On a typical weeknight at USF St. Petersburg, the day's sunshine has given way to softer night lights, blanketing the campus grounds and Bayboro Harbor in delicate shadows. Classes are over and the campus quickly empties as the Safe Team brings students to their cars and officers secure the buildings. With a collective yawn, the clamor of the school day quickly yields to the calm of evening.

But, as it approaches 10 pm on a recent Friday night, the hustle begins again at this campus that operates 24 hours a day. The Physical Plant night crew reports for duty, led by night custodial supervisors Maudestine Bennett and Bernard Jackson.

Maudestine Bennett came to USF St. Petersburg in 1988, after serving nearly 20 years as a housekeeper at Eckerd College. She enjoyed her day-time shift at Eckerd, working first in the dorms and classrooms, and later in the President's suite. But, after Eckerd's custodial service became privatized, Bennett decided she was ready for a change.

Her first assignments on campus were cleaning the upstairs offices and classrooms in Davis Hall - during the night shift. The switch from 7 am to 3:30 pm to 10 pm to 6 am took some adjustment.

“I had no second thoughts about working at night. I thought I was a day person, but found out I was really a night person!” She said her husband's support made the decision to work nights easier, too.

A year later, in 1989, Bennett was promoted to custodial supervisor, and now as a manager, her shift starts a little earlier and finishes a little later. Maudestine supervises a crew of four. “It's a good team. The night employees seem to get along very well. If there are problems, we try to solve them. That makes a difference,” she said. Plus she said there is great camaraderie with the other night custodial team, supervised by Bernard Jackson. If one worker is out sick, the entire staff pulls together to get the job done.

“As a supervisor, it is important to realize that everyone can make mistakes and an extra pair of eyes can make a positive difference,” Bennett said. “A good supervisor tries to eliminate confusion by giving clear work assignments.”

The night shift does it all: general cleaning, vacuuming, dusting and trash collection. The crew also often gets the rigorous jobs of stripping and waxing floors and shampooing carpets, tasks that are difficult to accomplish when campus is in full operation during the day.

Though these night staffers are rarely seen by most campus members, the work of the night crew is visible to all. Bennett said the crew takes justifiable pride in their essential contributions toward making USF St. Petersburg a clean, welcoming and "user-friendly" campus.

“I love my job,” says Bennett, “and the best part about it is that you can actually talk to people.” One favorite is Mark Pezzo, PhD, a psychology professor known for his long, late hours and kind words to the night staff, she said.

When she is not working, Bennett said she enjoys ‘conversations’ with her two chatty parrots, T.J. and J.J. The older parrot, J.J., has mastered many words and sounds and she said he is particularly effective when barking like a dog. Consequently, Bennett said she has a sign at her home that reads: “Beware of the dog.”

Bennett can be reached at 553-4177 after 10 pm or via campus mail at POR102. For service requests, please call the Physical Plant Office at 553-4135.