

Alumnus carries microscope into career



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Jay Jarvis spent his law enforcement career using science to make society safer.

His most trusted tool: a microscope.

"An elective course in microbiology during my undergraduate studies at Georgia College was really the first time I made extensive use of a microscope," said Jarvis, '78. "I learned later it was one of the most important tools I used as a forensic scientist. Being familiar with how to operate it and other equipment entering graduate school gave me a big advantage."

For more than 32 years the retired forensic scientist used a microscope to analyze evidence for criminal cases. Jarvis helped examine forensic evidence during the 1980's Atlanta children murders.

"Forensic science is nothing like the way it is portrayed on TV," Jarvis said. "The work is very tedious. We are scientists in the purest sense. I realized early on that every case you work is significant and sometimes the work benefits the prosecution, defense or neither."

Originally from St. James, N.Y., Jarvis knew he wanted to study chemistry after a high school field trip through the New York Police Department Crime Lab.

During 1975 his family moved to Milledgeville where the chemistry major earned his bachelor's degree at Georgia College.

"After Grumman Aerospace opened a facility in Milledgeville and my father moved us, I discovered Georgia College had a strong chemistry program," Jarvis said. "The experience was nice because the entire chemistry faculty knew students on a first-name basis, not just as a number."

Jarvis still remembers all his professors by name, too.

"Joe Vincent was the department chair, Dave Baarda and John Hargaden were senior faculty, and Ed Waali was my first faculty adviser. After Waali's departure, Doug Pohl assumed that role," he said. "While I never actually conducted toxicology work during my career, my toxicology course with Dr. Vincent prepared me to supervise toxicologists. My physical chemistry course with Dr. Hargaden taught me to rely less upon electronic calculators. Today, I hardly ever use one."

His undergraduate experience prepared him for advanced degrees. He earned a master of science degree from the University of Pittsburgh and master of public administration in justice management from Columbus State University.

"At Georgia College I remember doing some independent studies using gas chromatography," said Jarvis. "During acceptance interviews for graduate school, I was asked some specific questions about gas chromatography. Having that experience and knowledge played a huge factor in getting selected as one of 12 students for the program."

His passion for the field led to job opportunities with the Georgia Bureau of Investigation Crime Lab in Atlanta, followed by assignments at the agency's facilities in Macon and Summerville.

Jarvis served on the board of directors for the American Society of Crime Laboratory Directors and as a member of the Association of Firearm and Toolmark Examiners.

He later authored the book, "Georgia's Crime Doctor," which detailed the life of Dr. Herman Jones, the founder of the Georgia State Crime Lab.

"During my first year at Georgia College, my English professor, Dr. Sarah Gordon, tried to convince me to become an English major," Jarvis said. "I guess she recognized my writing skills long before I did."

However, Jarvis says his most significant career achievement was persuading a co-worker to marry him. His wife of 29 years, Debra, earned her science education specialist degree from Georgia College during 1997.

Although retired, Jarvis refuses to leave the crime lab. Currently, he works part time with the Alliance Forensic Laboratory in Texas; serves on the board of directors for the American Society of Crime Laboratory Directors/Laboratory Accreditation Board; and holds the position of associate managing editor for *Crime Lab Report*.

He also plans to start his own forensic consulting business in 2012.

"I used much of the knowledge, skills and abilities acquired at Georgia College throughout my career in state government," said Jarvis. "While small in size, the university's chemistry department included excellent facilities, modern instrumentation and dedicated faculty who helped me better understand the discipline."

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