



PAULA ALMOND (left) discusses plans to charter national honors fraternity Phi Theta Kappa at Brunswick

Community College with Beth McLean, dean of student services.

## Paula Almond Honored As Outstanding Student

BY DOUG RUTTER

When she was 16 years old, Paula Almond dropped out of high school to get married.

At the time, she said, it seemed like the thing to do.

Last weekend, she was named one of three outstanding students enrolled in the state community college system.

Mrs. Almond, a 33-year-old mother of four working toward an associate degree in general office technology at Brunswick Community College, was selected from among 17 other students in the eastern division to earn the North Carolina Comprehensive Community College Student Government Outstanding Student Award.

Candidates for the award had to be full-time active students with a quarterly grade point average of at least 2.5. Nominees also had to submit a personal history and a letter of recognition from a faculty member who teaches in their curriculum.

In her letter of support, math instructor Nancy Davis wrote: "I feel Paula should be highly commended for her 'balancing act' at being a mother and housewife, a work-study student, a performer of many assorted odd jobs, as well as a participant in community, school, and church affairs."

In addition to her full schedule of classes at BCC, which include typing, business math, records management and data processing, Mrs. Almond also works about 20 hours per week in the business curriculum office under the institution's work-study program.

The native of Albemarle is also a BCC Student Government Association senator, a member of the National Vocational-Technical Honor Society and an assistant den leader with the Tiger Cub and Cub Scout packs in which two of her sons are involved.

Mrs. Almond and her disabled husband of eight years, Eddie, have lived with their four children at Sunset Harbor for the past six years. Their two teenage children are from her first marriage, which lasted about five years.

With numerous commitments at home and school, where she currently maintains a 3.3 grade point average, her daily schedule doesn't usually allow much time to relax. "I tried crocheting and that's about the only thing I can get in."

But as a woman on a mission of improving the lives of her loved ones, she said it's all worth it. "You have to make 48 hours into 24," she added. "If it wasn't for all of

them (her husband and children), I couldn't manage it at all."

Before earning her state award, the BCC Student Government Association executive council selected Mrs. Almond to receive its outstanding student award. She was among eight students faculty members nominated for the honor.

While she said she was shocked to earn the state honor, Mrs. Almond added that she was also surprised to win the local award.

"I was up against some good competition," she continued. "We have a lot of good students in this school so it surprised me very much. It means I've really accomplished a lot."

Beth McLean, dean of student services at BCC, said, "I think Paula's just a wonderful example of what this college can do. It's just an example what anyone can do if they want to. It's the reason I'm here."

Mrs. Almond, who realized a lifelong dream in 1986 when she earned the equivalent of a high school diploma through BCC's General Educational Development (GED) program, hopes to complete studies for her associate degree next spring.

Because she dropped out of high school and realizes the additional hurdles uneducated members of society must face, she said she pushes her children extra hard when it comes to completing their education.

"I wish somebody had kicked me back then to keep me from dropping out," she said, adding that a degree, or at least a high school diploma, is a necessity to get anywhere in today's world.

Before giving up high school, she was basically a good student, she recalled. "I had it all up there. I just didn't use it a lot of times."

After completing her degree requirements next year, she said she hopes to find a position as an office manager or in a related career. However, she is just as quick to add that she may continue her education with some computer courses or possibly enroll in a four-year institution.

"I really just want to do something that challenges me," she added. "I love to be challenged."

Meanwhile, she will continue to take things one day at a time and encourage others who may have dropped out of high school to return for their diploma.

"It doesn't matter what your age is. You just have to have the determination to do it," she said. "It really makes you feel good about your life."

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