

Sixty-year Boeing employee Shirley Haines enlisted in the U.S. Marine Corps Reserves in 1952, one of only a few women in that branch of the service at the time. The Marine Corps Reserves was one of her passions in life; she served honorably for 30 years until her retirement in 1982 at the rank of Sergeant Major—the first woman to reach the highest enlisted rank that can be attained.

Her Marine Corps experience complemented many of her attitudes about work at Boeing. “Take care of your troops, and they’ll take care of you,” she said. “It doesn’t matter who gets the credit as long as we accomplish the goal.”

An important ‘first’



MARILYN LOCKHART PHOTO

Shirley Haines sits in front of a Cray X1 supercomputer, one of the fastest computers in the world. She’s holding a wire board and punch cards that she and her team used 40 years ago to produce reports.

Still learning— and going strong

Meet 60-year employee Shirley Haines, who’s embraced change

By DEBBY ARKELL

It’s not every day that you run across an employee with 60 years of company service—let alone one who’s worked in

computing and data management for nearly 40 years. But Shirley Haines, computer operator at the Data Center in Bellevue, Wash., has done just that—keeping up with lightning-paced changes in technology along the way and continuing to make valuable contributions to Boeing.

Haines’ Boeing career began in 1946 in the mail room at Plant 2 in Seattle. It was a job she admits she disliked at first. She stuck it out, however, on advice from her father.

“When I wanted to quit during my first month at Boeing, my dad explained what I needed to do and why I needed to do it,” she said. “Understanding what, why and how has always helped me, and my philosophy still is to learn everything I can about a situation.”

Learning and understanding are at the foundation of Haines’ career and many of her life experiences. She couldn’t afford to go to college, but she took advantage of classes Boeing offered. In the early 1970s, Haines and a co-worker decided they wanted to learn a computer programming language, so they took a COBOL class.

One of her first management jobs was in Data Control in Renton, Wash. This organization controlled the flow of all data processing materials for engineering, payroll and accounting, and other internal systems using a punch-card system. More than 100 keypunch operators put holes in rectangular cards that were fed into Boeing’s earliest computers to produce reports.

Since then, she’s witnessed the evolution of computing technology from punch cards to tape reels, discs and ultra-high-density tape cartridges. Haines was on hand as Boeing acquired its first Cyber computer and later its first Cray. The Cray X1 computer in her work area today, one of the fastest computers in the world, is used for computation of fluid dynamics in Commercial Airplanes design work.

Part of Haines’ longevity at Boeing comes down to her willingness to deal with change. Steve Burns, Haines’ manager, said that Haines has always kept abreast of new technologies and availed herself of training on new systems and processes. “Being fearless in the face of change makes a huge difference,” Burns said.

Her attitude is an inspiration to Radha Radhakrishnan, vice president of Computing and Network Operations for Boeing Information Technology.

“At some point in time we all tend to stop learning,” said Radhakrishnan. “Not Shirley. She’s constantly learning. The passion for what she’s doing is an inspiration.” ■

debra.j.arkell@boeing.com