

For moms, a chance to earn college degree

Answer Scholarship aims to help them return to school, set example for their kids.

By Lisa Du

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Want to help?

For more information on how to donate or be a volunteer mentor for the Answer Scholarship Endowment, please go to www.answerscholarship.org or contact Susan Andersen at sandersen@carolina.rr.com. Donations are sent to the Foundation for the Carolinas, which administers the scholarship.

In 2005, Charlotte resident Susan Andersen found herself a divorced mother of two. She decided to turn her sadness into something positive.

Andersen acted on a vow she made in her college days - when a scholarship helped her pay the bills - that she was going to give back to her community. She used money from her divorce settlement to start the Answer Scholarship Endowment, a nontraditional scholarship for mothers over the age of 25 with school-aged children in the Charlotte-Mecklenburg area. The Foundation for the Carolinas administers it.

Since its creation, the scholarship has been able to help 30 mothers go back to school to obtain either a four-year bachelor's degree or a two-year nursing degree. Several have gone on to obtain master's degrees.

By helping a mother receive an education, Andersen hopes to be able to help an entire family.

"I feel strongly that education is the key and if you educate the mom you're setting an example for her children to follow in her footsteps," said Andersen, a sales director for Mary Kay cosmetics.

That goal came through in the case of Tonya Faulkner. Faulkner obtained a degree in human and community services from Queens University of Charlotte with the help of Andersen's scholarship in 2007. This fall, Faulkner's daughter, Moiah, will be enrolling at Queens as a freshman.

"She knew how important it was for women to take care of their family and also lead their family," Faulkner said. "If she hadn't taken the time to (create the scholarship), I would not be a graduate student now and my daughter would not be in her first undergraduate program."

Until now, Andersen has personally funded the scholarship endowment. But due to the economic downturn and rising demand for the scholarship, Andersen is looking to raise \$20,000 to give out more scholarships.

"It's kind of grown beyond me," she said. "There are a lot of moms out there who want to go back to school."

Andersen said she is also seeking volunteers to mentor scholarship recipients.

Mentoring is something that Andersen herself has gained traction in. Several mothers who received the scholarship said they get regular phone calls from Andersen to ask about their lives and classes.

Andersen also holds a luncheon every semester for her beneficiaries so everyone can meet.

Shantell Kelty, who is studying to obtain degrees in business administration and management information systems from Pfeiffer University, said attending the luncheons was one of her best decisions.

"I acquired new friends and met Susan," Kelty said. "It touched me that she would take the time every year to get to know the recipients."

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DAVIDSON TEEN NEVER SAW SHARK THAT BIT HER

Kendall Parker, 13, is recovering after attack in the surf at Wrightsville Beach. **2B**

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