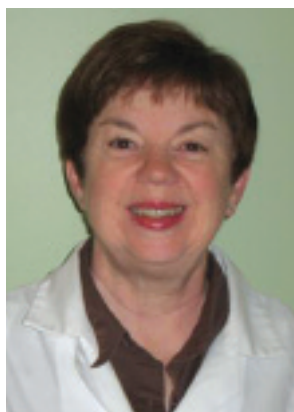


No Limits

GRADUATING TO NEW BIOTECH CAREERS

“Using me as an example, I don’t think it’s ever too late to change.”

– Margie Parker, Forsyth Technical Community College graduate, NCCU BRITE student



Margie Parker

After selling a party and balloon store, Margie Parker was looking for a new direction. She and her husband attended a seminar on the biotechnology program at Forsyth Technical Community College (FTCC) in Winston-Salem. The seminar renewed an interest in science that started in high school. She enrolled in FTCC’s two-year associate degree in biotechnology in 2006.

Three-years later, she’s a student at the Biomanufacturing Research Institute and Technology Enterprise (BRITE) at NC Central University in Durham on a full scholarship. She’ll graduate in two years at the age of 58 with a four-year degree in biology and chemistry with a concentration in biopharmaceutical science.

She learned about BRITE while attending a career fair held at NCCU last April. Their pharmaceutically-focused degree and the articulation agreement with FTCC that gave her credit for most of her two-year courses motivated her to go for a four-year degree.

Initially, Parker thought that she was too old to pursue a four-year degree, but a friend’s story inspired her. “A friend of mine was lamenting to her husband that she was going to be 49 when she got an advanced degree. He said to her, ‘you’re going to be 49 whether you get the degree or not.’ So I had that in the back of mind when I went for the (scholarship) interview that I’ll be 58 if I get this degree or not.”

Two weeks into College Algebra she faced her first hurdle. “It was a long time since I was in school. So I knew I’d have to do some reviewing in math. It is true. If you don’t use it, you lose it. It turned out I’d forgotten a lot more than I thought, like everything,” she said. “My husband asked me if I wanted to quit. I said I wouldn’t.”

Instead, Parker spent concentrated time at the library and the tutoring center. The result: she was one of eight to finish the class out of 24 and the only one to make an A. From there, she tackled chemistry, bioprocessing, cell culture, recombinant DNA, immunology, microbiology and genetics. Besides her classes, she worked in FTCC’s chemistry lab and then, after graduating in 2008, held a fulltime position as a lab technician for the biotechnology program.

Parker says her friends, husband and two grown daughters are fully behind her new direction. She’s excited about classes and labs at BRITE. “I don’t see myself slowing down in the foreseeable future,” she said.

“I think this is such a growing industry. If you’re willing to make some sacrifices and make some changes, I think it’s a very good opportunity. Using me as an example, I don’t think it’s ever too late to change.”

ABOUT NC CENTRAL

North Carolina Central University is home to the Biomanufacturing Research Institute and



Technology Enterprise (BRITE), the only program that offers a formal four-year biotechnology degree in the state. BRITE prepares graduates for jobs in biotechnology and biomanufacturing through the creation of an unparalleled learning environment that combines research and training in drug discovery and manufacturing technology with highly credentialed faculty, state-of-the-art equipment and facilities and curriculum developed in partnership with industry. For more information, visit <http://brite.nccu.edu>.

"I have that thirst for knowledge. I just want to keep learning. I want to keep going."

– Rose Pavia, Rowan-Cabarrus Community College business administration student,
part-time NC Research Campus employee

After retiring from a 30-year career as a paralegal in Rochester, NY, Rose Pavia settled in Concord, NC. She discovered the Cabarrus County Guardian Ad Litem program a few months later and started volunteering to advocate for abused or neglected children in the court system. When major surgery left her homebound in 2007, she started thinking that along with volunteering she should go back to school.

She remembered passing signs for Rowan-Cabarrus Community College (RCCC) on her way to volunteer. After looking into the school's programs, she enrolled in the spring semester of 2008 at the age of 68 to earn a two-year degree in business administration with an emphasis in marketing and retail.

"This is totally different from anything I've ever done. The law has always been my interest. I'm glad I picked business administration because I'm totally enjoying it," she said.

Her first challenge was to upgrade her computer skills, which required an extra course to help her progress beyond basic word processing to master programs like Excel and PowerPoint. As her classes progressed she decided to pursue an internship.

"Books and theory are wonderful, but seeing business in action is a different thing. There are always so many intricacies to learn," Pavia commented.

She spent the summer of 2009 as an intern in the marketing department of the North Carolina Research Campus in Kannapolis. She now works there part-time while finishing her two-year degree and continuing to volunteer with the Guardian Ad Litem program. She's helped with educational seminars presented by UNC Greensboro and RCCC and assisted with the creation of media kits and other marketing activities.


"I've never done business or marketing. It's very, very interesting," she said. "Different from class, marketing is really a people job. You have to be able to deal with all types of people. I have a long way to go mind you, but I believe everyone should start entry level and learn from the ground up. That's the only way to understand

the whole procedure of what marketing involves. Every day I learn something different."

She's learning about more than marketing. "It's (biotechnology) quite different from anything I've ever known," Pavia said. "My family genes are predisposed to cancer, heart trouble and arthritis. If research can do something for the next generation, I would be thrilled. There's so much we can do. So much we don't know yet."

She has witnessed the benefits of research. One of her three brothers, Pete Pavia, a former NBA and college basketball referee, participated in studies for Interleuken, an FDA-approved treatment for kidney cancer, before he died of cancer in 1992. North Carolinians may remember him as the referee who ejected UNC Chapel Hill coach Dean Smith in the final seconds of a 1991 semi-final playoff game against the Kansas Jayhawks.

Pavia is planning to graduate from RCCC, where she has a 4.0 grade point average, in 2011. From there, she's considering continuing her studies at UNC Charlotte.

"I have that thirst for knowledge. Most of the people I know want to go golfing or to the beach," she commented. "I just want to keep learning. I want to keep going." 



Rose Pavia