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## MU professor Kitty Dickerson remembered as caring mentor, mother

CRYSTAL DUAN *16 hrs ago*



Kitty Dickerson

Courtesy of the MU News Bureau

COLUMBIA — Kitty Dickerson's first experience with textiles was watching her mother make her clothes from agricultural feed sacks. Growing up on a farm in the mountains, Dr. Dickerson began making her doll's clothes by age 8 and her own clothes by her early teens.

Her interest in textiles eventually brought her to MU in 1981 as an esteemed Textile and Apparel Management faculty member. She worked until her retirement at age 70.

"She was certifiably a pioneer in the global textile economy," Bea Smith, former dean of the College of Human Environmental Sciences, said.

Dr. Dickerson died Sunday, Jan. 17, in Brooklyn, New York, from cancer of the mouth. She was 76.

Originally from Virginia, Dr. Dickerson was born on March 30, 1940. She completed her bachelor's and master's degrees at Virginia Tech in textiles and apparel and her doctorate in higher education from St. Louis University.

For over 20 years, Dr. Dickerson was a regular consultant for international policymakers on global textile and apparel trade, traveling to Geneva and Brussels. She won many awards, such as the 2006 Distinguished Scholar Award from the International Textile and Apparel Association, the 2002 University of Missouri Distinguished Faculty Award, the MU Provost's Award for Leadership in International Education and Textile World's "Top 10 Leaders" Award.

Smith said Dr. Dickerson was a "powerful professional role model" but was warm and accessible to students.

“Students spoke of her with exclamation points: Dr. Dickerson is fabulous! Awesome! She really cares!” Smith said. “We’ve all heard of 'famous' faculty whose students scarcely know them. Not so, Kitty Dickerson.”

To Liz Townsend Bird, a 1996 Textile and Apparel Management graduate, said Dr. Dickerson was a “soft-spoken leader” and “all-encompassing educator of life.”

“She always encouraged me and all of the students from TAM(Textile and Apparel Management) to stay focused and to rise above to meet professional challenges in front of us,” Townsend Bird said. “She stayed in touch with hundreds of her graduates and was their champion and cheerleader in their professional careers and personal lives.”

Dr. Dickerson wrote two textbooks regularly used in the textiles and apparel field along with 85 published articles in academic and trade journals.

She became a longtime board member of Kellwood Co., a St. Louis apparel firm with more than \$2 billion in annual sales in the 1990s, when there were fewer than 1,000 women nationwide on publicly traded corporate boards.

Ruth Tofle, professor and department chair of Architectural Studies and longtime colleague, said Dr. Dickerson was “fashionably attired, culturally enlightened and loved because she spoke with wit and kindness.”

“She was a fierce fighter, serious scholar and a revered romantic,” Tofle said.

Townsend Bird, now president of the alumni board for the College of Human Environmental Sciences, credits her interest in staying connected with the school to her relationship with Dr. Dickerson.

“She was always very direct and very honest,” Townsend Bird said. “We all respected her so much as this powerful academic. And she encouraged us to find our voices as young people.”

Dr. Dickerson is survived by life partner and former MU law professor Bill Fisch; children Derek “Deke” and Donya; three grandchildren, Evelyn, Diora and Everett; and brother C.T. Gardner. She was preceded in death by parents Lonnie and Virgie Gardner.

“She was very much a determined career woman,” Deke Dickerson said. “But the hat trick she pulled off in her life was achieving career goals but also being an excellent mother and a caring person to all the people around her.”

The memorial service will be at Memorial Baptist Church on Sunday, Jan. 29. Visitation will be from 2 to 4 p.m., and the service will follow at 4 p.m.

Memorial gifts can be sent to the Kitty Dickerson Graduate Fellowship for Excellence in Textile and Apparel Management or to the Kitty Dickerson MU Retirees Association Scholarship fund, both at 407 Alumni Center at MU.

“She did it all, and at the pinnacle of her own successful career, she never forgot what it felt like to be a first generation college student from a small town in Virginia,” Smith said.

*Supervising editor is Elizabeth Brixey.*

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## Crystal Duan

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