



Virginia Chanda

Each month, The Daily Courier will profile local philanthropists working to keep higher education at Yavapai College accessible in our community. Today, we meet author, YC scholarship founder and emeritus faculty member Virginia Chanda.

Virginia Chanda first encountered YC's Verde Valley campus back in 1979. It was destined to change her life. But first, she had to find it. "My dad came out with me when I first took the job," she laughs. "We were heading up Black Hills Drive. At that time, it was cattle country all around. He said, 'There can't be a college up here.'" There was, but it was small. Virginia spent the next 27 years helping the Verde Campus grow by teaching the students who passed through its doors. Now, she works with the Yavapai College Foundation to close the gap between deserving Verde students and the scholarships they need.

She may be Chicago-born – with a master's degree in English from the University of Pennsylvania – but Virginia's heart was always in the West. "When Yavapai College told me they had an opening at one of their smaller campuses, I didn't exactly say, 'you betcha!' But it was one of those wonderful things where what you're hoping for suddenly materializes." As one of only four full-time faculty members, she spent ten years teaching literature, composition and creative writing. "We had an interesting mix: students fresh from high school, retirees, and working adults going back to school." The working students earned her admiration: "A lot of them were women, 25 to 45. They were fantastic to teach because they were so self-motivated. They really wanted to learn."

In the 90's, as the campus grew, Virginia team-taught classes like Western Civilization, and Technology and Human Values, served as Division Chair and worked on committees to keep college accessible. "You want a place where people can come back to school and start – wherever they need to start – in order to move forward."

When she retired in 2006, Virginia wrote an exciting new chapter to her career – literally. She took her own manuscript to a digital publisher and published her first novel in 2011. Now, under her pen name, Val Chanda, she writes a series of mysteries and thrillers for Wasteland Press.

But she never forgot her Verde Valley students. So the YCF helped her establish the Virginia Val Chanda Faculty Emeritus Scholarship, for working students seeking a college degree.

"It gives first preference to those students with jobs, who struggle and keep at it." She says. The first scholarship was awarded in 2015, with two awarded each year. "If no one meets the

criteria, then it's awarded on merit. It breaks my heart when a scholarship isn't awarded because no one met the requirements."

The scholarship, and a YCF bequest, have helped Virginia create a legacy she's proud of. "What more could you want than to know you're helping someone move forward?" She asks. "It's a vital, living thing that makes a huge difference in people's lives."

-- MJ Grady