

Without Cory Butler, School Events Wouldn't Run

Manager of Events Cory Butler has the entire campus memorized. Not “memorized” as in the sense that she knows how to reach every building on campus, but “memorized” as in she knows the exact number of furniture in each room, and the room number of that room. She can immediately tell you that there are 379 seats in King Theater and that Apthorp Chapel can fit 209 people. If you give her a random room number, she closes her eyes and tells you what furniture characterizes the corresponding room. In contrast, most students can't even claim to know the campus well. We only ever visit specific classrooms, the Quad, or Forbes Dining Hall—the spaces that matter to us. For Butler, the spaces that matter span all 130 acres of the school.

I'm sitting across from Butler in her balcony office on a Monday afternoon, having climbed the narrow spiral stairs that lead to the upper level of Straus. Photos and paintings of different sizes hang from the wall beside the door, and a large bookcase holds chinaware, flowers, and an orange-and-blue pompom commonly spotted at pep rallies. The mementos don't just decorate her office. They live there, stored snugly in shelves or on the walls, huddling like family. Now, coming into her fifth year at Milton, Butler sits on a navy blue armchair and tells me about what led her to know the school inside-out. It turns out that five years ago, the administration tasked her with repopulating the school with an enormous amount of its furniture.

During COVID-19, the campus underwent a “de-densification,” in which much of the furniture in each building was packed away in ten 18-foot tractor trailers. Because Butler started in her position at Milton after the school reopened, she restored all the furniture back to its original places. For nearly five months, she worked with a team of movers to unload Harkness tables, chairs, and other furniture before returning them to their former places. Restoring the clunky tables central to every English classroom felt very much like putting together pieces of an intricate puzzle, Butler remembers. She remarks that each Harkness table had been separated into two pieces before coming to a rest in its respective storage space. Moreover, the movers found all the pieces scattered randomly in different trucks, so de-densification required matching each piece to its opposite for tables in Wigglesworth Hall, the Stu, and Pritzker. By the long-awaited end, she had touched every piece of furniture on campus and committed the entire campus to memory.

Today, as Manager of Events, her knowledge of the school aids her in all the events she plans. Planning requires Butler to consider the event's every detail. For instance, for Family Weekend, where family members attend their students' classes, she accounts for setup, audiovisual needs, catering, cleaning, and participants' movements across and around campus. Knowing the campus like the back of her hand can make the preparations run more efficiently.

Once the planning finishes, Butler collaborates with the Operations Team—consisting of Campus Safety; Facilities Events and Grounds Crew; Aramark Catering; Audio Visual; Academy Technology Services; Cleaning; and more—to execute the behind-the-scenes work. She constantly communicates with the Team, ensuring each group has the necessary information while also providing timelines and check-ins to confirm each group understands how their role connects to the larger guest experience. For any event, she describes herself as the “glue” that holds all the different teams together, someone whom anyone could come to and ask for help on any aspect of the event. Other than Family Weekend, she oversees numerous events such as the Orientation Program, Opening of School, Revisit Days, Boarder Dinner, Convocation, Baccalaureate, and Graduation.

When asked if there is anything she wishes the student body knew about her work, Butler says, “There are so many people whose work happens quietly behind the scenes, yet their impact is felt everywhere. From those who set the tables...to the teams who...welcome families at registration, each person plays a vital role in creating the experience our community enjoys daily.” Without Butler and the Operations Team, school events wouldn't run. We can also play our part. The first step: noticing those around us.