

## **Nelson scholarships fund NWACC PTA students**

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**By Steven Davis**

### **NWACC Public Relations Intern**

BENTONVILLE – Four NorthWest Arkansas Community College students received the William Nelson PTA (Physical Therapist Assistant) scholarship Friday, June 15.

A total of \$20,000 in scholarship money was awarded to Jennifer Innis, Terry Robinson, Heather Wilichowski, and Cassandra Witten to help pay tuition and books for the PTA program.

Jennifer Innis is from Salem, Ark. Innis is still adjusting from the small town life to Northwest Arkansas life.

“It’s definitely a big change,” Innis said.

Her parents and younger brother live in Salem. Innis received an associate’s degree from ASU-Mountain Home, a bachelor’s degree in Interdisciplinary Studies from ASU Jonesboro and now attends NWACC to receive her PTA degree.

Innis loves being around people and that is what being a PTA allows her to do.

“I love watching people overcome obstacles and being able to say I helped them makes me feel good,” Innis said.

Her expectations are to make lifelong friends with peers and instructors, obtain everything she needs to know about the PTA profession, and begin preparation for the licensure exam in August.

Innis said that she is very grateful for the scholarship.

“This scholarship shows that I have accomplished a couple of things in life, like making good grades and being accepted into this program,” she said. “It means that I don’t have to take out another student loan.”

After graduation, Innis plans to move back to Mountain Home and work as a PTA. Eventually, she would like to return to school to become a Physical Therapist.

Terry Robinson is 37 years old, has a wife, and three children, age 12, seven, and four. They live in Bentonville. Robinson has always enjoyed martial arts; therefore, physical fitness has always been a part of his life.

“I’ve chosen this field because I like to work with people specifically in the area of overcoming restricted movement, cause by whatever circumstance,” Robinson said. “This coupled with an extensive knowledge base in physiology and nutrition, will allow me to enhance the lives of the people in my community and provide a comfortable lifestyle for my wife and children.”

Robinson said he was attracted to NWACC by the accelerated program.

“For starters, NWACC is considered one of, if not the best community college in the nation,” Robinson said. “The PTA training staff and program material are second to none.”

Robinson said that instructors really know their stuff and are good at teaching it. He also said that the college atmosphere at NWACC seems more serious and better organized.

Robinson said this scholarship provides the supplemental income necessary for him to focus more on the PTA course and its practical applications. Otherwise, he would be required to work many hours to maintain his family budget, and find that his true curriculum retention would suffer.

“Quite simply, it relieves some of the pressure,” Robinson said.

Robinson said that he plans on staying local when he finishes the program.

Heather Wilichowski (above) is from Rogers and has two younger siblings. Wilichowski graduated from Rogers High School in 2005 and attended Missouri State, Springfield, Mo., for her first year of college. She moved back in fall 2006 to attend NWACC.

Wilichowski said one of her biggest reasons for coming to NWACC was the PTA program.

“I chose to be a PTA because I have been interested in sports related injuries for as long as I can remember,” Wilichowski said. “I played soccer for 11 years and saw many injuries and always wanted to know how to help them.”

Wilichowski expects the program to be tough, but very much worth the hard effort in the end.

“I expect to be very well educated at the end of the program and well prepared to go into the PTA work field,” she said.

Wilichowski said this scholarship means she will be able to go through the program without working as much as originally expected.

“I will get to focus more on my studies as opposed to having to worry about making money to pay for my schooling,” she said.

Once she finishes the program, Wilichowski hopes to work sports-related injuries or pediatrics.

Cassandra Witten is from Washburn, Mo., and has a four year old son. Witten started at NWACC in summer 2006 and has been working on her prerequisites. She is now in her fourth semester.

Witten has been in healthcare for four years and says she has found her niche. Witten enjoys interacting with people as well as helping them.

“When a PTA helps their patient regain strength after an injury, they are helping that patient get a part of their life back,” Witten said. “Being able to help someone like that and watch them progress is a process I can’t wait to be a part of.”

Witten said NWACC’s PTA program has a wonderful reputation. She said, after only four days into the program, she had already learned a lot.

“My instructors are great and I am in a class with a fantastic group of people,” Witten said.

Her expectations for the program are to learn from her mentors, absorb the information, and take the material she learns and use it to become a well-rounded PTA.

Witten said with the help of the scholarship she can focus on school work more and financial needs less.

“I have cut my hours drastically at work, so of course ‘getting by’ is always a stress in the back of my mind,” Witten said. “The William Nelson scholarship helps to ease that stress so I can devote myself entirely to the PTA program.”

William Nelson was a local business man who received physical therapy, off and on, over the course of his life. William did not have family and when he passed away two years ago, he left money to be managed by the Care Foundation with the only specification that it be used in some way for physical therapy.

Chris Stecklein, Program Officer, and his associates at the Care Foundation contacted all physical therapy and physical therapist assistant schools in the state and spoke with program directors and students. Last year, Care Foundation chose to award a full scholarship to an NWACC student, Chris Kirby, who will graduate in August from the PTA program. This year, the Care Foundation gave 26 scholarships totaling \$57,000.

The Care Foundation is able to choose which school it offers scholarships to and how much to award. NWACC has been one of those schools for the first two years.

A physical therapist assistant provides therapy to patients of all ages under the supervision of a physical therapist. Physical therapist assistants have direct one-on-one contact with patients providing the patient therapy.

The PTA program consists of two parts: the prerequisite courses and the technical courses. Prerequisite courses can be taken part-time or full-time, transferred from another school to NWACC, and/or completed during the spring semester of application to technical classes.