

WORK HARD AND JUST DO IT!

By Rebecca Bell

Christy Garza lives by the motto that “everything is possible through dedication and hard work.” She says, “The brain can learn anything you put in front of it. We just have to allow ourselves to do it.”

Garza, a Kansas City, Missouri, native, has found her brain to be a sponge of information since she dropped out of high school at the age of 17 in 1980. “I needed to work, and I had no parental guidance about finishing high school,” she explains. “My parents didn’t graduate from high school, and they didn’t see the importance of obtaining a high school diploma. About the only positive thing that came out of my decision to drop out was that I moved to Midland with my sister.”

During the Midland oil boom of the early ‘80s, life was good for Garza. She obtained a job at Midland Oil Scouts typing oil reports. However, by the mid 1980s, the oil boom became a “bust,” and Garza was one of many who found themselves unemployed from what they thought would be lucrative careers in the petroleum industry.

Even though things were tough financially for Garza during the late 1980s, she did manage to meet and fall in love with her husband Paul, who is an optician at Optics Unique in Midland. The couple married in 1987 and soon started their family consisting of a girl and two boys—Shannon, Christopher and Bryan.

Garza states, “For a while I had several ‘odd jobs.’ I worked at Long John Silvers and worked at a bakery, but I realized that if I really wanted to have a career and help make ends meet for our family, I would need to go back to school. I also wanted my children to value education and knew that I needed to be a role model for them. I couldn’t expect them to stay in school and get a high school diploma if I didn’t have one.”

So, in 1990, the wife and mother of three small children enrolled in GED classes at Midland College (MC). She excelled in her studies, and after receiving her GED diploma, she decided to begin taking classes at MC toward an Associate degree in office systems technology. Little did she know when she received her degree in 1994 that soon she would be back at MC—this time as an employee.

MC Vice President of Information Technology and Facilities Dennis Sever was one of Garza’s instructors and is now her supervisor. He says, “As I recall, Christy was an excellent student. As an adult with children at home, she

was serious and diligent. She sat near the front and in the center of class. She was certainly a top performer as a student and is now a top performer as an employee.”

Since October of 2000, Garza has been employed in the MC information technology department coordinating and managing the college’s video conferencing network. Garza recalls, “When I started working at MC, we had one conferencing server and four video conference units. Within the last eleven years, we have completely upgraded the video network infrastructure to accommodate Internet protocol and ensure better stability. We have added two additional servers and nine additional video conferencing units.”



Christy Garza in her MC office

Through MC’s video conferencing network, classes are transmitted to remote locations in outlying areas. Garza keeps the system running daily and sees to it that connectivity happens as scheduled.

Mr. Sever notes, “Christy’s role at MC is pretty difficult. For years, she has carried the responsibility of our video conference system with minimal part-time and, only recently, some full-time help. Her job is essentially 65 hours per week of technical responsibility for ensuring that classes are transmitted from Midland to locations like Panther Creek, Coleman, Big Lake, Rankin, Iraan and Fort Stockton.”

As part of the Office Systems Technology Associate Degree program, Garza took several computer science and information technology electives. She says, “I enjoyed the required courses in the office systems curriculum like word processing and business English, but information technology was the direction that most interested me. I really like working with technology. It comes to me naturally.”

So, in 1994, when she graduated from MC, Garza chose to look for jobs that were technol-

ogy-related. She soon was hired as a computer lab instructor at Crockett Elementary School, and it wasn’t long thereafter that she became a telecommunications specialist and eventually promoted to network assistant for the Midland Independent School District.

Garza explains, “I love problem-solving. When one piece of equipment isn’t communicating with another, I enjoy troubleshooting to make the two components work with each other.”

Garza states that while she has an aptitude with operating technology, she also has an affinity toward interacting with people. “I’m definitely a ‘people person,’” Garza says. “I think that is why I enjoy being in an educational environment. I like the interaction with staff and students. I knew from the moment I started working at Crockett Elementary School that a school setting is where I belong.”

In her free time, Garza enjoys cooking, baking, bowling, walking and spending time with her three granddaughters, Ariel, Zoey and Sadie.

After she was hired at MC, Garza decided to go back to school once again and obtain a baccalaureate degree, which she did in 2006 from Lubbock Christian University (LCU). The LCU degree in organizational management, combined with Garza’s dedication and work ethic, enabled her to earn a promotion to her current position as video conferencing service manager.

Garza says, “I took a non-traditional route to education and a career. I wouldn’t advise that my children do the same thing I did; however, it helped mold me into the person I am today.” She is extremely proud of the fact that her daughter and two sons currently are attending college. Shannon, age 29, has just 9 hours left to finish MC’s health information technology program; Christopher, age 24, is attending MC and majoring in energy technology; Bryan, age 23, is a pre-med student at the University of Texas at Arlington.

Garza explains, “It was difficult being a mom and full-time student.” She credits her husband Paul for helping her along the way. She says, “The brain is a remarkable organ, and we don’t know what we are capable of doing until we try. Anything is possible. You just have to make up your mind to do it and then work hard to get it done!”

A little bit of West Texas in Austin

For the second year in a row Representative Tom Craddick asked Midland College art student Bonnie Johnson to paint the House District 82 ornament for the Lone Star Celebration Christmas Tree in the Texas House of Representatives Chamber at the State Capitol in Austin. Craddick asked Johnson to create the ornament in a way that showcases the unique character of the district that includes Crane, Dawson, Martin, Midland and Upton counties. The ornament, entitled “Sunsets and Cactus,” illustrates the natural beauty of House District 82 and West Texas, including the colorful sunsets and cacti for which the region is known.



Bonnie Johnson

“I was delighted to do it,” stated Johnson. I am honored that Representative Craddick considered calling me again to paint something representing the wonderful West Texas region.”

“Bonnie did a fantastic job capturing the colors that illuminate our West Texas skyline, and I am proud that a Midland College art student’s ornament will be on display for all visitors to the Texas Capitol to see,” Craddick said. “With 150 House Districts throughout the state, an artistic rendition of the unique characteristics that make up each district is an excellent way to demonstrate our state and area’s pride. I commend Bonnie for the time and effort she put into highlighting the best aspects of our West Texas area.”



“Sunsets and Cactus” painted by MC art student Bonnie Johnson

Since 2009, members of the Texas House have had the opportunity to create a tangible symbol of the state’s invincible spirit through the district ornament project. Speaker Joe Straus (San Antonio) and his wife Julie invite each House member to provide a decorated ornament for the Lone Star Celebration Christmas Tree in the Chamber of the Texas House of Representatives. The Texas-sized tree was displayed from December 2, 2011, through January 6, 2012.

Bridge

Tuesdays, January 31-March 27
1:00-3:00 p.m. or 7:00-9:00 p.m.
Cost = \$45

All it takes is the ability to count to 13! The game of Bridge generates excitement through shrewd thinking and creativity. It is also a highly social experience, offering a combination of meeting new friends and competition. Previous exposure to the game is not required—just a desire to learn it. Participants will learn how to evaluate hands, bid, keep score and more. Call (432) 685-4518 to register and obtain more information.

MC Workforce Continuing Education offers accelerated courses designed to improve career skills

Real estate program begins January 23
Mondays-Thursdays, 6:00-9:45 p.m.

Educational courses required by the Texas Real Estate Commission to sit for the real estate salesperson exam.

Math Skills for the Technical Trades reviews common on-the-job calculations
January 24-February 9

Tuesdays and Thursdays, 6:30-8:30 p.m.

Designed to help improve math skills by reviewing fractions, decimals, percentages, plane figures, measurements, and graphs.

Both of these courses meet at the convenient location of the Midland College Advanced Technology Center, 3200 W. Cuthbert. To register or obtain more information, call (432) 681-6326 or visit www.midland.edu/workforce