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Marianist Service Award: Beth Schwartz

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In her job, benefits manager Beth Schwartz gets to share in some of life's great joys — job offers, raises, parenthood and retirement — as well as its greatest sorrows — terminal illnesses, deaths of colleagues or their loved ones, families in turmoil, retirements postponed.

That's why, when Father Paul Marshall, S.M., University rector, called and said he needed to see her on an important matter — unbeknownst to her, the Marianist Service Award — she was prepared for bad news — a sick relative or colleague.

She was speechless when she learned she'd been selected for the award, which honors two full-time staff members whose behavior over a significant number of years exemplifies UD's Catholic and Marianist character.

Schwartz, a member of the third cohort of Marianist Educational Associates and an employee since 1995, said conveying the charm — particularly to new employees — brings her great fulfillment.

"I think people know what a community it is here," she said. "I think people want to work here because it's so different from the corporate mentality."

For her, it is.

"I like most that I can care about the people I work with," she said. "In the corporate world, you don't really get up and give a person a hug. I appreciate the opportunity to be able to care about people and to show it, to give them a hug or to hand them a Kleenex."

In difficult weeks, particularly those when the community loses someone, whether an employee or a family member, she's renewed by the reminder that she can lighten someone's burden of grief.

"It's painful, but there's a reward in it," she said. "If I can make it so they have one less thing to worry about, then I've done my job."

Schwartz also has had a hand in making the University one of the Best Colleges to Work For in a 2008 *Chronicle of Higher Education* feature. As a member of the Advisory Committee on Women's Issues, she identified ways to strengthen UD's climate for women and recommend benefits that would be family-friendly. In 2007, she worked with Joe Untener, associate provost for faculty and administrative affairs, English professor Sheila Hassell Hughes and several others on campus to formulate a policy on faculty maternity leave — a relative rarity in higher education and one that has received positive attention in the media and in human resources circles.

The task was a formidable one because of the complexity of tenure, academic schedules, part-time faculty availability and legal considerations. But the result was one that meets both faculty and student needs and reflects positively on the University.

"I'm proud we could do that because it was the right thing to do," she said.

Editor's note: Schwartz has designated her Marianist Service Award honorarium for the Bombeck Family Learning Center — "for the littlest members of our community," she said. Among those little members is daughter Emily, 1.