

BC3 single mom joins children in her “Hall of Fame” with Governor’s Achievement Award

State lauds BC3 @ LindenPointe social work major, KEYS participant

June 6, 2018



Butler County Community College student Katina Reed, 45, fourth from left, is shown Friday, June 1, 2018, with her children, from left, Kamira, 16; Tyrone, 21; KaShya, 7; and Tracey, 13; at their home in Sharon. Katina, a BC3 @ LindenPointe social work major, has received a 2018 Governor’s Achievement Award for “obtaining employment and for taking the steps necessary to lead your family toward self-sufficiency.”

(Sharon, PA) Butler County Community College student Katina Reed turns her right cheek to accept 21-year-old son Tyrone’s kiss before he darts out the door for his job as a certified nursing assistant.

Reed’s daughter Kimari, 16, is savoring the highest honors award she received from Sharon Area High School. Son Tracey, 13, is chattering about becoming an astronaut. And daughter KaShya, 7, is pointing out pictures of her favorite teachers – “That’s Mrs. Sangregorio. I call her ‘Mrs. S’ and that’s Miss Kokoski, I call her ‘Miss K’” – in the 2017-2018 C.M. Musser Elementary School yearbook KaShya brought home this very day.

Kimari's chenille-and-felt varsity letter – protected by a waxpaper sleeve, ACADEMICS in capital orange letters printed across the spine of a block-shaped, blue "S" – will be placed in "Katina's Hall of Fame." The 6-foot-tall, light-grained wooden cabinet with four windows is surrounded by packing boxes in the kitchen of a public housing apartment the family is preparing to leave and is near where Kimari is cooking dinner.

Alongside Kimari's varsity letter, Tyrone's 2015 Farrell Area High School diploma, and Tracey's football and KaShya's dance trophies, will be placed the 45-year-old single mother's Governor's Achievement Award, which she received in Hershey on May 17. The 8-inch by 4-inch wooden plaque in the shape of Pennsylvania reads: "This award is presented to you in recognition of your hard work demonstrated by obtaining employment and for taking the steps necessary to lead your family toward self-sufficiency."

"I am proud of myself because I am achieving"

Reed is a social work major at BC3 @ LindenPointe, Hermitage, and one of eight Pennsylvanians to receive the award presented during the Pennsylvania Workforce Development Association's "Journey to the Top" conference in Hershey. The participant in BC3's Keystone Education Yields Success program was selected for gaining financial independence for her family through employment and ending her acceptance of Temporary Assistance for Needy Families cash assistance.

Nominees in the 2017-18 fiscal year must have participated in EARN, Work Ready, KEYS or Refugee programs, obtained employment and closed cash assistance after July 1, 2017, as a result of employment, according to Sandra R. Judge, of the state Department of Human Services.

"I am proud of myself," Reed said, "because I am achieving. Slowly, but surely. Not in a specific order, but I am doing it and I am not the only person who is proud of what I am doing."

There is also KaShya – "My mother does hard work. And she goes to college" – and also, Reed said, laughing, "the governor."

KEYS, a program among Pennsylvania's 14 community colleges and the Department of Human Services, provides assistance and services to students receiving TANF and-or Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program benefits.

Among the KEYS program's goals is that its students attend and participate in school with the intent of graduating with a credit- or noncredit-bearing certificate or associate degree in career-specific programs.

“I thought, ‘I have to go back to school’”

Following her 1993 graduation from what is now the Lawrence County Career and Technical Center, where she earned a certificate in restaurant trades – Reed’s “ham and potato soup” is the family favorite, Kimari says, disagreeing with Tyrone, who prefers his mother’s chocolate cheesecake “New York-style,” he says – Reed studied part-time at Baltimore City Community College, near her father’s residence, and worked full-time through positions secured from a temporary job agency.

Five days after Reed’s Baltimore City Community College spring semester ended in 2009, her father – Gene Cheatham, 58, of Baltimore, her “favorite guy,” a master carpenter with whom she attended rhythm and blues concerts twice a month an hour from their homes – died of pancreatic cancer. Reed would not return to Baltimore City Community College.

Reed relocated to Western Pennsylvania in January 2015, and found employment as a personal care assistant, a job in which she injured her left shoulder, necessitating workers’ compensation. The reduction in salary forced the family from its neighborhood rental into the public housing apartment they have called home since October 2016.

When her workers’ compensation benefits expired in January 2017, Reed began to receive full TANF benefits.

“I was thinking, ‘What am I going to do with myself?’” Reed said. “I like hands-on work and working with people. And working with intellectually challenged and elderly people is hands-on. Sometimes you have to do basically everything for them. I had injured myself and I couldn’t do that anymore.”

Reed noticed a KEYS flyer affixed to a bulletin board during a July 2017 visit to the state Department of Public Welfare office in Hermitage.

“I thought, ‘I have to go back to school.’”



Butler County Community College student Katina Reed, 45, is shown Friday, June 1, 2018, at her home in Sharon with the Governor’s Achievement Award, and commendations from the office of the governor, the Pennsylvania Senate and the Pennsylvania House of Representatives. She received the recognitions May 17 during the Pennsylvania Workforce Development Association’s “Journey to the Top” conference in Hershey.

“I like to make my own money”

The former human development and human disabilities major at Baltimore City Community College resumed pursuit of her associate degree as a full-time student at BC3 @ LindenPointe in Hermitage, found a 25-hours-a-week position with Diversified Family Services, Hermitage, and ended her TANF cash assistance – all within the state’s 2017-18 fiscal year.

“I am not the type of person who sits at home,” Reed said. “I like to make my own money. I like my own stuff. I like to work.”

Reed, said Karen Jack, the KEYS program director at BC3 and who nominated Reed for the Governor’s Achievement Award, “had a lot of struggles. But she kept going. I am really proud of her. She continues to work and achieve her goals even though she has had a lot of setbacks. She doesn’t let that stop her. She is extremely motivated and inspiring to others.”

BC3’s KEYS program provides help

Reed was one of about 100 BC3 students who participated in KEYS during the 2017-18 academic year, Jack said. Six of those students received associate degrees or certificates in BC3’s 2018 commencement exercises.

Reed found that KEYS would assist with purchasing textbooks for classes that have included family balance and lifespan, social welfare, human diversity, sociology, microcomputing, psychology and English.

“I couldn’t afford them on my own,” she said.

She will take film analysis and intermediate algebra at BC3 @ LindenPointe in summer sessions that begin June 12.

KEYS also provides a sounding board, Reed said – “If I have things on my mind, they listen, and they help me figure out my plans” – and funded \$1,000 in automobile repairs – “a tune-up and two new tires” – necessary for her family’s trip to Hershey to watch her receive the Governor’s Achievement Award.

“I wouldn’t have been able to afford that on my own, even though I am working,” Reed said. “KEYS has everything available to you if you need it.”

One thing her family no longer needs is TANF cash assistance.

“My kids all want to be either working or going to school,” Reed said. “But that’s my rule anyway. You got to go to work. You got to go to school. I try to speak positive to them. They see that I keep trying and I don’t give up. It makes them push even harder.”

“You have to cook grits on low,” Reed yells toward the kitchen to Kimari, who plans to become a clinical psychologist.

“Go outside and play with Sanai,” Reed tells KaShya, who calls her mother her “best friend.”

“I have very good kids,” Reed said. “They are well-mannered. Some people ask me, ‘Is that your daughter? Is that your son?’ I say, ‘Yes, what did they do?’ And they say, ‘They didn’t do anything. They are just so well-mannered.’ And I love that.”

Once the family returns to a single-family neighborhood rental, “Katina’s Hall of Fame” will be positioned in the living room – “Right by the front door, as soon as you walk in, so everyone can see it,” Reed said.

Reed will also enshrine related Governor’s Achievement Award commendations from the Pennsylvania Senate – “Through her indomitable courage and enduring spirit,” the proclamation states, Reed “has been able to find a balance between school, work and motherhood”; and from the Pennsylvania House of Representatives – “She has successfully overcome numerous barriers to achieve her true potential.”

She will save room for the associate degree she hopes to receive from BC3 @ LindenPointe next May, and the bachelor’s degree she plans to pursue from a senior institution to follow.

“I am proud of myself,” Reed said. “I know I have been struggling for a long while to get to where I want to be. And I keep going and not let my barriers hold me back. Just knocking them down. Knocking them down. One by one.

“It’s a slow process, but it’s in progress.”