

Magna cum laude graduate: Now he is ready to pursue his master's degree

By CHERYL WILLIAMS
Chronicle Staff Writer

It took William W. Phillips Sr. of Winston-Salem more than 20 years to get to college. When he got there, he was determined to excel — and he did.

Phillips graduated *magna cum laude* from Winston-Salem State University with a degree in business administration.

"I had no idea I would finish with honors," Phillips, 45, said. "The only time I measured my grades was the first semester. I wanted to really see if I could make it.

"I felt it was something I should have done a long time ago," Phillips said about his decision to enter college at the age of 39.

Phillips, a soft-spoken, well-dressed man, took time to reflect on his college career last Wednesday in his home.

A lot has happened since the time he first thought about college and the present. He said that when he graduated from high school in the 1950s, he wanted to

go to college, but his family just could not afford it.

Phillips then put the thought of college aside to get on with his life. He got a job with Twin City



William W. Phillips

Electric Co. He worked there for almost two years before going to work for a furniture company. He then went into the Army.

After his stint with the Army, he returned to Winston-Salem

and got a job with what was then R.J. Reynolds.

During this time, Phillips had married. His wife died about two weeks after the birth of their son, William W. Phillips Jr.

He remarried in 1974. He is now divorced and lives with his son, who is a junior at WSSU.

For the past 24 years, Phillips has been employed as a superintendent of window services at the post office.

He said that it was the influence of a "special friend," whom he did not want to name, that prompted him to go to college. "This friend urged me to go to college and get a degree in what I already knew," he said.

At age 39 Phillips entered WSSU. "I have always felt that WSSU was a fine institution," he said. "I didn't think about going to any other school."

Being an older student in his classes did not bother him, he said. He said that he often found himself giving advice to the younger students.

"I helped a lot of students realize that if they cheated, they were cheating themselves, not the instructor," he said. "I told them that they needed to apply themselves."

Phillips took his own advice about applying himself and soon became hooked on school.

"I stopped doing everything except working and going to school," he said. "If it required my going to the library, then I would go to the library and do what I needed. To me college was a way of organizing myself."

He said that he was averaging about three courses a semester at night and working full time at the post office during the day.

College did require some other adjustments. Phillips said that he had never been a person to read much, but in college he had to read a lot.

Phillips said that college never caused any problems between him and his son. In fact, they often studied together, he said.

He said that when he entered college, his son was still in high school. "It was an inspiration to him for me to go to college," Phillips said.

After about seven years of night school, Phillips finished the requirements for his degree.

He said that during this time he strove for the highest grades and usually received them. Usually when the time came around to

look at the end-of-semester grades, he said he received a boost. But his grade bubble of excellence burst on one occasion when he received a "C" in an accounting class.

"When I received my one and only 'C' it was like boom, you're dead," he said. "It was my first introduction to that course. I panicked. I said, 'That will never happen again.' It really blew my mind."

Because he worked, Phillips said he never had time to get involved with any campus activities.

He did, however, pledge the Omicron Gamma Lambda Chapter of Alpha Phi Alpha Fraternity Inc. He proudly displayed his elaborately decorated black-and-gold paddle as he talked about his hope that his son would follow in his footsteps and pledge Alpha also.

Throughout his time in college, Phillips had the support not only of his son but of the rest of his family as well. The youngest in a family of five, he said that his three sisters and his brother attended the commencement exercises.

Two sisters came from their home in Washington, while the

other sister and his brother, who live in Winston-Salem, didn't have far to travel.

Phillips said that he has gotten a quality education from WSSU. "I couldn't ask for better instructors," he said. "I feel like right now I could go out and compete with the world."

But Phillips said that he doesn't want to compete with the world at the moment.

His plans for the future include continuing to work in his present job. In 10 more years he can retire from the job.

Phillips plans to pursue a master's degree in marketing, but he said that he will take six months off before taking the plunge back into the books.

His plans also include eventually starting a business.

Today, Phillips is a proud man, and with good reason, because on May 18, when he strolled down the aisle at the Coliseum with his red honor cord around his neck, he had accomplished something he had only dreamed about before.

Phillips urges all older adults to go to college and pursue their dreams.

"Try it," he said. "You'll be surprised that you can do it."

Bailey

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Walter Marshall, then a Roundtable member, now president of the city's NAACP. Marshall said he feels much the same today.

"His votes have been OK but the problem has been his lack of verbalization on issues," Marshall said in an interview Wednesday morning. "He doesn't speak up on certain issues."

Yet, even while criticizing Bailey in 1983 as needing "to do more in the black community," Roundtable member Larry D. Little, then an alderman, said Bailey had improved.

Bailey and Drayton discount the critics. "I have to get along with my school board members," Bailey said. "The board knows that when I speak, I am speaking for black folks. But I can't offend them. If I was a militant, I could not get anything done."

Drayton said criticism of Bailey's performance by some blacks is unwarranted. "I don't believe he is weak," Drayton said. "No black can be as outspoken as some would like when he is the only black on the board."

Bailey's biggest accomplishments have been persuading the board and administration to hire two black principals and two black assistant superintendents, he said.

"We needed some black principals and officials within the system," Bailey said. "I was under pressure from the black community to get some black principals."

There had not been any black principals since the city-county school system was integrated in

the early '70s, Bailey said.

Bailey, who is vice chairman of the school board, says he believes his influence among his fellow board members has improved since he was first elected in 1974.

"They listen to what I have to say," Bailey said. "They try to do something about my (recommendations) if they can. I have made the board and superintendent more aware of the needs of black people."

Bailey said he receives many telephone calls from black and white parents about the education of their children.

"When I was first started as a school board member, I didn't get calls from any parents," Bailey said. "Now, I think people trust me."

The most recent controversy Bailey and the school board must address regards changes in school attendance lines to alleviate racial imbalances, he said.

"I can feel the pressure, and I am in a delicate situation," Bailey said. "I think it will be a campaign issue, but I don't want it to become one. It is going to upset a whole lot of people."

Bailey says he supports a study of the attendance lines, but he feels no changes should be made for the 1986-87 term.

Regardless of the issues, Bailey said, his chances are good in November. "I feel that I have been fair to everyone," he said.

"He is a very credible public official," said R. Michael Wells, chairman of the Forsyth County Democratic Party. "He is recognized as a good and capable person."

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Correction

In the story in last week's *Chronicle* titled, "City worker files lawsuit," it was incorrectly stated that Curtis E. Dixon earned a master's degree from North Carolina A&T State University in public administration.

In fact, Dixon received a master's degree from A&T State in mathematics and a master's degree in public affairs/administration from the University of North Carolina at Greensboro. He has also completed 36 semester hours toward a doctoral degree in administration from UNC-G.

In addition, the story implied erroneously that Dixon served in the U.S. Air Force after he earned a diploma from Atkins High School. In fact, Dixon was graduated from A&T State before he went into the service.

The *Chronicle* regrets both errors.

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