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ASU Mid-South Names Rachel Heideman 2015-16 Academic All-Star

Arkansas State University Mid-South student Rachel Heideman of West Memphis has earned Arkansas Community Colleges (ACC) Academic All-Star recognition for 2015-2016.

“It came as such a surprise; it was awesome,” said the U.S. Army veteran and mother of 3-year-old twin boys. “I knew I had done well in my classes, but I didn’t give any thought to the possibility of receiving such a prestigious honor. I figured they would pick somebody who had done more than I have. I guess I sometimes underestimate what I do.”

Among those who don’t underestimate Heideman’s successes are ASU Mid-South employees Grace Troutman, Dr. Craig Lafferty, Boyce Elliott, Dr. Ray Hawkins, and Mary Field.

“Rachel is such a sweet, dedicated, hard-working young lady,” said Troutman, a biology instructor at the college. “She always had a great spirit in class and was willing to help others. She made an ‘A’ in my biology class which is not an easy feat. I cannot think of anyone more deserving of this award.”

“Rachel is the epitome of hard work and dedication to success,” added Dr. Lafferty, an ASU Mid-South Allied Health instructor. “In my class, she was a willing team player who graciously shared notes and ideas with classmates. She juggles family, work and school in the perfect fashion.”

Dr. Hawkins, a Natural Science instructor, described Heideman as “an extraordinary and committed scholar. She was by far the top student in her class, and she displayed a great deal of originality and initiative while completing course projects.”



Elliott, an administrative specialist in the Human Resources Department, said Heideman is making the most of her second chance at higher education.

“With a rocky academic past behind her, she set her sights on a renewed desire to achieve her academic goals. Through all of her many daily challenges, Rachel continues to be the embodiment of the ideal student that Mid-South strives to produce every day.”

Field, a Communications instructor, said Heideman is “the type of student every instructor wants in class. She was engaged in learning and took responsibility for her assignments. She also has a delightful personality and great smile.”

Originally from Corning, Kansas, Heideman finished high school with above-average grades that she admits could have been better. “I was too busy in band, music, dance, and cheer. I think those are also important, but I just really didn’t put my heart into my academics.”

She enrolled in Washburn University in Topeka with a plan of majoring in opera and becoming a professional vocal performer. “I love to sing, and I still do it at every opportunity,” she explained. “I sang a lot in the Army.”

Heideman’s first experience with higher education, however, generated less-than-stellar results. “I didn’t understand responsibility very well at times, and I kind of let things get out of control,” she said. “I didn’t realize that education was so important. I think that’s what drives me now. This is my second chance, and I can’t mess it up again.”

She dropped out of college, became a certified nursing assistant, and worked at a home for people with developmental disabilities and a nursing home before deciding she wanted more.

“I just realized that unless I went to school – and I didn’t have the time or the money for school – I wasn’t going anywhere,” she said.

Heideman enlisted in the Army, and after training at Fort Leonard Wood, Missouri, and Fort Sill, Oklahoma, she was sent to South Korea.

“I loved being there,” she said. “I learned a lot, and it was also fun. The country is beautiful, and their culture is so amazing.”

She monitored radar near the demilitarized zone between North and South Korea during her 18 months in Southeast Asia. “Most tours in Korea only last a year, but I volunteered to stay longer,” Heideman said. “I would love to go back some day.”

When Heideman returned stateside, she spent two years at Fort Bliss, Texas. Following an honorable discharge, she followed her fiancé, also a veteran, to Arkansas. She was introduced to what was then Mid-South Community College and became a fan almost immediately.

“The campus is amazing,” she said. “When I first came here, I swear I thought I was coming to a four-year institution. I was like, ‘There’s no way this is a community college. These buildings are beautiful.’”

“I love this school, and I love the classes. The teachers and the staff are so accommodating and nice. People are really nice in Kansas, too, but the southern charm takes it up a notch here.”

Heideman is taking general education classes at ASU Mid-South while considering her long-term options.

“I know I want to do something in the science field,” she said. “I’ve looked at medical technology, dental hygiene, pharmacy, and clinical lab work. I love playing with microscopes and ‘cooties’ and seeing how things work. I want to get my bachelor’s and master’s and beyond.”

Her academic performance at ASU Mid-South has been nearly flawless. “I’m proud of my grades because I work really hard,” Heideman said. “I came away with B’s in high school, but I’m such a perfectionist now that I want to make A’s.”

Maintaining that level of classroom success can be challenging when her family life comes into play. Already this semester she has dealt with illnesses and infections.

“It’s really hard sometimes to work it out, but you do the best you can,” she said. “When people ask me how I do it, the one thing that comes to mind is you never know how strong you are until strong is the only option you have, until strong is the only thing you can be. That’s what it’s like with school and kids. You just have to roll with the punches.”

In spite of the occasional trials, Heideman said she wouldn’t have it any other way.

“I love having kids. They have done something to change me for the better.”

In addition to caring for children and taking classes, Heideman serves as a tutor and lab assistant. She helps students with Developmental Math, College Algebra, Biology, Chemistry, Microbiology, and Anatomy & Physiology.

“I have a full workload, but that’s good because I don’t like being bored.”

Heideman joins a distinguished group of local students who have been honored by the institution and the two-year college association. Previous Academic All-Star winners include Treyvon, Olden, Melinda Laster, Kenneth Cunningham, Pat Crume, Danielle Abner, Chris Sherrill, Erna Bass, Jasmine Grayson, Lori Hall, Corey Platt, Nonda Mitchell, Faye Flowers, Allison Covington, Bonnie Nichols, Roneshia Hill, Susan Madison, and Brandy McAdams.

For information on the All-Star program or other scholarship/financial assistance opportunities at ASU Mid-South, please call (870) 733-6729. For general information about the college, please call (870) 733-6728, see the website at www.asumidsouth.edu, email admissions@midsouthcc.edu, or visit the campus at 2000 West Broadway in West Memphis.