

Graduate beat obstacles

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Four years ago when she got accepted to Davidson, Hollis' Gaffney High School classmates were shocked. The class valedictorian, who also applied to Davidson, wasn't accepted.

"I had people say, how did you get anything from Davidson? You're on welfare," she recalled. "When she found out I was accepted to Davidson, she started screaming affirmative action," Hollis said.

Hollis went to Davidson to visit its campus in north Mecklenburg County. What she saw almost made her not want to enroll. "I didn't see many African Americans," she said. But an administrator at the school, Leonard Saderwhite, called Hollis' pastor, who prayed with her about going to Davidson. But the determining factor that kept her from going to Wofford College or Yale University (which also accepted her) was the "generous financial aid package" Davidson offered.

And Davidson's campus is close to her family. Hollis' mother, Detra Foster, became a mother at young age and that forced her to drop out of high school so that she could work two jobs. Hollis, who said she has never met her father, has a close bond with her grandmother, Lenora Hollis, who raised Hollis and a younger brother and sister until Foster moved the family to Gaffney.

It was a rough transition, Hollis said. "We went from seeing my grandmother and grandfather every day to moving to this foreign place," she said. As a pre-teen, Hollis acted out. Fighting in school, getting suspended and expelled. But her life changed in

the eighth grade when a guidance counselor Dorse Cleveland, decided that she was worth saving.

She got through high school, working and helping her mother take care of her sister and brother. Then she arrived at Davidson. Immediately, her peers knew she was different.

"I didn't find much of a community at Davidson (with other black students)," Hollis said.

She also had different worries from other students on campus, Pittard said.

"During one exam period," Pittard recalled, "one of her friends was killed. (Tiffany) was the godmother to her child and then she was gone."

Hollis spent her time making a difference on and off campus. She was the first black female to run for student body president and became an advocate for Davidson's West Side community.

"She has this really amazing ability to motivate young people to make better choices," Pittard said. "There is a fine line between enabling and empowering and Tiffany is always trying to find that line."

After graduation, Hollis plans to return to Gaffney and help others. She wants to work with young people, and plans to return home and live with Lenora.

Hollis has already inspired her brother and sister to want to further their education.

"One thing I hope for Tiffany is that her next situation allows her to blossom and she still learns the lesson that she needs to learn," Pittard said.

Newcomers

Cheris Hodges and Angela Brown have joined The Post's reportorial and advertising staffs.

Hodges is The Post's features editor. A 1999 graduate of Johnson C. Smith University, she previously worked at the (Greensboro) News & Record and (Winston-Salem) Chronicle.

Brown is The Post's classified and real estate account specialist. A native of Lancaster, S.C., she is a graduate of the University of South Carolina and previously worked in the mortgage lending and real estate industry.



Hodges

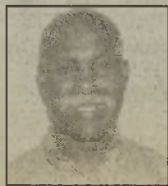


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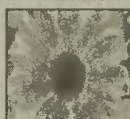
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