

### WILKES COUNTY GRADUATE RECEIVES SCHOLARSHIP

Kandis McNeil, recent graduate of West Wilkes High School (WWHS), is the recipient of North Carolina's 2015 Buster Bynum Scholarship, a \$2,500 award granted by the Southeastern States Pupil Transportation Conference (SESPTC). The scholarship was created for one child of a transportation employee in each of the fourteen member states, including North Carolina. Kandis' father, Rodney McNeil, is parts manager of Wilkes County School Bus Garage. He has worked in school transportation since 1997 – the year Kandis was born.

Kandis' academic record and community work made her the perfect candidate for the award. Applicants were required to have a minimum cumulative grade point average of 3.0, show outstanding leadership skills and demonstrate exemplary citizenship qualities. Kandis graduated first in her class with a 4.86 GPA. She served as student body president and vice president of Health Occupations Students of America (HOSA), and she was a member of many other co-curricular and extracurricular organizations. Kandis also volunteered with the Muscular Dystrophy Association, Samaritan's Kitchen of Wilkes, and Village of Wilkes, a local senior citizen community.

Her father, Rodney, said he could not be more proud of his daughter and her scholarship. "It is a big honor," he said. "It proves to me that all the hard work she did, that people do notice it, and I'm just so proud of my daughter for what she's done."

Rodney recounted all the times he's been told his daughter was special – something he said he has known for a long time. "I've had three individuals at three different colleges reach out to me for no reason and tell me she's going to make a difference in this world," said Rodney.

Making a difference in this world is exactly what Kandis plans to do. She will attend Wake Forest University in the fall, where she will study biology or chemistry on a pre-medical track. She said she hopes to attend medical school and complete her residency in neurology, an interest inspired by her work with Alzheimer's patients staying at Village of Wilkes.

"Many in my small town do not get the chance to go to college, and neither of my parents attended college, so I understand its importance," said Kandis. "I feel confident that my time in college will be characterized by learning more about myself and the world that I am surrounded by, and I plan to use these gained skills and interests to make a positive difference in my community."

Kandis attributed her work ethic to the example set by her father, Rodney, and his fellow employees. "I have never met a more engaged and active crew, and I am so proud to say my dad, Rodney McNeil, is a part of that," said Kandis. "My dad works so hard at his job, and I look up to him so much as my inspiration for the hard work I have done." She said she admires the extra mile Rodney and his coworkers go to ensure every child in the county can get to and from school safely.

Kandis' interests include dancing, music and crafting. In the fall, she'll move to WFU early to attend the weeklong Magnolia Scholars program, where selected first-generation students are offered academic support and access to cultural programming and research opportunities.

"I would just like to express how blessed I feel to have been named the recipient of the Buster Bynum Scholarship," Kandis said. "This is such an honor for me, my family and Wilkes County. I am so thankful to have been a part of this."

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