

# Rotary Helps Nontraditional Student Pursue Her Dream

**When Renae Owens '18** was laid off from her customer service job, she knew she had to upgrade her skills by going back to school to get a degree. Her dream of starting a second career in human resources began with an associate's degree at Quinsigamond Community College and continued at Worcester State as she jumped full time into her bachelor's degree in business.

A single mother with a 23-year-old daughter, she's not your typical college student. Owens is pursuing her degree with determination, buckling down on her studies and sustaining a 3.7 GPA with honors. In addition to her own success, she's also focused on setting an example for her daughter.

"I knew it would be a challenge, but I also knew that if I put my mind to it, I would be successful," says Owens. "It's good to be able to show my daughter that whatever your age, you can go back to pursue your dream."

Pursing that dream full time can be financially difficult, and she's grateful that she was selected as one of recipients of the Worcester Rotary Club Scholarship, a unique award specifically for nontraditional students. She is the 29th Worcester State student to receive a Rotary Scholarship over the past 13 years; those scholarships represent a \$31,000 investment in Worcester State students by the local business organization.

The scholarship program actually evolved from a loan program that began more than 30 years ago, according to Gary MacConnell, chair of the Worcester Rotary Club Education Fund. In 2005, the organization decided to instead offer scholarships to students who attend three local colleges. From the beginning, the criteria called for giving the scholarships to nontraditional students.

"It made sense because a lot of them don't have a whole lot of money to go to college," says MacConnell. "The notes I receive expressing thanks for the scholarships are very heartfelt. Often they say the scholarship is what keeps them in school."

Owens' enthusiasm for learning fits with the Rotary's mission of providing educational opportunities and career development for community members.

"When I'm in school, it's like I'm in another world, the exciting world of learning. When I study, by the time

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**Renae Owens '18**



A Rotary Club Scholarship is helping Renae Owens '18 pursue her dream of earning a business degree.

According to its charter, the Rotary Club provides humanitarian service, encourages high ethical standards in all vocations, and helps build goodwill and peace in the world. The main objective of Rotary is service, which is reflected in its motto, "Service Above Self." Rotarians develop community service projects that address many of today's most critical issues, including support for programs for youth, educational opportunities and international exchanges for students, teachers, and other professionals, and vocational and career development.

I finish, it is at least five or six hours later every time," says Owens. "My hope is that I can use the skills and knowledge I learn to be one of the best managers in the business."

And once she has achieved her dream, Owens says she won't forget the help she received.

"I believe I can make a difference in the community, and I also believe that once I complete college, then I can give back to someone in need and help them to achieve their educational goals as well," she says.