

## New coordinator has deep roots in Delta

By Nancy McGee

The Herald Staff

On New Year's Day, Peggy Wright stepped in as the coordinator of the Delta Studies Center.

In addition to acting as coordinator of the center, Wright is teaching a geography class.

"When I was approached about this position, I thought, 'Well, this would be great,'" she said. "I've been involved with Delta initiatives for more than 25 years. Dean McGee said my responsibility will be to 'pull together several initiatives from agriculture, business, communications, education, engineering, fine arts and nursing and health professions to receive maximum benefits across the state and the nation.'"

Wright said Arkansas State University focuses much attention on the Delta because Arkansas State rests in the Lower Mississippi Delta.

"It's an excellent time to further ASU's role in directing resources from the university toward Delta initiatives," she said. "I am excited about this position and happy because of the fact that I worked with the Lower Mississippi Delta Commission, which the Delta Studies Center comes out of."

Wright graduated from Lincoln High School in 1967. She said Lincoln High no longer exists because of desegregation.

"Lincoln was the black high school in Forrest

City," she said. "I am a product of Lincoln, and I always let people know that there was a Lincoln."

After high school, Wright attended AM&N, which is now the University of Arkansas at Pine Bluff.

"I got sick and had to come out of school. Because I came from a poor background, with all the medical bills, I could not go back to school, so I went to work," Wright said.

Wright started to work at Southwestern Bell as an operator.

She said she began on April Fool's Day 1968. She worked for 10 years until the company eliminated the office.

At that time she was the group manager of operator services.

"After I left the phone company, I took a couple of classes at (East Arkansas Community College)," Wright said. "I took a class here and a class there. By that time I was married and had children, so I was working and trying to go to school."

Wright was working on Delta initiatives even then.

"For about 10 years, I worked with low and very low-income families with the FMHA (Farmer's Home Administration) Self-Help program," she said. "I worked with 62 families to help them to build their homes."

Eventually, she decided she wanted to go back to school to finish her degree. She took leave in 1991.

"I received my two-year degree at EACC and

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Wright

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then came to ASU and was fortunate enough to meet Dr. (Hubert) Stroud, (professor of geography) in the geography department," she said. "Dr. Stroud encouraged me and became my mentor. I fin-

ished my degree; I received a BA in geography in 1993."

She received her master of public administration from ASU in 1993.

She said she was the first person in her family to receive a college degree.

"My mother was really proud

of that, and she was able to come here to both of my graduations," she said.

Wright has worked on many other Delta initiatives, including the Arkansas Delta Housing Development Corporation's Home Instructional Program for Preschool Youngsters.