

# Legacy Insights:

## Wisdom from Retired Facilities Professionals



### Reflecting, Letting Go, and Living a Rich Life

by ARC Facilities

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Janet Sisolak retired from MD Anderson Cancer in Houston after more than 30 years with the organization, working primarily on major capital projects, assisting with real estate selections and managing the strategic facility planning team. Throughout her career she's managed large and lengthy projects. But there have been major ups – and downs over three decades.

Prior to her employment with MD Anderson, she had worked for a large architectural firm, and MD Anderson was one of her clients. Following a lay-off with that firm, she accepted a staff assistant position with MD Anderson, but feared her career would start all over again.

“In that moment, when you've been laid off, it's like you've been kicked in the gut and your self-esteem goes to pot,” said Janet.

It turned out to be the best thing that could ever happen to her because she was able to help the newly hired vice-president put together an organization chart, handle project budgets and understand all the different parts and pieces of a project. The assistant position led to a 10-year project.

“I joked about only having one thing on my resume for ten years,” she said.

At the end of that engagement, she had to decide what to do. She was given an opportunity to stay within the organization in another department or take a nice package and go. What she discovered in those ten years is, as a facility management person, you take a different approach to projects.

“For the architect and the contractor, they're trying to get buildings up as quickly as possible and within budget and get out of there. And with a facility management hat on, you're thinking more about the long term,” said Janet. “I think facility people are more attuned to long-term costs and long-term implications. You understand multiple concerns.”

Janet learned that in healthcare facility management, physicians and scientists are pushing architects to do things they've never done before – which was a blessing during a career in which she was never bored.

“We were always doing something new and different and innovative,” she said.

On the facility side, she felt like she was part of a family concerned with the day-to-day work that needs to get done and its impact on patients, staff, colleagues, and the facility.

As a team leader, responsible for large projects, and coordinating large groups of people, Janet believes that it's important to let people vent their frustrations as a part of the collaboration process.

"Everything we did at Anderson was a large project, and we gained a lot of experience in understanding how to do that," she explained.

Looking at what's happening right now in her life, she's enjoying traveling.

"We went to Croatia, Istanbul, Hungary, Slovenia, and then Bosnia," she said. "This was our first retirement trip, and it was absolutely amazing. If I can have one big adventure every year, I'll be set."

She also "unwinds" with embroidery and training her dog in agility.

Initially her boss was apprehensive about her planning to retire.

"You're such a workaholic. Are you going to be able to let this go is what he said," explained Janet. "It's like I flipped a switch because that yearning to go back is just not there. I'm having a blast!"

To get her team prepared for her departure, Janet was super organized. At one point, she had to clean out bunch of files, so she made herself a guest from her personal email account, so when calls from team members started coming, she'd send them a link to whatever it was they needed. She hasn't gotten a call from anyone in about a month.

"For me, learning to think less about my personal successes and to value the greater accomplishments of the entire team has taken time," said Janet. "My efforts were focused on making my team self-sufficient, making sure they had the resources they needed and supporting them in whatever way made sense. Letting go and handing the reins over to others is hard, humbling but more often results in a better product at the end of the day."

Janet shared several key observations she learned during her career in facilities management she believes are crucial for new professionals to recognize.

- The world does not revolve around you. Relax, listen to others, and do your best.
- Don't lose sight of the people in your life, e.g., your parents, your spouse, your best friend from college. All these relationships will shape who you are and how you treat people in the work environment.
- Personal conversations are very important. Not texting, real conversations. Pick up the phone or take someone out for coffee.
- Have integrity, be honest, be accountable, and treat everyone like you'd like to be treated.

When you've been a part of the building environment for 20 years or more, you can see clearly how relationships shape your ability to learn and lead your way through the widest array of circumstances and situations. The individuals in each of these profiles have persisted and thrived while adapting new technologies, new rules and regulations, and new directions. So, give yourself a few minutes to read their stories, absorb their lessons, and consider the impact of their accomplishments.

Explore the experiences of retired facilities professionals in the latest series from ARC Facilities -- Legacy Insights: Wisdom from Retired Facilities Professionals and [follow us on LinkedIn](#).