve the problems that the pandemic brought upon us. We are a Lasallian institution, and in the service of others, people need to come first.”

Bob explained how the pandemic was a glimpse at what retired life might be like for him. He says he is excited to go to urban luxuries like theatre and restaurants now that they are open again, but he is also taking advantage of the small farm he has on his property.

“I’ve got chickens and I’ve got goats and I’ve got a garden and I like to cook and I’ve been canning,” he said. “And I like to go to the theater, [my husband and I] like to go to restaurants a bit. I’ve seen three [Broadway] shows already. So, you know, I’m not bored in the slightest, but the funny thing is I feel like I’m busier now than I ever was when I worked.”

In total, Bob spent about 40 years teaching in the Bronx, and he seems to have genuinely enjoyed it.

“You know, I loved my job at the time I worked there. Someone said, ‘If you love your job you never work a day in your life’ and I never worked a day in my life.” ★

