

WEATHER

Today's High **88°**
Tonight's Low **68°**



INSIDE

Local: Barns milked for state grant, Page A3

Sports: Bills slim down roster for final time, Page B1

50¢

Lockport Journal

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September 2, 2002

Fertile mind takes woman from fields to formulas

By Cindi Wittcop
Lockport Journal

Tonya Williams can still feel the heat on her back and the sweat running into her eyes as she stoops over the cucumber plants. The sharp spines prick her fingers as she pulls the vegetables from the vine. Day after sweltering summer day is spent the same way until it is time to move on to yet another harvest.

The memories are still too real for Williams, now 30, though her youth spent in the picking fields of Somerset and Florida has slipped away through two decades.

Williams holds on to the memories. They remind her

of where she came from and where she's heading.

Growing up as the daughter of migrant workers Innella and Leroy Williams, she has accomplished more than she could ever have dreamed.

This month, Williams will graduate with a bachelor's degree in human health services/community mental health from the University at Buffalo. She is concurrently working on an associate's degree in criminal justice at Niagara County Community College, with her graduation date set for Dec. 26.

In September 2003, she anticipates receiving her master's degree in human service administration from Buffalo State College and she

aims at continuing her graduate studies to become an attorney.

Williams exhibits a gritty determination to achieve her goals — though she calls it "hard headedness." She also admits to being a "free spirit," which, she says, has gotten her into tight spots, but also has allowed her the vision to seek her goals.

"I'm adventurous — I'll branch out and fly if you let me," she says.

Migrating between Florida and New York during much of her childhood, Williams was what she calls a "teenage mama." She gave birth to her first daughter, Santana, just 12 days short of her 14th birthday. The next year, her

second daughter, Innellamarie, was born.

The father of the children was Williams' childhood sweetheart in Leesburg, Fla., but she didn't marry him. Instead, she settled in Lockport in 1987, where she attended Lockport High School until March 1989, when she dropped out.

The years that followed saw Williams involved in an unhappy marriage, struggling to raise her girls while working minimum-wage jobs that offered no opportunity for advancement.

"What really broke my back was working at McDonald's," Williams said. "I

Please see **Mind**, Page A2



Photo by Laura Smit, Lockport Journal

Tonya Williams works on the computer with her daughter Santana, 16, in Lockport.

Labors of Love

Editor's Note: Quick, close your eyes and think about your job. Did you see red? If so, you may be ready for a career change. In honor of Labor Day, here are three unusual career alternatives available in Niagara County.

By Rick Forglone
Lockport Journal

TATTOO ARTIST — Job Description: Create wicked artwork and draw onto body; some light clean up work.



Sultry summer blesses parks

By Seanna Adcox
The Associated Press

ALBANY — Labor Day weekend

urging other members to vote Nov. 5 for the candidates that will be best for

ballot box, representing 20 percent of voters in 2000, up from 19 percent in 1992.

Mind: Education is the key

Continued from Page A1

knew I was never going to go anywhere working jobs like that."

So Williams signed up for a General Education Degree program offered through SUNY New Paltz College, where she lived on campus for 11 weeks. While working on her diploma, Williams said her eyes were opened to the educational opportunities available to her.

"(The GED students) were allowed to blend in with the college students," she said. "No one could tell the difference between us and them, and for the first time in my life, I felt like I was where I belonged."

Graduating second in her class in 1991, Williams was "on fire" for education and yearned to learn more, but life got in the way for the next half-dozen years as she continued her day-to-day struggle to survive.

It wasn't until 1997 that she was able to enroll at Niagara County Community College, where she studied liberal arts with a concentration on criminal justice.

Just getting to classes presented a challenge to Williams, who didn't have a driver's license, but she took advantage of rural transportation, riding a bus to and from college each day. After obtaining her license in 1998, she has been able to drive herself to classes at UB, where she completed her bachelor's degree, and the University at Buffalo Millard Fillmore College, where she received a health and human services certificate.

While at NCCC, Williams was mentored by Deborah J. Robinson, a faculty member in the counseling center,

whom she says she owes much of her academic success.

"(Robinson) has such a 'gung-ho' attitude," Williams said. "She always told me, 'The best thing you can be is an advocate for yourself.'"

That's a lesson Williams took to heart, according to Robinson, who sees a bright future for her former student.

"Tonya is one of the few people who has a great ability to form alliances, and people who form alliances tend to be very successful," Robinson said. "Tonya also is what I call an educational late bloomer, and she's a survivor."

"Some individuals who have gone through diversity are bitter, but she's not like that, she has a tendency to say 'OK, what do I need to do to get through this?' and then she calls people to get the information she needs."

Others Williams cites as having a positive impact on her educational experience are Tim Veiders, coordinator of the criminal justice program at NCCC, Niagara County Task Force Chief Craig Harmon and Lockport City Police Department Lieutenant Bob LaForest.

Asked what advice she would give to other young women who may be facing the same obstacles she encountered, Williams is matter-of-fact.

"The first step is getting a GED and then taking it from there," she said. "Also, take advantage of all the programs that are offered through various agencies in Niagara and Erie counties."

"And never stop dreaming."

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She married Rodney S. Phillips of the First United Methodist Church. She worked at Tool and Plastics in Amherst as a home mother. She was a loving and enjoyed her family. Debra has a son and two daughters, previously of Lockport.

Beloved wife of Rodney Phillips, Marie and Brian Andrew, born (Eric) Davis of Lockport, Duane (the late Jennie Bennett; grandchild of Lockport; daughter-in-law of Stretch of Lockport, Duane D. Tonawanda and Henry F. Spitzer, sister-in-law of Bradley Phillips (Stan) Rigby of Alva, FL, Karol Lockport and David Phillips. Survived by five step-brothers, uncles, nieces, nephews and

Friends and relatives are invited Tuesday from 7-9 p.m. and Wednesday from 10-12 p.m. at the Sherrie-Bream Funeral Home, Gasport, NY, where funeral services will be held on September 5, 2002 at 11:00 a.m. Selden officiating. Interment at the Cemetery, Gasport. Memorial service in memory of Debra.

Ilse Neivert

Ilse Neivert passed away August 1, 2002. She was a Fellow and Rebekah Health Officer. She was born on March 4, 1924 in Breslau, Germany. She was the wife of Ernst and Else Aber Kaiser.

She immigrated to England via the War Relocation Authority Program. In England she enrolled in the St. Mary's Boarding School, which accepted students from Germany. At St. Mary's she worked as a nurse and was in charge of caring for approximately 70 patients in the school. In 1940, when a German invasion seemed imminent, she was evacuated to the Isle of Man for three months. She returned to St. Mary's in 1941.

Mrs. Neivert came to the United States in 1947 where she lived in New York City. She then enrolled at the New York State College of Cobleskill, NY, from which she graduated in 1950. She was a member of her class. In 1947, Mrs. Neivert who was attending Cornell University in Ithaca, NY. At Cornell she taught in the foreign language department. In 1950, Mrs. Neivert and her husband moved to Lockport, NY. She worked at Springs and then to Lockport. Mrs. Neivert was the chairman of the Board of the School and Crafts Show. She founded the school and taught there for a number of years. She served as President of the Board of Meals-On-Wheels.

She is survived by her husband, Bruce of Lockport and Peter