MEET YOUR NEIGHBOR: Ellen Randolph, 43

Bookstore startups lead to career building collections for library

By SAMANTHA FRANK
Palm Beach Post Staff Writer

Ellen Randolph can’t help but laugh when she thinks about the stereotypical librarian she pictured most of her life—a quiet older woman with eyeglasses and hair tied in a bun, helping children find Nancy Drew books.

“That’s so 1950s,” said Randolph, who works as the rare books librarian for Florida Atlantic University’s special collections and archives.

It has been a learning process for the 43-year-old Boca Raton resident, who went back to school to change careers.

Randolph was born in New Orleans and moved around as a child because her father was in sales. She received her bachelor’s degree in philosophy from Furman University in South Carolina in 1988.

Before becoming a librarian, she pursued one of her dreams by opening a bookstore in Deerfield Beach in 1993. It was a natural fit for Randolph, who has always been an avid reader.

That same year she married her husband, Terry, who is a political science professor at the south campus of Palm Beach State College in Boca Raton.

Randolph sold her bookstore in 1997, and 2001, she opened a second bookstore in Deerfield Beach, which she sold in 2005.

After selling the second bookstore, Randolph was wondering what to do next when her husband suggested that she become a librarian.

In 2007 she received her master’s degree in library and information science from the University of South Florida.

The following year, she was hired in her current position at FAU.

As the rare books librarian, she oversees several collections, including one that tries to replicate the libraries of the Founding Fathers of the United States and one that consists entirely of music scores.

“I have the opportunity here to help them build and grow,” Randolph said. “As someone coming from a business background, I like that.”

GARY CORONADO/Staff Photographer

Ellen Randolph, 43, is the rare books librarian for Florida Atlantic University’s special collections and archives in Boca Raton.

Q&A

What are your hobbies? “Besides reading, I like gardening, spending time with friends and taking ballroom dance lessons with my husband.”

If you could switch jobs with anyone, who would it be? “A veterinarian.” Randolph said that she was originally on the pre-vet track in college, but she found the math classes to be too difficult.

What is your biggest accomplishment? “Starting a business, running it successfully and having it still last.” Randolph’s first bookstore, Bargain Booksellers in Deerfield Beach, remains open today.

You’re hungry at 3 a.m. What food would you eat? “Cheese and crackers.”

What has been your biggest challenge? “It’s very hard to go from owning a business and being your own boss to allowing others to direct you.”

@ samantha_frank@pbpost.com