

Harriet Oberlin New Student Mother at AMU

When it comes to mothering students, Harriet Oberlin is an old hand at it.

The new women's residence hall director at Alaska Methodist University, Mrs. Oberlin spent more than 40 years as a school teacher and administrator. Now, at age 66, she has decided to educate students in a different manner by working with them in a day-to-day situation.

Knowing that the inevitable was coming, Mrs. Oberlin planned for the day she would retire which was just this last July. And Alaska figured in her plans. Beginning with a tour through the state last year, she told herself that she had to return but didn't know how just yet. "I travelled all over the world and I realized I knew very little or nothing about one of our great states."

After looking into various positions she might fill here in Alaska, Mrs. Oberlin came upon the idea of dorm mother. Although the people with whom she spoke kept diverting her attention to administrative and teaching positions, she preferred a job that "was fulfilling a need that was a little different and yet would be a challenge."

Just 12 days after her official retirement Mrs. Oberlin was at AMU preparing for the fall arrival of students.

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Although her travels throughout Alaska included trips to Fairbanks and Juneau, Mrs. Oberlin "liked what I saw in Anchorage." She found it similar to Fort Wayne, Ind., from which she came.

She also liked the size of AMU and what she heard people say about the school. "This was really where I wanted to come."

In deciding to remain in Anchorage Mrs. Oberlin hoped not only to learn about its geography or history but most importantly she explained, "I wanted to learn about the people up here; people who are here by birth or because they want to be here by choice. People are my business."

Mrs. Oberlin volunteered for the position of dorm mother, she said, because "I have to be busy. I enjoy young people. I've worked with young people all my life."

Being in charge of some 60 girls day and night is a totally new experience to Mrs. Oberlin who previously served as director of personnel in Japan and Europe for military schools, among other duties.

"I've been director of lots of things but I've never been a dorm mother."

"I want to have the girls realize that they do have someone here," she said, whether to help solve a problem or to just rap. "I want this to be a homey kind of situation for the girls."


While providing the young women with a home-like atmosphere Mrs. Oberlin also hopes to promote some fun activities for the residents.

Her duties, she said, are hard to define and she likes to think that her primary function is general supervision of the dorm as it concerns the welfare of the students who live there.

Mrs. Oberlin, along with housekeeper Dorothy Hill, tries to instill pride in the girls, to get them interested "not only in their own little corner, but the entire place. This is part of an education."

What better way to learn about the people than to live with them as she does in the AMU dormitory on campus. Mrs. Oberlin maintains an open door to her apartment in order that the girls may feel welcomed.

Always looking for new ideas, the new "mom" plans to stay "as long as I feel I'm accomplishing the goals I've set for myself and as long as people are satisfied."



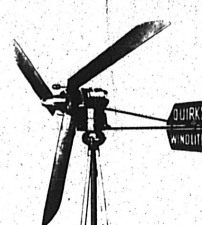
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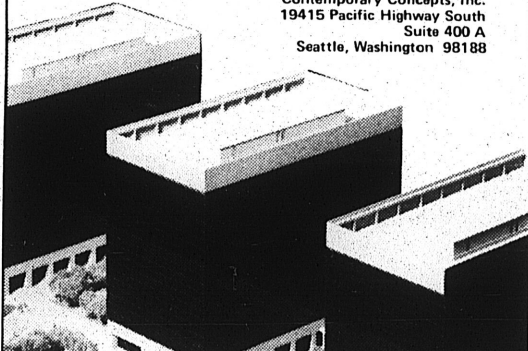
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