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Press Release

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BCCC Success Story Brenda Barney to be Given Alumni Achievement Award at College's 59th Convocation Ceremony, September 20th



Brenda Barney (in her Johns Hopkins University graduation attire) reflects on her BCCC experiences beneath the Bard Building's BCCC sign, this past summer.

BALTIMORE — At one time Brenda Barney could expect little more out of life than a subsistence wage and the difficult baggage accompanying teenage motherhood. As a Baltimore City correctional officer whose sole career assets were personal diligence and a high school diploma, Brenda's life's horizons—ironically—stretched no further than the prison walls surrounding her.

But Brenda was never afraid of the future; indeed, she longed to embrace it. Rather than lowering her sights and settling for the less-than-inspiring, paycheck-to-paycheck existence she had come to know for 20 years, Brenda decided to marshal her strengths, make change her friend, and re-focus on ambition. And because of her accomplishments, she will be honored Wednesday with the Baltimore City Community College Alumni Achievement Award—the school’s highest distinction for alumni—having distinguished herself at BCCC and carried the hope and message of education to the community at large.

In 2000, at the age of 44, Brenda enrolled at Baltimore City Community College, after successfully—and simultaneously—raising two children and rising through the ranks, to Captain, at the Department of Corrections. At the age most people bask in the relative security and stability of mid-career, Brenda was in a self-imposed shake-up. She would set sail in unfamiliar waters, remembering only that this new course in life had to be about change—about finding and enjoying work at a much higher and more creative level; of developing professional credentials which could carry her forward; indeed, of equipping herself for the responsibility, as she saw it, of helping people while helping herself.

In 2004, as she pursued an associate’s degree in general studies part-time at BCCC, Brenda gained the mentoring, group study and encouragement so often afforded BCCC students. Professor of English and mentor Lynn Kerr, a Johns Hopkins University alumna, urged her not to eliminate Johns Hopkins from the list of transfer institutions she dreamed of attending, merely because of cost. Professor Jorge Pina gave her much-needed experience and expertise with computers. Others arranged financial aid and a schedule which could accommodate work and life responsibilities. As Brenda describes it, “BCCC was the birthplace, cradle and crib of my accomplishments in higher education, helping me to think again about the possibilities—not just the everyday workaday constraints—of life.”

She achieved the rare distinction of being admitted to the Johns Hopkins Police Executive Leadership program—a bachelor’s degree program—while still a student at BCCC. She graduated from BCCC with an associate’s degree in general studies in 2004, with a GPA of 3.43. This year, in May, she graduated Johns Hopkins with a Bachelor of Science degree in Management and Leadership. At Johns Hopkins, her GPA was 3.85.

At 50, Brenda, former working single mother and high school graduate, is now enrolled in the Johns Hopkins master’s degree program, where she is scheduled to graduate in May 2007. For Brenda, the halls of American education have replaced those she once knew, at the Baltimore City Department of Corrections. She hopes—as a college-level teacher, guidance counselor or psychologist—to lead as many students as she can in that direction, helping to launch dreams once grounded, and ignite fires of hope long smoldering.

“I’d like to think I am an example for single parents and older students,” she says. “My story is not remarkable; I might be able to offer people encouragement, a window into their life’s possibilities, and that very necessary successful outlook. If I can do it, you can. The American Dream is alive when your spirit—your individuality—comes alive. I can’t tell you how surprised and humbled I am by my community college experience. Believe me, the doors you open here will become your pathways to the world.”

For more information on Baltimore City Community College, Brenda Barney, or BCCC’s 59th Convocation, to be held Wednesday, Sept. 20 from 12:30-2 p.m. at the Liberty campus Physical Education Center, 2901 Liberty Heights Avenue, contact the BCCC Institutional Advancement Office at 410-986-5450.

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