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Redbird Buzz Episode 25: Barb Dallinger, June 14, 2023

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Barb Dallinger Interviewee

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Redbird Buzz

Episode 25: Barb Dallinger

June 14 2023

Rachel Kobus 00:10

Welcome to Redbird Buzz, I'm Rachel Kobus from Alumni Engagement. Two-time alum Barb Dallinger has made it her career to empower and support students, so much so she dedicated 30 years to Illinois State University starting in the Wonsook Kim College of Fine Arts and ending as an Associate Director of Events and Catering in Event Management, Dining and Hospitality. In between she held positions in University Housing Services, Campus Dining Services, the Dean of Students' Office, the Bone Student Center and Braden Auditorium and, of course, EMDH. She's supervised hundreds of students for the Bone and Braden, and she made sure to focus on always providing a safe, comforting and stable environment while teaching everyone to value their history. In the end, when all's said and done, she hopes her legacy has been one to be remembered as someone who truly cared about students.

Rachel Kobus 01:03

So with us today - what's the word, Redbird? Tell us a little bit about yourself, Barb.

Barb Dallinger 01:08

Well, I'm currently retired now, which is crazy to think about, but I'm also still hanging on a little, helping out in Student Health Services and a couple of committees and things. So I'm actually on campus, pretty much.

Rachel Kobus 01:26

Yeah, you didn't want to leave?

Barb Dallinger 01:27

Exactly, exactly. They dragged me away kicking and screaming, exactly.

Rachel Kobus 01:33

In 30 years you've done so much, but, like I said, you are a two-time alum and you started out at Illinois State and part of the reason I wanted to talk to you today was I see this as - and I said this to you earlier, I think, in an email - this is your life Barb, because you've done so many different things and had to go down so many different paths and you're willing to share your story with us, especially during this month. So can we start off talking about you as Barb the student, so Barb the student at Illinois State University, and what that was like?

Barb Dallinger 02:04

Barb the student at Illinois State was so different than Barb the employee. I was very shy, very quiet. Still chatty, but you know, I came in as a transfer, I transferred in as a junior, which, back then we didn't have a lot of the transfer services that we had, which made it a lot harder to connect. So really what I was involved in was the Big Red Marching Machine, that was my main involvement. And then I was in the College of Fine Arts because I was a piano major - [coughs] excuse me, I'm sorry. Sorry about that. I was a piano major so I spent a lot of time over in the College of Fine Arts area over there and then in Big Red. So that was really my home. The thing that made my undergraduate different, I guess, was, I was in the process of, like, figuring out this whole sexual orientation thing my junior year when I came here, and the College of Fine Arts, to me, it was truly a safe place. I knew when I was in the college that no one would hurt me. I knew when I was on that marching field that Ed Livingston and our drum major Kevin Jensen would not let anything happen to me. Because in the residence halls things were happening, but, like the girls on the floor, they jumped me, they beat me up, they threw food on me when I was taking a shower. But as a junior, I didn't have Preview. I knew when I moved into Watterson there was these names down there at the desk with little initials after them but I didn't know what they meant. I didn't know what they did, I didn't know who they were, I just knew where the mailbox was and how to find my room. So when all these things happened I never told anybody, frankly, because I didn't know who to tell. And to make things harder, when I arrived, like, literally, right away when I arrived, the adviser in the College of Fine Arts was Herb Sanders and he died. That's that Herb Sanders advisor award that they give out. He died when I got here so the college was quite upset as they would have been, and the people who were, like, juniors and seniors and sophomores that already had laid their plan out with him and knew what they were doing - I'm like, I have no idea what I'm doing here. Trying to figure out what classes you were going to take and how you were going to work this. I was very blessed in that I have a cousin I grew up with, he lived across the street from me my whole life and I basically followed him, you know, I was a year behind him. He's six months older, and I followed him to Illinois Central College, and then when I graduated he was already here, I followed him to ICC - or to ISU - he lived one floor above me in Watterson and very much was like, okay, let's go find your classes. I'm like, okay, and he'd come and get me and go to dinner, you know, make sure I ate, stuff like that.

Rachel Kobus 05:16

Oh, it's nice to have that [cross talk, inaudible].

Barb Dallinger 05:17

It really was, it was great, but it was a very, it was a very different college experience, I think, than a lot of the students have, especially a lot of the students now. Very, very quiet, very closeted, very trying to figure this out.

Rachel Kobus 05:34

And we'll get in to, you know, talking more about how the campus has changed and you've been a part of that. And I'm going to use this word a lot throughout our talk, because I think it's a good theme to relate to you, Barb, is champion. So how did you champion through having to go through this experience at ISU? You graduated, you went on, I know, to a different part as a teacher, which we can get into that too, but how did you champion through knowing that I'm gonna have to do a lot of this by myself, because the resources aren't here yet for me?

Barb Dallinger 06:01

Right. Plus, being closeted, I mean, my family had no idea that I was trying to figure this out. I walked on campus, I was engaged to a man, and then all of a sudden life changed, you know, hugely, and it was just a lot through the woman I was dating, you know, she was much more, she was one of the "well, I've known since I was five years old" people and I'm like, no, you didn't, because that is not possible. But she was a good resource, you know.

Rachel Kobus 06:37

Okay, it's surrounding yourself with people that, I mean, that you trust and [inaudible], making your own safe environment, then, when it was not offered.

Barb Dallinger 06:44

I really hung on to the people from my community college. I was still very, very close with the people from my community college. Crazy, crazy story, went home after that first semester and all of us who'd gone, like our group of, like, seven people had gone to ICC together in the College of Fine Arts there, and we met at the Poison Apple, which really dates us. We met at the Poison Apple when everybody was home from break because we'd all gone different places, and that night every single one of them except one told me they were gay. And I'm like, excuse me? And they were like, well, we just didn't think you could handle it so we didn't tell you while we were at ICC. And then it dawned on me, it's like, so what you were doing when I had to be home at 10:30 was you were dropping me off at home and then you guys were going out and having fun without me?

Rachel Kobus 07:36

Because you didn't want to tell me but I wanted to tell you and I was trying to figure it out too -

Barb Dallinger 07:39

And I'm trying to figure out anyway. It was just crazy, somehow you automatically gravitate to the, you find your people. I'm just like, what?

Rachel Kobus 07:47

But, like, you said too at ISU, Big Red March Machine, College of Fine Arts, that became your place -

Barb Dallinger 07:51

That was absolutely my place.

Rachel Kobus 07:52

[Cross talk, inaudible] yes. And that's, and, I think, as resources grew, obviously, as I said, we'll talk, it becomes better, but to know that there was a place and it's good to hear that. Hopefully every student finds some place -

Barb Dallinger 08:03

Find that place, yes.

Rachel Kobus 08:05

And finds someone like a Barb, which - so after graduation you did not start at Illinois State for your 30 career, or your 30 years of a career, you went -

Barb Dallinger 08:14

I moved to St. Louis. I moved to St. Louis. My girlfriend at the time was a safety engineer, she graduated in safety. So I majored in piano, she majored in safety. She was going to be the breadwinner, so I better go where her job is. And we went to St. Louis, and I was there for close to 10 years. Started out as a kindergarten teacher until they figured out I was gay. Well, they didn't figure it out, they asked and I said yes, which was, I don't know, probably stupid, I was going for the honesty points. Lost my job, lost my teaching certificate, and then started working at Shriners Hospital for Children in St. Louis. Worked there for several years and then made the decision to move back. Because to me this is home, I'm from Morton, this is home. Moved to central Illinois, back, and one of my friends was an ISU cop. And I moved back, it's like, I'm just not sure what I'm gonna do, and she's like, why don't you apply to Illinois State? It's a great place to work. I was like, okay, I'll try it, what the heck. And I started out as the proverbial Secretary Three, where everybody starts, and worked my way up to a Secretary Four and then a Five, all these little moves helping me move up, and then when I was working in Housing one day they posted the job for the information person at the Bone Student Center and I was like, you know, I'm gonna, I'm gonna try it. And much to my surprise, I got it.

Rachel Kobus 09:52

And then from there, like you said, we went through your whole list [cross talk, inaudible], yes, yeah.

Barb Dallinger 09:55

And from there just kind of went - but when I came back to school, when I came back I was driving through town here in Bloomington and somebody shot my car windows out as I was driving and they blamed it on the rainbow pride flag on the back of my car. And it's like, something clicked, and it was just, okay, you've taken away the one thing that I want you to do, you've taken away my teaching license, I've been shot at, I've been beat up, I've been, you know, tied up, I mean, just crazy stuff. There really isn't anything you can do to me now, there really isn't, and I'm going to make it my mission to make sure that what happened to me here doesn't happen to the students that I have now.

Rachel Kobus 10:40

And you did that. I mean, thank you for sharing that because you did, like, you've done that in every way possible and that's what you were known for.

Barb Dallinger 10:47

That was the main - it was like, you know, I don't care. And my big goal, because I didn't think there was anything else open to me, it's like, I'd been fired, I didn't think there was anything else open to me, was just some kind of, you know, working in an office somewhere. I had no idea what would happen when I tried for the job at the Bone.

Rachel Kobus 11:12

Yeah, and then you excelled and you excelled more and you excelled more and oh, my God, I don't know what ISU would do without Barb. Honestly, yeah, it's true.

Barb Dallinger 11:19

The thing, the important thing we learned when I worked in Housing, was that if Barb gets bored, she gets in trouble. I was in trouble a lot when I worked in Housing, I mean, a lot. And we learned this - so I've always told people I've been here 30 years, I've never worked one job more than four except this very last one before I retired at EMDH. I switched positions every four years. Not that I applied for some of them, but it was like, okay, like when I was the assistant director of special projects in the Bone I did the stuff nobody else wants to do, you know. When I was the assistant director of special projects they came to me and it's like, we really want you to work on commencement and Welcome Week. I'm like, okay.

Rachel Kobus 12:10

Say yes.

Barb Dallinger 12:10

Yeah, and it's like, okay, and it's like, it just, I gradually, every couple years something changed, and then one day my boss walked into my office and closed my door and he said that he had, they had just fired the person who was the auditorium manager and he said, we want you to take it over. And I looked at him like, well, I have no knowledge and no skills and no training, but if you're okay with that I guess I am.

Rachel Kobus 12:40

Sure, Braden, bring it on!

Barb Dallinger 12:42

I was like, sure! And Judi Khalilallah was my assistant and, well, became my assistant, and she'd been there for years so she knew what to do, you know, and I would literally just go to her and go, okay, and now what? Is this okay? I was very, it was crazy, because she had started to create a season and I was looking at the notes, and I called this producer Don Kronberg, who's one of my dearest friends now, he was, he's an agent with NiteLite, and I call him up, it's like, hey, it looks like we have Willie Nelson booked with you in September. He said, you thought you did, and he hung up. And I'm like, well, this is going well. And I spent three weeks having agents hang up on me and I'd call them back and my job was to rebuild all the bridges that had been torn down. And I picked up my phone one day and it was Ginger from William Morris and she called me and she's like, Barbara, this is Ginger from William Morris, Nashville. I was like, yes? And she's like, we understand, word out on the road is that you're running Braden now? I'm like, yes, I'm sure gonna give it a shot, you know. And says, I have one question for you, and I'm like, sure, shoot, and she's like, how come no one's heard of you? And I was like, well, because I've never done this before, but I'm gonna do my best. And I kept calling Don back and saying, you know, I understand - because some, he had a show that did not go well - I'm like, I understand what happened, I understand you're angry, but we're gonna, we're starting over here.

Rachel Kobus 14:29

You had to create a safe space for everybody in Braden again, then, basically, you are literally the creator of comforting, stable spaces, Barb.

Barb Dallinger 14:36

It's like, oh, my gosh. And he said, I'll tell you what, he said, you don't really know what you're doing. I'm like, you are absolutely right, I don't. I'm doing what Judi tells me to do and we're learning it as we go. And he spent three days with me and showed me the ropes, which is probably one of the stupidest things that an auditorium manager could do, because you're learning from the agents that are trying to, you know. But he was amazing, he's been an incredible resource for me. Not all the shows came from him, obviously, but he was, he's in Chicago and he was an incredible resource. They sent me to Ball State where one of our alums who used to be a student in Braden runs their auditorium and I went over, I spent a week with him and just a brain dump, this is what we do, which was so crazy cause he'd been a student and he's like, you're what? And it was like, I know I'm the campus tour guide, but -

Rachel Kobus 15:44

Not anymore. I am the Braden -

Barb Dallinger 15:47

Not anymore. No more perky, chirpy tour guide. But it opened up this incredible experience that I would just literally sit there, it's like, how is this my life?

Rachel Kobus 15:59

Going from where you started and having to work - like you said, though, you built up that what else can go wrong? Nothing is going to go wrong, I'm going to make sure that I [cross talk, inaudible], yes.

Barb Dallinger 16:10

I'm just going to do this, and to the point - I always did an announce at the beginning of the show, because, I told my boss, I said, it's very important that people realize it's me now. That chapter is closed, it's me now. I said, I'm introducing every single show that starts - excuse me - and I did. And I went out, and one day President Bowman was in the audience and I, it had just been an incredible day and we'd had a wonderful time and I made the comment, I said, you know, there are days that I just can't believe this is my life and I swear I would do this job for free. And he came up to me afterwards and he's like, you know, we can make that happen, yeah. I was like, well, let's, let's not, you know.

Rachel Kobus 17:00

I love this job, but not for free.

Barb Dallinger 17:01

But not that much. Like, I do still need to, you know, eat, it's like, if I had a - you know, it's like, I don't have a husband. If I had a happy husband at State Farm we'd talk, but I don't, you know. It's like, oh, that's crazy. But the stuff, I mean, it's just surreal, the stories. I'm actually, I'm working with a couple people, I'm writing a book.

Rachel Kobus 17:24

You are?

Barb Dallinger 17:24

I am.

Rachel Kobus 17:25

What's it about? Your time at ISU or -

Barb Dallinger 17:28

It is.

Rachel Kobus 17:28

Okay, I did not know that. This is brand new information.

Rachel Kobus 17:32

Good for you. Well, and I was gonna say.

Barb Dallinger 17:32

It is.

Barb Dallinger 17:33

Page 14 is a - you know -

Rachel Kobus 17:36

It's okay, you only have like a hundred probably, or maybe 200, 300, 400 more to go.

Barb Dallinger 17:39

Yeah, in fact, it's basically a day in the life of what happens, like, with all the different artists.

Rachel Kobus 17:45

Oh, okay, so can I have like a little inside scoop, because that was going to be one of my questions now that we're talking a little bit about Braden of what is some of your favorite, fondest memories working at Braden?

Barb Dallinger 17:57

The people - I think the thing that was the most surprising is that the people, like, quote, the famous people, for lack of a better word, are just people who miss their families and they're on the road, and my goal was always to make sure they had a wonderful day. It's like, I'm greeting them at the door, "Welcome to Braden Auditorium, we are so glad you're here." And I mean, we had breakfast ready for them, dinner was always on real China with real silverware instead of a spork. I never gave them, you know, wedding chicken with three tiny potatoes and broccoli. So I tried to make it - because that's what they're getting everywhere on the road, what can we do that's different, what can we do to make their day? Flowers around, decorating the, you know, the dressing rooms up a little bit. And it really, it really

paid off in a semi-selfish way, because if they're having a good day they do a good show, and then my people see a good show and then they want to buy more tickets and it's just a circle.

Rachel Kobus 19:05

You're probably the smartest person in this room right now, because that is perfect, I love the cycle, yep, mm-hmm.

Barb Dallinger 19:10

I mean, it's, that was our goal was always just have a wonderful day with them, and my students were just amazing. Sara Evans was here and she had her kids with her and two of my student workers took her kids to the Children's Discovery Museum for the day.

Rachel Kobus 19:26

Yeah, just little things.

Barb Dallinger 19:27

I'm like, you're just gonna let my kids take your kids? And she was like, oh, yeah, I'll be fine. I'm like, okay.

Barb Dallinger 19:34

Whatever makes you happy. We had a group called Leahy and it's these siblings that are in a band and they traveled together in the bus with their wives and their kids and their family. And we set the greenroom up basically as a nursery.

Rachel Kobus 19:34

Whatever makes you happy.

Rachel Kobus 19:50

That makes sense.

Barb Dallinger 19:50

And a couple of my students were basically running a daycare all day, playing with the kids, keeping them safe, doing whatever, and during the show the littlest, tiny, barely toddler, barely walking, was just having a meltdown and I, while her mom was on stage, I stood at the fly rail holding her so she could see her mom dancing along and it's like, yeah, see, mommy's right there, it's okay. And, you know, anytime we tried to go back it was like, [imitates baby wailing]. Okay, we're staying right here.

Rachel Kobus 20:19

But I love that these are the stories too. It's about, again, because you're all about, it's a wonderful day and making others feel safe and comfortable and so - these stories.

Barb Dallinger 20:27

Well, and it was kind of out on the road that we were a, we were difficult, you know.

Rachel Kobus 20:32

Okay, so you're trying to rebrand, you're trying to get the reputation back.

Barb Dallinger 20:36

I'm trying to redo that and it's amazing how word travels on the road. And when we did get Willie Nelson here, I greeted him at the back door and he walked in and his first word - I'm like, welcome to Braden Auditorium, he says, I hear you got good food here, I'm very excited to hear you got good food. And I'm like, thank you, get that out there on the road for us, thank you.

Rachel Kobus 20:56

And also, I hope it's good food, yeah, make sure that it's extra good food, yes, yep.

Barb Dallinger 21:00

We knew that it had, we knew that the table had kind of turned a little bit. And I mean, yeah, there were times it didn't go well, or whatever. I, we had George Jones, and he was just such a love and it was his final tour and he was ageing and, you know, and I'm sitting in my office one day and my phone rings and I answer it, he's like, Barbara, this is George Jones. And I'm like, I have people, don't you have people? You know, it's like, if I have people you surely have people.

Rachel Kobus 21:31

How do you have my number?

Barb Dallinger 21:32

Yeah, yeah, exactly, and he's like, I just wanted to call and tell you that when we come over a couple of weeks from now - I'm like, yeah, we're excited about your company. He said, I just want you to know, I'm going to be wearing my blue suit, because you know, we're going to be on that stage together and we got to look good. Just so you know, I'm wearing my blue suit. And I'm like, that is good to know, I will plan accordingly, thank you. And we're chatting, and all of a sudden he goes, oh, I gotta go, and he hung up. And it was like, were you not allowed to be on the phone?

Rachel Kobus 22:02

Oh, my gosh, he called you to make sure you coordinated correctly.

Barb Dallinger 22:06

Yes, and we did, and we did. It was good to know, it was a great heads-up.

Rachel Kobus 22:11

Yeah, and I would say, and a memorable moment then too. That's funny.

Barb Dallinger 22:14

Yeah, he was singing a song and he had a prompter in front of him with, like, big letters so that he could see and his band was playing with him and it switched to another song and then they did another song, but then George came back to the first song but the band was playing song number four. And I'm off to the side of the stage screaming, follow George!

Rachel Kobus 22:45

Did it work? Did it work?

Barb Dallinger 22:47

They finally did, it was like, do what he's doing. I don't care you've already done the song. Do what he's doing!

Rachel Kobus 22:54

Do it again, yeah!

Barb Dallinger 22:54

Exactly. It's like, he's obviously not reading the letters from the prompter.

Rachel Kobus 22:58

And now you're managing fans on top of it too.

Barb Dallinger 23:00

Oh, yeah. Just [inaudible], or, they'd, like, people would come in, one of the guys from REO came up to me, he's like, do you have any, like, my back is just killing me, do you have any Tylenol or something? I'm like, oh, absolutely, I can get you a massage, I can - you want some ice? It's like, what, what can we do? He's like, nah, I just need to lay down, I think I'm just gonna lay down and see if I can get my back feeling better. It's like, okay, so I got some Tylenol and he did great, he made it to the show, he did great and he was leaving, and I'm hugging him and I'm like, well, I hope you feel better, you be, you know, be careful, ice is your friend. And he's like, okay, fine, and they took off. Well, I generally have the artist's cell phone so that I can get ahold of them while they're here and then I dump it, you know. And I called him the next morning, I said, I promise I'm not going to be a crazy stalker person, I just wanted to make sure you're okay today. And he's like, I really am, I'm feeling better, thanks, I sat, had a little downtime, I had help. I was like, okay, I promise you I'm ditching your phone number now, I just wanted to check, and he's like, okay, you have a good rest of the day. I was like, I promise you I'm not a crazy stalker person.

Rachel Kobus 24:11

No, but that's the extra mile, that's the extra -

Barb Dallinger 24:13

But I'm worried. But I'm worried about you.

Rachel Kobus 24:14

Yes, yeah. And that's what makes you - that, like, you did, you brought the reputation back, you obviously got the word out in the way you wanted it to, and again, see, it's about championing through and being the champion for Illinois State and for Braden Auditorium. It's, what are we going to do, yep.

Barb Dallinger 24:28

My marketing intern told me one time during my announce - it'd be like, okay, you need to talk - he'd be like, okay, you need to talk about this show coming up and this show coming up and you need to talk about this. And I'm like, okay, fine - excuse me - and occasionally he would have like four or five things and I'd go out and I'd talk and I'd come back, he's like, you forgot two. I'm like, I know, I can only remember three things. We have to figure out what's important. Three things, that's my max. He's like, okay, so he started gearing everything to [inaudible] - okay, these are the three things we're talking about, and I'm like, okay, he's like, if you can work it in, and I'm like, thee, three. He's like, okay.

Rachel Kobus 25:10

You know, and so, speaking of students too, you, and I have to mention, you know, the Bone and Braden are going to be celebrating their 50th year and you've been there for a majority of it -

Barb Dallinger 25:19

For thirty [cross talk, inaudible].

Rachel Kobus 25:20

Yeah, so -

Barb Dallinger 25:21

Crazy!

Rachel Kobus 25:22

I know, and then working with all these students and being, you know, starting to become a mentor and a role model for many, what does that feel like to know how much of an impact you've made on the students at Illinois State from where you came from as a student, Barb, like, you've seen the changes now too?

Barb Dallinger 25:38

A lot of people have said that, you know, you're talking about having such a lousy undergrad experience but yet you're such a champion for Illinois State, it's like, but that's based on my time here as an employee, not necessarily my undergrad. Or they'll be like, isn't it weird to work where you went to school? And I'm like, no, I was only here two years. I've been here 30 as an employee, that's totally different, you know. But the relationships that I've gotten to build with them are just incredible, and making sure they've had some really good experiences that they can build their life up. It's crazy, because my kind of original student workers are turning 50, which is just not possible.

Rachel Kobus 26:25

That's crazy, woah.

Barb Dallinger 26:26

I was really upset about it at home. I'm just like, they're turning 50, that's not possible. That is not possible, it's just not.

Rachel Kobus 26:34

It's not. They're not, really, it's fine.

Barb Dallinger 26:36

And my girlfriend [Latricia?] says, well, honey - I'm like, the math doesn't work, and she says, well, honey, you know you didn't birth them. She's like, you got them at eighteen. And I was like, oh, that's true, you're right, yeah.

Rachel Kobus 26:51

You missed the first twenty, eighteen years of their lives, so, I mean.

Barb Dallinger 26:53

Yeah, exactly, I was like, oh, yeah, you're right. It does work now. But I'm like, holy cow. But I'm -

Rachel Kobus 26:59

But it felt like you were probably with them for a long time, because you were, you were there to help these, you know, the students at Braden and Bone -

Barb Dallinger 27:05

And so many of them, so many of them are still in contact with me and call me and stuff. One of my, one of my former students called me, he texted me and said, hey, I just really need to talk something out with you. And I'm like, yeah, sure, give me a call tonight. And we were talking and he made the comment and he's like, well, now you know, I'm getting ready to turn 45, and I'm like, okay, stop right there. This just now became all about me instead of you. You cannot be 45. He's like, well, yeah, I graduated like 20 years ago. It's like, oh, my God, okay, give me a minute and then we'll go back. It's just, like, I need to process it. You're, you're, you're turning 45? He's like, yes, have you processed that, like, can we go back to my problem? It's like, okay, if we have to. Oh my gosh, but yeah, and so many - my very first student worker, Rhonda, my very first student worker came, she showed up at my retirement reception. She walked in the door and I just lost it. I'm like, what are you doing here? And she's like, hey, I saw it online and there's no way I wouldn't come. It's like, I mean, a bunch of my students traveled, like, hours to get here. I was just blown away by the response that I got from them. They're just incredible, just -

Rachel Kobus 28:32

That's the impact you've left, Barb and, I mean, so it's amazing to hear and see that and I have to bring up too, you've worked with so many Bone and Braden students, but you also were the advisor of PRIDE for eight years too so you also worked with our PRIDE students, our LGBTQA, I mean, work, and I think, like you said, campus is different now too in that aspect, that you were like, oh, these students are out so now what is my purpose too, so how have you [cross talk, inaudible] -

Barb Dallinger 28:58

Oh my gosh, my first year as the PRIDE advisor we talked a great deal about it being a safe space and several students would talk with us, like, well, I've been walking past the room - because everybody knew Room 375, Student Services Building on Wednesday night, that's where the gay kids are - and

they'd talk about, well, I walked down the sidewalk for like three weeks and tonight I finally decided I was just coming in. I was like, okay, fine, we're glad you did, that's why we're here. And they were - or they'd walk in and, like, I think that I maybe want to be here and that I maybe should be and I think I might be gay, but - to you flash forward to now, because I still do stuff with them, you flash forward to now and they're like, well, I was the president of the GSA in junior high and I was the secretary in high school. And you're just like, how are you so together? I mean, it's just night and day. When I was working in Housing and getting trouble all the time, when I was working in Housing, one young person went to Preview and talked to people at Preview and whoever she talked to at Preview sent her to me over in Housing and I looked up and there's this little person knocking on my cubicle and she's like, they said at Preview that you're nice to the gay kids. And like, I am, I am, come on in, come on in.

Rachel Kobus 28:59

Yes, yeah, oh - but then - so, well, [cross talk, inaudible] you've grown and you say, yes -

Barb Dallinger 30:35

But I'm still in contact, you know, many years later, with them, so, like, oh my gosh. I was working - we used to, during Welcome Week we used to staff the res hall desks and give them their planners and stuff as a passages person for Welcome Week. And I am like, okay, too much. This one, this one young lady was coming up to check in and she had rainbows everywhere. I mean, she had jewelry and ear - I mean, she was just rainbow down. And I got her all checked in and I took her planner and I opened it up to the first PRIDE meeting and I was like, first PRIDE meeting, and circled it and I handed to her, I'm like, I'll see you there. And she was, like, too much, too much!

Rachel Kobus 31:18

Was she there? Did she come?

Barb Dallinger 31:19

She was.

Rachel Kobus 31:19

Ah, see!

Barb Dallinger 31:20

Too much, and she's like, no, no - it's just she was with her mom, you know.

Rachel Kobus 31:24

Oh, yeah.

Barb Dallinger 31:25

Like, too much? Sorry, sometimes I have to pull it back.

Rachel Kobus 31:28

Uh-huh, uh-huh, but that's how you get people involved, too. So, like you said, you, I mean, you make an impact on students, whether it's you're working with them, you're advising them, you're being just an

ally to knock on a cube for, and that's what I think keeps our campus and our students growing and changing and learning what's coming, too. So again, you're very appreciated for that, Barb. You're appreciated for, you know, being the ally, being the champion, being what I like to call the historian of ISU, like you said, working through a book now, and again, I'm very excited to hear that -

Barb Dallinger 32:00

I'm excited. We're trying to figure out, it's like, this is, it's like, do you combine the PRIDE stuff with the Braden stuff or is that two or what do you do, and that we don't really, we don't [cross talk, inaudible] -

Rachel Kobus 32:11

I don't know how you do that, yeah. There's a history behind both, too, so that can be hard, yes, yeah, yeah.

Barb Dallinger 32:15

Yeah, yeah, so we're trying to figure that out and we'll see.

Rachel Kobus 32:18

Well, and in the end, too, I actually I have to mention, part of PRIDE, you know, learning that you were the advisor then, it made far more sense, learning as I came in that you helped found the LGBTQA+ Alumni Network too, you and Dave Bentlin saw it as a need. So can you talk a little bit for our alums listening, like, why all of a sudden, I think it was around 2014-ish time that became the mission, it was important?

Barb Dallinger 32:45

It was so selfish of me. It's just, like, I want to know where my babies are.

Rachel Kobus 32:49

Okay, there you go.

Barb Dallinger 32:51

It was selfish but wonderful, you know. And the other RSOs, a lot of them had an alumni group, and Dave and I were like, we should do this, because a lot of the alums would come back for the annual PRIDE Drag Show and it's like, we need to do something. We need to not just be hugging and screaming in the ballroom. It's like, we need to do something. And that's when we started doing, like, a pre-reception so that the alums could do that. And we tried to turn it into a full weekend one year with, like, you know, brunch the next day. The hard part with the PRIDE students is there's no "hi, I'm gay" box to check. I mean, I could give them rosters, but you cannot send them anything unless they give you permission. So at Lavender Graduation we have it out now, asking them, you know, I know this is the last thing on your mind, but please sign this so we can send you things. And the very first drag show we did, I'm literally standing in the ballroom with this stack of paper, walking around, I'm like, PRIDE alum, fill this out, PRIDE alum, fill this out –

Rachel Kobus

Grassroots marketing.

Barb Dallinger

PRIDE alum, fill this out. And they're like, what am I - ? Just fill it out and give it back to me. And we really built the list by contacting people, same people. And then during COVID, oh my God, it was amazing. During COVID Alumni Engagement contacted me and said we would like to give you a little COVID burst and told me I could pick a year or a time when I was a PRIDE advisor and I could invite, like, 20-odd students to come to a Zoom meeting so you've got the perfect square of Zoom people. And we did that and it was a PRIDE board from the, like, '98-ish, around there, '98, '99, and it was incredible. It was just so incredible to see all of them and for them to see each other. I forget that I see them but they don't see each other –

Rachel Kobus

That's the point of the Alumni Network too is to -

Barb Dallinger 35:07

And we had to figure it out because, like, one of them, one of them is in Israel and a couple other ones were in, like, Alaska and California.

Rachel Kobus 35:18

So timing was -

Barb Dallinger

Timing, it's like, okay, when is everybody awake? You know, it may be late for some but early for another one, you know. And I contacted Talia and she's like, I don't care when it is, she's like, I don't care - she's the one in Israel - she said, I don't care, she's like, I will get up at two o'clock in the morning –

Rachel Kobus

Just to talk.

Barb Dallinger 33:07

- don't worry. And I was like, oh, okay. And it was incredible, just watching them reconnecting, it's like, oh my gosh, what are you doing? A couple of them had, like, you know, their kids on their lap or the partner that they married in the background and hung out for a little bit. And at one point I looked at Talia and she was just sitting there, like with her head on her hand, like on the table, and just, I thought she froze. I'm like, Talia, are you okay, did you - are you there, did you freeze? Cause I mean, hello, she's coming in from Israel. It's like, did you freeze, are you okay? She's like, no, I'm fine, I'm just watching everybody. It was like, oh, my gosh, it was amazing.

Rachel Kobus

And that's, again, and I'm gonna say this here too, for anyone listening, we always encourage, you know, if you want to be a part of specific networks, especially like the - [phone rings] it's okay - especially, you know, the LGBTQA+, like you said, it's something that we ask our alums to opt into. So always feel free to reach out to someone like Barb, to reach out to the Alumni Engagement office, because we do specific events, we have specific programs, we want to connect our Redbirds in the

ways they feel comfortable. So we want to make sure - the more that tell us, the more we can do for our alums too, so I'm glad you brought that up, that it is definitely something we want to learn. If you aren't already opted in to any, again, network, please just contact and let us know too, so –

Barb Dallinger 37:03

[Cross talk] you know, the Big Red Marching Machine -

Rachel Kobus 37:04

Yes, yeah, anything, yes, anything else. So, you know, and with that, Barb, I have to end on this too, is, you know, we're talking about 30 years of you being an advisor, as a supervisor, someone that's created a whole reputation for Braden, someone that's, you know, given back so much, and now you've left a legacy recently, it was approved that there is going to be a crew room named after you too in Braden, so leaving that legacy, because you've done a lot on campus and you've gifted back to campus, you support campus, you support our students, you know, through fiscal and through your talent as well. So I have to mention that, that I think that's amazing to hear, that you have that, so that's amazing.

Barb Dallinger 37:48

Thanks, thanks. They, we talked about it and the other option was the greenroom, which is where, like, the stars hang out or whatever. And it's like, you know, I don't want it to be the greenroom, I want it to be where the student workers hang out. It's their room where they, you know, they got lockers and they hang their coats, put the book bags up, and if they're hanging out, that's where they come and where they eat dinner or whatever. It's like, that's where, that's their space. I wanted it to be the students' space, not something else kind of out there, crazy. The other part of it was we - so many students that have gone on to do incredible things, like Steve [Steve Knuth] worked, he was a student worker, and he worked the day we had David Copperfield, and David was so impressed with him he gave him his business card and said when you graduate in a couple of months give me a call. And he went, he toured with Copperfield for like five years and then left Copperfield, he ran the theater where, like, the Oscars and Emmys and stuff are, he ran that out in LA and he moved to Australia and he ran the Sydney Opera House in Australia. He's now started his own company but, I mean, I want them to realize there's like eight examples of people who have done this. I want you to realize, if you like this, this can be your life.

Rachel Kobus 39:13

One business card away.

Barb Dallinger 39:14

I understand - yeah, I understand that you came and you wanted to major in accounting and go you, but if you have fallen in love with this, it is a possibility. There are possibilities out there, you just need to utilize those resources.

Rachel Kobus 39:28

And that's perfect to end on too, so thank you Barb for being with us today. We appreciate it so much.

Barb Dallinger 39:32

Thank you for asking, thank you for asking, it was fun.

Rachel Kobus 39:36

Thank you.

Rachel Kobus 39:52

So that was two-time alum, ISU historian, ally, champion, and proud Redbird Barb Dallinger. Tune in next time to Redbird Buzz for more stories from beyond the quad.