

Professor Donald Beil; NTID Applied Computer Technology program, 1997 Eisenhart Winner

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Most good teachers probably can recall the moment when they decided on their chosen career. For Donald Beil, professor in NTID's Applied Computer Technology (ACT) program and 1997 Eisenhart Award winner, that "life altering" moment happened 33 years ago in the east African country of Somalia.

Beil, a Peace Corps volunteer for two years, was teaching mathematics to secondary school students. He realized then, he says, that there was some magic in "doing something, and realizing that if I did it right, someone was going to learn something."

For 22 years, Beil has been "doing it right" at RIT, where he has taught computer courses to deaf students. Along the way, Beil has done many things: served as ACT chairperson and acting director of NTID's School of Business Careers, received several awards for technical writing, published 11 college textbooks and trade books, and received the 1996 Award of Excellence from NTID's Deaf Professional Group (DPG).

The DPG award, which recognizes Beil's "ongoing commitment to the understanding, sensitivity, and respect for the interests of deaf faculty and staff members of the community and of the needs of deaf students in and out of the classroom," was particularly meaningful to Beil.

"I'm extraordinarily proud of my association with NTID and was extremely appreciative of receiving that recognition."

He takes great joy in the challenges placed before him by the ever-changing students who take his computer courses and who in recent months have flocked to enroll in two new Internet courses he created.

"Introduction to the Internet" is a paperless course whose syllabus, daily lesson plan, in-class presentation material, and homework assignments all can be found on a "master calendar" on the Internet that students can access from labs on campus or from home. The class helps students develop their skills in programming for the Internet, learn to create and design their own "home pages," and use the Internet for searches such as how to find co-op and permanent jobs. "Intermediate Internet" teaches students how to create interactive Internet projects.

Students in the ACT program now rank third among all RIT programs in the number who have individual home pages on the Internet.

In addition to creating the Internet course, ACT chairperson Donna Lange also described him as "the driving force" behind a workshop on "Building Your Own PC" that was offered to incoming NTID students during summer orientation and again later for faculty and staff members.

"In addition to teaching as well as developing and updating course materials, Don has been involved in many activities that have had a significant impact on the department's morale," says Lange. "He has participated in faculty/staff/student cookouts, bowling tournaments, and other events, so much so that he is known as the 'ACT Social Director.' His enjoyment and enthusiasm for his work is contagious."

"I am fortunate to work at a place where I have wonderful students, great colleagues, and the resources to try new things," Beil says. "I hope that my students see and feel my love of learning and of computing. It is my responsibility to nurture their abilities, to expand their interests, and to sustain their enthusiasm."

Beil is married to Marian Haley Beil, a publications designer who is a graduate of RIT's School for American Crafts. Their two sons, Noah, 26, and Gabriel, 24, live together in San Francisco and are a computer consultant and an architectural model builder, respectively.

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