BUILDING ON HISTORY

Charles Morrill’s days at Monticello date back 35 years. He has witnessed the tide change in terms of how history is presented at Jefferson’s estate.

“I started as a tour guide in 1985,” says Morrill, who moved with his wife, Carol, from New York to Charlottesville the same year. He recalls the day in the fall of ’85 when a staff memo informed tour guides that they were no longer to refer to enslaved people by the euphemism “servants.”

“That was one of the first steps toward change,” Morrill says. “To be able to witness that evolution is, frankly, quite inspiring.”

Morrill’s role evolved, giving him the chance to learn new skills, flex his tech muscle and make a positive contribution. “Throughout the quarantine, I was grateful to still be employed and found even more ways to contribute.”

WORKING THROUGH IT

During the pandemic-related closure, Monticello was able to retain all its staff members, many of whom found creative new ways to contribute.

GETTING TECHNICAL

Ordinarily, Mikey Amos can be seen around Monticello as a guide, interpreting history for guests. But when COVID-19 swept across the nation, Amos tapped into his technology skills to contribute to the virtual content that Monticello began offering while the property was closed to the public.

“I’ve always been interested in computers and video games, and keeping up with the changing technology trends,” says Amos, who has been a staff member for about two years.

Monticello’s weekly livestreams offer viewers expert analysis of all things Monticello and Jefferson, and even one-on-one interviews with the man himself — portrayed by Jefferson interpreter Bill Barker. Amos saw an opportunity to chip in.

“When we started doing livestreams, one person was running them and he needed help, so I volunteered,” he says.

His role evolved, giving him the chance to learn new skills, flex his tech muscle and make a positive contribution. “Throughout the quarantine, I was grateful to still be employed and found even more ways to contribute.”

SEEDS OF KINDNESS

For more than 30 years, Dana Capps has worked at Monticello in a variety of capacities, the most recent of which is her role as mailroom office manager.

“My role, pre-COVID, was to take care of the incoming and outgoing mail,” says Capps. “I was responsible for making sure all the mail got delivered to the correct offices.”

This is quite an undertaking considering Monticello has more than 20 departments spread out across many locations.

When COVID-19 came, Capps says Monticello’s leadership team took action immediately, ensuring that employees could keep their jobs and expand or exchange their duties, as necessary. For Capps, that meant her days became geared toward produce and people.

“I packaged seeds for sale from our Center for Historic Plants,” says Capps. “I also transported seeds to the botanical garden in Washington, D.C., and delivered Monticello-grown vegetables and fruits to churches and other groups in the Charlottesville community.”

Her new assignments came easily for Capps, who says she loves helping people, especially those in need. “Just getting to meet the people in the community and giving them fresh produce was so special,” says Capps. “There’s a real need for this kind of kindness right now, and I’m so proud of Monticello for rising to the occasion.”