

Woodbridge campus changed with the times...

but the strong sense of camaraderie remains intact

When the Berkeley School of Woodbridge opened in 1982, it provided a stepping stone to good jobs for high school graduates who were not interested in pursuing college degrees.

Berkeley's secretarial students – all girls – became proficient in shorthand, typing, and business English, and were sought after by big companies, including American Home Products and Hess. Fashion was also a strong part of the early curriculum, with graduates seeking positions in purchasing, retail, and display. Many of the Woodbridge students found jobs in prestigious fashion houses in Manhattan.

“The push back then wasn't that all girls had to go to college,” said Professor Frances Calvaruso, an Adjunct Professor in the Information Technology Department who began teaching shorthand and typing at the Woodbridge Campus in 1982. “The Berkeley School of Woodbridge provided an alternative for girls, and was considered a good way to get ahead. Many of the girls got positions as executive secretaries.”

Why open a campus in Woodbridge? When the Berkeley School moved from East Orange to Garret Mountain, it lost most of its enrollments from south of the old location. The Woodbridge Campus was opened to regain that market, as well as in response to alumni and employer demand. Formerly a Bohack Supermarket, the new building had to be completely renovated to accommodate the school. It was considered a good spot for the college because it was in the heart of downtown near the municipal building, chamber of commerce, and the railroad station.

Robert Maher was the first director of the Woodbridge school, and for several years was the only male on campus. Due to a strict dress code, he was also the only one allowed to wear pants to school. Students were required to wear skirts, nylons, and two-inch heels, and the attire of the all-female faculty could not include pants. Once a month, on “pants day,” those rules were relaxed and everyone could wear pants.



Dean Lanzi (left) and Professor Calvaruso.

“If students were not dressed appropriately on all other days, they were sent home,” Professor Calvaruso said. “Today, when I stand in front of a class and see the relaxed style, it's hard to believe we ever had that dress code.”

In addition to secretarial and fashion courses, Woodbridge students took a Personal Development course to learn social graces such as personal hygiene and how to set a tea table. In the Contemporary Culture course, they studied the arts.

“We would take them on class trips to the city to see classic shows like ‘Grease,’ ‘Chorus Line,’ and ‘My Fair Lady,’” Professor Calvaruso recalled. “For many of the students, this was their first trip to the city and their first time experiencing live theater.”

Back then – as now – Berkeley faculty worked hard to prepare students for the job market. In the last semester before graduation, the focus was on researching companies, writing resumes, and conducting mock interviews. Students graduated with secretarial certificates in either a 9-month Intensive course, a 12-month Executive course, or an 18-month Professional course. Fashion students earned a 4-quarter diploma in Fashion Merchandising. Students seeking Associate Degrees could transfer to the Garret Mountain Campus.

Woodbridge campus *(continued)*

“Some of the students were from South Jersey, and for them Garret Mountain was like the other end of the world,” said Dean of Advisement and Student Records Linda Lanzi, who began teaching at the Woodbridge Campus in 1983. “In those early years, the majority of the students went straight to work after earning their diplomas.”

In the late '90s, the number of students at the Woodbridge Campus outgrew the size of the existing classroom space. Following a new round of major construction, the entire first floor was transformed into classrooms while the formerly unfinished basement became home to a student lounge, library, faculty room and offices. Today's classrooms are spacious and air-conditioned, and the campus has several computer labs. Like all other Berkeley campuses, Woodbridge also has an Academic Support Center, a library, and a bookstore. Today's students, Dean Lanzi said, are different from those who attended the campus in the '80s.

“Students back then went to school first, then got jobs,” Dean Lanzi said. “Today's students put way more demands on themselves and do a lot of juggling. Many of them work the equivalent of full-time jobs while earning their degrees,” she added.

Longtime faculty members agree that there is one thing on the Middlesex Campus that remains unchanged.

“Because it is so small, there's a great sense of camaraderie and closeness between faculty and students,” Professor Calvaruso said. “I love teaching at Woodbridge; it has truly become like a second home to me.”

