

Work Samples

Toni Marie Talley

3/4/2021

The following work samples are a reflection of my work as a News Reporter for WACH Fox News 57 in Columbia, South Carolina.

From SC State University to the big screen

Orangeburg, S.C. (WACH) - The South Carolina State 101 Marching Band kicked off the school year in traditional bulldog fashion with a pep rally Wednesday afternoon.

Lacyona Muldrow is in the middle of all this playing her snare drum, a vision her grandmother had more than two decades ago.

It's now a craft that landed the college senior a role in a motion picture on [VH1, Drumline 2](#).

"Going there and being involved with that, it was just phenomenal," said Muldrow. "I'm in a movie. Who would have ever thought I would be in a movie."

The first Drumline hit theatres more than a decade ago, starring Nick Cannon. Muldrow says her friends and family encouraged her to try out for the sequel.

Waiting until the last minute to decide if she'd go to the auditions in Georgia, Muldrow tells WACH Fox at first she didn't have any form of transportation to get there, but her parents made a way.

"I had to be there at seven, we didn't get there until five in the morning. We had nowhere to stay. The hotel rooms were booked. We actually slept in the car. I changed at McDonald's to get to the audition," said Muldrow.

After two days of auditions, the 101 Marching Band member got the news of a lifetime. Muldrow won over casting directors to play the double of the leading actress, a moment her mother would never forget.

"It was actually on Mother's Day," said Muldrow. "My mother said if you go there and land this role for me that would be the best unforgettable Mother's Day gift for me."

Lacyona will join more than 20 other members of her band colleagues in the movie, and the apple doesn't fall too far from the tree. SC State Band Director, Eddie Ellis, played a part in the first Drumline movie.

He says hard practice got him the role, which is a routine he strives to teach his students.

"It feels great simply because the first movie," said Ellis. "We talked about the first movie all of the time and now for them to be a part of it and experience it as they get on the scene and be in it, I'm just happy, really happy."

Lacyona says she's hopeful her role in the movie will encourage young girls around the world.

"I want to be the change and allow females to say, I can do this," said Muldrow. "I wanted to be that person, that idol that young females can look up to and say she's doing it in college or she's doing it in high school. I can do it. I want to go and do it. It's possible to do it."

Drumline 2 will be coming to a TV near you this fall on VH1.

If you'd like to get a feel of the SC State 101 Marching Band before the movie premieres, the band will travel to Charlotte, North Carolina on Saturday, August 23 to participate in the Queen City Battle of the Bands.

For more information, [click here](#).

Local leaders react to Ferguson town hall discussion

Columbia, S.C. (WACH) - Since the shooting of 18-year-old Michael Brown, racial equality in America has become a common question among local leaders.

WACH Fox hosted a panel for the "Your Voice Your Future" town hall discussion where panelist argue the events leading up to and after the death of Brown, reiterating debates that racial divides still exist in the United States.

"The outrage that you see in Ferguson I believe is a cry from people saying this is America," said Columbia Mayor, Steve Benjamin. "There are certain things that ought not happen here and we're not happy about it because it's not just happening in Ferguson, it's happening all over the country."

With the town hall focusing on moving America forward, community policing and more training within law enforcement were two of many solutions suggested.

"I think that we, we collectively as a country, need to rethink this whole position of militarization of our law enforcement departments around the country," said Cynthia Hardy, referring to what some called excessive force when police officers attempted to calm protestors in Ferguson.

However, before those recommendations can come into play, some argue that the change for America will need start with the younger generation in order to rebuild trust between the community and law enforcement.

"It starts with the youth. It starts with the programs. Perception is everything," said Sgt. Kevin Lawrence with the Richland County Sheriff's Department.

"Community policing is more than a concept," added JT McLawhorn, president of the Columbia Urban League. "It is a process where people connect with folks, so if you don't have any connectivity, then you're not going to have any success in this society."

Also reacting to Ferguson in Tuesday night's town hall discussion was Pastor Robert Cale with New Direction church.

He says not only will police officers need to protect and serve, but communities also need to learn to protect those who live in it.

"The police can't fix everything," said Cale. "It takes us the everyday people to live in that conduct of Christ."

Echoing Cale was Courtney Sanders who joined in to watch the town hall discussion.

"We need the accountability from everybody, and that's the biggest thing is expecting things from people and having them deliver," said Sanders.

Brown, who is black, was unarmed when he was shot Aug. 9 by Officer Darren Wilson, who is white. A grand jury is considering evidence in the case and a federal investigation is also underway.

Reversing the curse, taking control of your diabetes

COLUMBIA, S.C. (WACH) - Diabetes is the seventh leading cause of death in South Carolina, effecting more than 300,000 South Carolinians.

It's a disease effecting 1 in 8 African-Americans in the state, the 16th highest rate of Diabetes among African-Americans in the nation.

"I was diagnosed with Diabetes in February of 2014," said Frank Levi.

A fan of everything sugar and already familiar with diabetic symptoms, Levi says he walked into his physician's office prepared for what the nurses had to tell him. He wasn't registering on the diabetic scale, being diagnosed with Type 2 Diabetes.

"I sat and listened," said Levi. "I already went in with the mind that whatever she recommended me to do I was going to do, and I did."

Going cold turkey by drastically changing his eating habits and exercising more, Levi would drop from 268 lbs. to 220 lbs. in a matter of weeks. He says his weight loss shocked nurses, but his battle of reversing the curse was far from over. He'd be informed if by dropping between 10 to 15 extra pounds, doctors could take him off of his medication.

"Do the meds, exercise, and eating right consistently. That's what it is. It's the exercising and the eating right, it heals the body," said Levi.

Now he's made eating healthy and exercising a lifestyle. He tells WACH Fox that Diabetes forced him to change his life, and in the meantime it's inspired others to change theirs as well.

"Some people have just watched me," said Levi. "I didn't even know that God was doing it but He used it to inspire a lot of people to make a change in their lifestyle."

Levi contributes his family, friends, and his faith in God for encouraging him to stay determined to get back on track.

"I believe that because of the work ethic and because of faith, the Bible talks about faith without good works is dead, and I believe that couples with the belief of the power of what Christ can do," said Levi.

Frank is no longer on medication, aiming to continue his efforts of raising awareness in the community about the deadly disease.

105-years-old and still voting

COLUMBIA, S.C. (WACH) - Election day is here with voters nationwide filing into the polls to cast their vote.

One Midlands woman knows all too well the importance of getting out and exercising her right.

At 105-years-old, Allen University Alumni, educator, and civil rights activist, Donella Wilson, has not missed an election since 1948. It was the first time Wilson was given the privilege to vote after being denied for decades because of the color of her skin.

"I was so proud," explained Wilson.

Never forgetting her first time voting in the capital city, Wilson says voting was a right the people wanted and a battle she's proud to have been a part of to help move the nation forward.

"We had an opportunity that we didn't have before and we were just marching one behind the other," said Wilson. "We had lines. Kept lines moving."

As Columbia's oldest voter, Wilson's voting experience has become a highlight for many over the years.

Tuesday, Jim Clyburn, Columbia Mayor Steve Benjamin, and James Felder among other community leaders all greeted her at the Prince Hall Masonic Lodge.

Richland County election commission ready for Tuesday's voters

COLUMBIA, S.C. (WACH) - It has been two years since a botched election in Richland County created some major changes in the county's election infrastructure.

Since 2012, the county election commission has undergone several changes including new leadership to improve the voting system. This time around, the outcome is expected to be a lot different.

"We're planning and we're constantly planning and we're planning to get better, make this office better when it comes to voting," said Samuel Selph, chair of the Richland County Election's Commission.

Selph has chaired the election's commission since February of 2014. He's the third chair in two years.

Since being in the position, Selph has made strides to improve the voting process in Richland County. It's the type of effort that has not gone unnoticed by voters who rallied for change due to long wait times, uncounted votes, and out-dated machines in the 2012 elections.

"We were strong in our grievance with how poorly it was handled as far as a city is concerned," said Donnie Clark, who cast his vote early on Monday.

Those kinds of concerns are issues Selph says his staff has trained for in the recent months, and are more than prepared for come Tuesday morning.

"In 2012, we didn't have enough machines, we have enough machines. You didn't have enough workers, we have enough workers," said Selph. "We have our plan in place to where when we go out there tomorrow morning and we start up our machines, we're ready to receive the voters."

"It was stated that there would be more machines and they would be updated so if that's taken place, there shouldn't be any difficulty," added Clark.

Polls will open at 7 am and close at 7pm Tuesday.

As of lunchtime Monday, nearly 141,000 absentee votes had been cast state-wide.

SC leaders push to strengthen domestic violence laws

Columbia, S.C. (WACH) - When it comes to domestic violence, South Carolina leads the country in cases of women killed by men.

The most recent [case involves 53 year old John Corbett](#) who shot and killed Akawandalis Byrd, 28, and injuring another male victim.

According to Sheriff Leon Lott with the Richland County Sheriff's Department, Corbett and Byrd had past history when it came to domestic violence.

Byrd was recently arrested for stabbing Corbett during a domestic dispute about a month ago. After Corbett bailed her out of jail, they continued their relationship.

Now local leaders are fighting to stop domestic violence cases by strengthening South Carolina laws.

"I've been to enough calls to see a woman so disfigured, she looks like the elephant woman," said Chandra Cleveland-Jennings.

Jennings is a retired officer, and says though her gun and badge have been put up, she strives daily to protect and serve those in violent relationships.

Jennings adds that South Carolina has made strides of creating stricter laws, but the state has ranked number one in domestic violence for too long, and now is the time to start implementing stronger laws.

"The wrong move or the wrong weapons used in an incident can make a difference between life and death," added Jennings.

One lawmaker making the effort is Lexington Senator Katrina Shealy.

She has introduced a bill to strengthen domestic violence laws, but says the legal system has gotten in the way.

"I guess that's where I find the push back," said Shealy. "The legal system wants is easier to let the criminals back out. Every time I try to introduce it, that's where I find the push back."

Senator Shealy says the bill would change sentencing in a criminal domestic case.

"It's increasing what it was before. The first offense it was only 30 days and it's all at the judge's discretion," said Shealy.

The bill would allow a judge to sentence someone to a year for their first offense, three years for their second offense, and five years for their third offense.

[According to the South Carolina Coalition against Domestic Violence and Sexual Assault](#), the number of women murdered as a result of domestic violence has increased from 34 to over 40 women, since 2010.

The organization also noted that 36,000 domestic violence cases are reported to law enforcement each year by the victim in SC.

However, experts say the number of cases reported can be misleading because there are so many victims afraid to come forward.

"If you don't want to get law enforcement involved, tell someone," added Jennings.

If you or someone you know is involved in a dangerous relationship, [click here for a list of resources available to help](#).

Overcoming adversity to obtain college degree

COLUMBIA, SC (WACH) - It was all of dream for 22-year old Patrick Plunkett four years ago when he embarked on a journey he once thought was impossible.

Plunkett is a foster child with a Fragile X Syndrome, a genetic condition causing a learning disability. However, he does not allow his condition to deter him from achieving his dreams. He's added to his family's long list of accomplishments as a proud 2014 graduate of the University of South Carolina.

"When the big day came everybody was excited, I was excited to see myself walk across that stage so it was great," said Patrick Plunkett.

"It was just joy," added Patricia Scott, Patrick's foster mom.

Patricia says Patrick's biological mother suffered from a disability, and was unable to care for him. She says she took him in and loved him as if he was her own son, and to see that his dream becoming a Gamecock was fulfilled is uplifting to her.

"To know that we had done something for him to help him get to a point in life as he calls it a milestone, it helped him in a way to where I know he would appreciate it," added Scott.

Patrick studied criminal justice at Carolina by participating in a unique program called The Carolina Life Program.

Carolina Life is designed for students with intellectual or cognitive disabilities.

Garnett and black are very familiar in the Plunkett family. Patrick's older brother and fellow Gamecock, Ron Scott, describes seeing his brother walk across the stage as a surreal moment.

"Seeing that happen and seeing how he was beaming and excited was a moment that I won't soon forget," said Ron Scott.

"Without the support, you just fall, you give up," added Patrick.

In a luncheon held at the Department of Social Services Friday afternoon, Patrick recognized his case worker Wynona Doctor who has played a vital role in his life.

"It makes me feel honored," said Doctor. "I've had several other youth on my caseload in the past who have graduated high school, and it's been years since I've actually witnessed a college graduation so it really makes me feel good as his former case manager."

"Without Miss Wynona, I don't think it would have happened," said Patricia.

Though Patrick is checking off another goal on his list, he says he looks forward to giving back to the community through working with his church and the Department of Juvenile Justice. He

says he also plans to find work with the Palmetto Richland Hospital, where he has volunteered for several years.

"I encourage anyone with any disabilities to go to college, pursue your dreams. It doesn't matter what it is. If you have the support system for it, then go ahead and do it," concluded Patrick.