Of all the engineering faculty and staff who have supported Tennessee Tech University's Center for Manufacturing Research since its inception, Darlene Wiegand shines as the professional actively involved in the groundbreaking, growth and ongoing operation of the center.

For her service and dedication to the center for more than 25 years, Wiegand was awarded TTU's Outstanding Professional Award.

"Darlene was a major player who supervised and coordinated much of the support team when the center was formed," said Joseph Scardina, mechanical engineering faculty emeritus.

Wiegand joined the university in 1976 as an assistant secretary in business management while she was pursing her bachelor's degree in business administration.

She later joined TTU's mechanical engineering department, and in 1984 began her service to the Center for Manufacturing Research as the first permanent employee of the center.

"Darlene's role within the Center for Manufacturing Research transcends her assigned job duties," said Ken Currie, center director. "She has been a counselor and a caretaker to those under her supervision; she is a jack-of-all trades and a source of corporate knowledge."

One of the major highlights of Wiegand's decades of service was her response to the way budget cuts affected the College of Engineering in 2009. A large turnover of key personnel due to retirements and voluntary buyouts left the college without financial personnel at a critical time, the end of the fiscal year. Wiegand volunteered to take on the challenge of managing financial matters.

"During the summer and fall of 2009, Darlene took the lead to process the high volume of financial, personnel and related documents for the college, in addition to continuing her responsibilities in the CMR," said Davis Huddleston, interim dean of TTU's College of Engineering. "She enabled me to move beyond replacing existing capabilities and actually enhanced and improved our financial and administrative services."

"Darlene is highly respected by her peers in the College of Engineering and throughout the TTU campus,” said Huddleston. "She is often selected to represent the college in various ways that are beyond her job description."

Wiegand was instrumental in developing a quality feedback session with a local industry that led to improving the efficiency of the student work study program. She also helped establish a pilot program for the ProCard system and gave input on how the system works with daily operational expenditures of the center's state appropriations and externally funded research projects.

“Ms. Wiegand has always been the reliable go-to person when I or other faculty have one of those non-traditional circumstances that arise during the course of executing research projects,” said Mohamed Abdelrahman, former CMR faculty member. "She takes her job seriously and her skills leading the staff are superb."