



September 27, 2013

TRiO Educational Opportunity Center Counselor Earns National Honor

Letory Collins, a TRiO Educational Opportunity Center Counselor at Mid-South Community College, has been honored as a National Institute for Staff and Organizational Development (NISOD) Excellence Award winner.



“I was surprised at first, because I didn’t even have a clue that I had been nominated,” said Collins, a lifelong resident of West Memphis. “To win the award has been a highlight for me, one of the greatest achievements of my life. I appreciate everyone who helped me, those who believed in me before I learned it was okay to believe in myself.”

Sandra Mabry, EOC program director, and Dr. Elaine Wilkins, former Learning Success Center director and current adjunct faculty member, said Collins is well deserving of the honor.

“Letory’s life reads as if it were an example for how a young woman can first change internally and then embark upon a journey to change the world, one person at a time,” they wrote in a nomination letter. “Because Letory is a part of this community, she stands out among her neighbors and friends as a shining example of what they can accomplish. She is intelligent, positive and has a work ethic second to none. She is proof that dreams do come true.”

Mabry and Wilkins said Collins is a great recruiter for the college and higher education.

“Letory brings many students into this institution because they know her and they know her story. Students come in and ask for her by name. She greets everyone with a welcoming but professional attitude, and she takes the time to answer questions.”

Another coworker described Collins as the “cornerstone” of the Learning Success Center.

“I am continuously amazed at the way she handles the multitude of situations that have come her way so calmly and graciously,” said Nettie Parr, administrative assistant for the TRiO Student Support Services program. “She treats every person, whether a vice president or a first-time entering student, as if they were a part of a family.”

“I have never seen a day that Ms. Collins does not exhibit a positive attitude, and she inspires with her level of character and integrity. I have never known anyone that is more compassionate and fair, both to students and staff. I am honored to have such an amazing mentor.”

Collins, a mother of four children ages 16-22, dropped out of high school to take care of her family. She later resumed her education at MSCC and earned a GED® in 1994. Collins worked in the hotel and dry cleaning business before enrolling in college classes in 2005.

“I was really nervous about college, but the first day of class I was in a room with a 78-year-old lady, and she inspired me. From then on, everything was a piece of cake. If I can work in a dry cleaners in 120-degree heat, I can do anything. Everything has prepared me for what I’m doing now. School has been my easiest thing.”

“When students come into my office and say they can’t do something, have reservations, or are a little apprehensive, I say, ‘Any obstacle you can face, I’ve been there and walked in those shoes. All you have to do is pick up the phone and call me, and we can work through to it. If you bring it to me, we will figure it out.’”

Collins graduated magna cum laude from MSCC with an Associate of Arts degree in 2008.

“Mid-South Community College has changed my life,” she said. “I went from just working day in and day out to having a great job. I’m not in poverty anymore, and that’s

what I tell everyone I meet on a daily basis. Education is the key to get you out of poverty and into the middle class.”

Earlier this year, Collins earned a bachelor’s degree in Professional Studies with an emphasis in Criminology from Arkansas Tech University.

While an MSCC student, Collins participated in the Work-Study program and served as a Career Services assistant before joining the EOC staff as an administrative assistant. She earned a summer promotion to counselor after completing her bachelor’s degree.

A tradition since 1989, the NISOD Excellence Awards program supports individual colleges in recognizing and celebrating their finest at home and on an international stage. At MSCC, recognition criteria includes a positive attitude, commitment to professional development, college service and commitment to institutional advancement, community service, and innovation, integrity, professionalism, and fairness.

Previous staff award winners at the College include John Easley, LaToya Roberson, Deborah Webb, Rita Hulen, Linda Graham, Melissa Cox, Sherry Fountain, Verna Davis, Leslie Anderson, Jeremy Reece, Jerry Webb, Nancy Hogan, Don Threm, Tom Cook, Barbara Stewart, Debra West, and Sandra Williams.