Distance Learning Alum: “GW Instantly Felt Like Home”

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Left to right: Staff member Jacyntha Brewton and alumna Sue Dembski at the 2014 Share Fair, held on GW’s foggy bottom campus. Dembski, who earned her master’s degree online, visited campus for the first time to volunteer at the March 8 event. (Photo: Amy Butler)

Although she graduated from GW more than a decade ago, Ohio resident Sue Dembski, GSEHD MA ’03, recently visited Foggy Bottom for the very first time.

Dembski, a fourth generation educator who teaches third grade, earned her master’s degree entirely online. At the time, she was living in Milwaukee, WI and couldn’t attend school during typical class hours.

When Dembski discovered the Graduate School of Education and Human Development’s (GSEHD) Educational Technology Leadership online program, she knew it was the right way to continue her own education.

“Teaching young minds is what gets me up in the morning,” explains Dembski. “I can’t go anywhere without looking for things that will help my students learn more about the world around them. As my husband says, education lights me up!”

Dembski’s passion to help others runs deep. “Giving back to those that have given to you is a basic part of my life,” she says. “I’d been looking for a GW event that would both speak to my interests and allow me to make a positive impact.”

Enter GSEHD’s Share Fair, a two-part event with a mission to transform education and create the
best 21st Century classrooms. Held on March 8 on the Foggy Bottom campus, Share Fair was open to educators, students, parents and life-long learners and offered professional development workshops, as well as activities inspired by the Science, Technology, Engineering and Mathematics (STEM) education philosophy.

“Share Fair was the perfect opportunity for me,” says Dembski. “Being a volunteer was exciting, rewarding and touching.”

It was also a learning experience; prior to the event, Dembski thought that STEM was reserved for science teachers. “It was so exciting to see kids, parents and teachers excited about hands-on learning. Because of this experience, I’m now championing an effort in my home district to install a STEM Academy.”

Dembski was also able to expand her personal and professional network by meeting all types of educators from all areas of the country. “The free flow of ideas and exchange of experiences was very uplifting; talking to fellow teachers who share your passion is wonderful and inspiring,” she says.

Perhaps the most inspiring people for Dembski, however, were her fellow volunteers, with whom she has made lasting friendships. “That alone,” she says, “was worth the trip.”

And while that trip came many years after Dembski received her master’s degree from GW, the timing was just right.

“What struck me deeply was that, even though I had never been to the campus and knew no one, I felt instantly at home,” she explains. “The night of the volunteer orientation, other alumni came right up to me and started conversations—everyone was so warm and friendly. I can’t say enough good things about my experience.”

Dembski plans to continue that experience at next year’s Share Fair—this time with her coworkers in tow. “I know that they’ll learn a lot,” she says, “but I really want them to feel the love that I felt.”

—Melissa Nyman

Want to get involved with GSEHD? Contact Jacynta Brewton: jbrewton@gwu.edu. Already a volunteer? Share your story! E-mail: cable@gwu.edu