

# The WELLESLEY TOWNSMAN

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WELLESLEY FRIENDLY AID

## With a little extra help, single mom conquering college

Each year between Thanksgiving and New Year's, GateHouse Media, of which the Wellesley Townsman is a part, publishes a series of stories about local or area nonprofits that can use readers' help in providing for their clients. This year, the Townsman is featuring the services and faces of Wellesley Friendly Aid.

By Anne-Marie Smolski  
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Odessa White says when she attended Newton South High School (Class of 1990) she was an average student. But now, as she attends MassBay Community College in Wellesley full-time, she is maintaining a G.P.A. of 3.78 or higher.



Making the grade isn't always easy for her. She is a single mother of three and guardian of a 13-year-old nephew. But she has help: the Wellesley Friendly Aid Association has not only paid for her books but has also paid the \$50 fee for her to join the National Honor Society Phi Theta Kappa.

White is most appreciative for the support of Friendly Aid, which has also helped her pay for camps for the four children.

"I wouldn't have been able to send them to camp without Friendly Aid," White said. Her nephew went to a vocal workshop in Boston, one of her daughters went to Dana Hall, her son attended Babson Sports Camp for lacrosse, basketball and baseball, and her other daughter was able to go to Noble and Greenough for an intensive drama program. "She's my Broadway star-to-be," said the proud mother.

White didn't know about the book fund for college students during her first year at MassBay, when she was attending part time. She found out about it during a discussion about camps for the children when she mentioned that she was having a tough time paying for both tuition and books.

Karen Mondell, program administrator for the Wellesley Friendly Aid Association, said paying for White's books helps White free up money to pay for something else, such as a recurring bill.

White said she just fills out a one-page application and provides Wellesley Friendly Aid with a course list and the textbooks required and then shows them her grades each semester. "It's a good incentive to do well," White said. "I want them to know they're getting their money's worth."

Although White deals mostly with Mondell, she has also spoken with board members of Wellesley Friendly Aid. She said she's always treated with respect.

"I've always done things pretty much on my own," White explained. "I've always thought people should pull themselves up by their bootstraps, but I know it's OK to ask for help. They're [Wellesley Friendly Aid] very discreet," she added.

Now majoring in communications, White, after taking a year off between high school and college, originally stud-



Odessa White heads to a class at MassBay Community College. WICKED LOCAL STAFF PHOTO BY ERIN PRAWOKO

ied biomedical technology for two years, in conjunction with Jobs for Youth. She earned a certificate from Boston University School of Medicine in Biolab Studies and went to work as a lab technician, working in hematology oncology at New England Medical Center.

"I loved it," White said. "I was doing something I was very good at and was respected for it."

By the time she was 25, White said she wanted to start a family, but said, "I was afraid of working in a lab." She said she had concerns about the biogens she was working with.

By the time she had two daughters and a newborn son, she decided to go to work at Coca Cola as a sales administrator. She stayed for six years.

Although she had always wanted to go back to school, her children came first. But after she was laid off from Coca Cola in 2009 she said she no longer had an excuse.

White said MassBay was affordable, close to home and it offered a good, quality education.

As far as switching her concentration to communications goes, she said, "I think that I've proven myself in the scientific realm and I want to prove myself in communications."

A self-described "newsie," White remembers as a kid asking her mom to follow the Channel 5 News trucks when she'd see them in Newton and would be so disappointed if all they were doing was pulling into a gas station to fill up.

When she was living in Brockton she went to Continental Cable and told them she wanted to be an intern there. "I'm very eager to learn. How can I be a part

of the production?" she remembered saying. She showed up every day and they started letting her help out, doing "little stuff."

It was a complete fluke, White said, but she got to interview Jane Pauley for the cable station. Pauley, whom White has always held in high esteem, was in town to highlight a teacher for her show. Although Pauley had told the network channels that she wasn't going to grant any interviews when she was in the area, White and a photographer staked out the parking lot at the school until Pauley came out.

Pauley agreed to be interviewed. White said, "She was so sweet. She gave us a fabulous interview. She said, 'You're going to be great.'"

After an internship at NECN, White said she wants to go into television reporting.

To help the process along, White has joined a group called the Boston Association of Black Journalists. "I want to make sure everything I do is enriching myself in my personal life as a student and a mom," White said.

In addition to taking classes at MassBay, White is co-editor of the student newspaper, the MassBay Spinnaker. She joined MASSPIRG, and last year she worked at the college to get students registered to vote. She works on a recycling campaign at MassBay and helped with a food drive in conjunction with a shelter in Boston.

On the home front, the Barton Road resident coaches her daughter's Pop Warner cheerleading team and has also been a cheer director. She's also busy getting a daughter to singing lessons, and

her nephew to rehearsals for an upcoming show.

"I don't get a lot of sleep. I have a creative schedule outside school," White said.

Future plans include applying to be a Davis Scholar at Wellesley College, where she would continue to study writing. White would also like to find an internship again, "maybe in public television," she said. "I'm not afraid of the stage," White said, having come from the beauty pageant world in which she would perform a monologue, recite a poem, or dance for the talent portion of a program.

"I'm also open to working on a [news] paper. I just want to challenge myself. I'm having a lot of fun studying," White said.

White takes five classes a semester and thinks she studies about two hours a week for each of them.

"I study at home," White said. "The kids know the living room is off limits to them" [when she's studying]. And, she said, she can also keep an eye on them from that location.

Her children also have a lot of homework, and some of the time they'll all go together to the Wellesley Free Library or they'll all go over to MassBay's library.

"They know where I am because I'm making them a part of it," White said.

For more information about the Wellesley Friendly Aid Association call 781-235-3960 or visit [www.wellesleyfriendlyaid.org](http://www.wellesleyfriendlyaid.org).

Donations of all sizes are welcome and may be mailed to: Wellesley Friendly Aid Association, 219 Washington St., Wellesley Hills, MA 02481.