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Recommended Citation

Office of University Communications, "Gardner-Webb Alumna Takes Game Show for a Spin" (2012).
Gardner-Webb NewsCenter Archive. 1960.
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Office of University Communications

January 20, 2012

Kendra Hauser '11 Wins Wheel of Fortune

BOILING SPRINGS, N.C.— Like many Americans, Gardner-Webb alumna Kendra Hauser ('11) admits she is a “game show junky.” For years, she says, she and her mother have spent quality time with the Game Show Network, answering “Jeopardy” questions and solving “Lingo” word puzzles, often working crossword puzzles or word-search games in their laps all the while. So it’s no surprise that Hauser’s bucket list included “Win ‘Wheel of Fortune,’” or that she joined the “Wheel Watchers Club” when she turned 18. A girl can dream, right?



But Hauser’s story took a turn toward the surreal last May, when she received an email invitation to a “Wheelmobile” casting event in Virginia – a chance too good to pass up. “Wheel of Fortune is one of those things I always wanted to do,” Hauser said. “I definitely believe in following your dreams, even if you’ve kind of gotten off the path like I did. That’s why I did the nontraditional type schooling route.”

A working mother, Hauser went back to earn her associate’s degree in paralegal technology at Forsyth Tech in her hometown of Winston-Salem, where Gardner-Webb operates its Greater Opportunities for Adult Learners (GOAL) Forsyth Center. After a professor at Forsyth praised Gardner-Webb’s criminal justice program, Hauser decided to enroll, eventually earning her Bachelor of Human Services degree in 2011. She currently works as a N.C. deputy clerk.

“I just love the GOAL Program because it gives working mothers like myself, and other nontraditional students, an opportunity to earn our bachelor’s degrees,” Hauser said of her experience at Gardner-Webb. “Everybody I came in contact with, from my teachers here at the Forsyth Center to my advisor in Boiling Springs, was always so nice and helpful. The program is convenient and affordable, and I just really appreciate how accessible it is for nontraditional students.”

The most “nontraditional” development of her recent life, though, was that call from the Wheelmobile – and Hauser seized the moment. She met the casting group in Virginia, and impressed them enough to earn a call-back for final casting auditions. During the casting, Hauser and a group of hopefuls played simulated rounds of “Wheel,” gave personality interviews, and even took timed written puzzle tests that evaluated her ability to think quickly under pressure. She left Virginia with a promise to hear a “yes” or “no” within two weeks. “I was checking the mailbox every day,” Hauser remembered, “and they ended up waiting until two weeks on the dot to send word. But that word was a ‘yes,’ so I was thrilled.

As one might expect, Hauser said the experience of actually playing “Wheel” for real cash and prizes was quite different than playing along from her sofa. “Pat [Sajak] tried to keep us calm—he was great—but it just didn’t work. When that spotlight is actually on you, you’re trying to process so much information in such little time. You’re thinking about what’s on the wheel, and what letter you should choose, and what the category is, and it’s a pressure cooker.”

Fortunately, Hauser has a knack for word puzzles, and she managed to win all three toss-up rounds and dodge a few unlucky “Bankrupt” spins to win her episode. She even landed an all-expenses-paid Central American vacation by guessing “Lush Tropical Rain Forest” during the Prize Puzzle Round. She and her brother will be vacationing to three different spots in Guatemala in May. “Other than one brief trip to Canada, neither of us has ever traveled out of the country, so we’re very excited,” she said.

Ultimately, even more than the cash and the vacation, Hauser said she’s most grateful for the “Wheel of Fortune” experience, which she called a “once-in-a-lifetime dream come true.” “It was something I said I wanted to do, and when the opportunity came, I did it,” she said. “I would just encourage everyone to follow their dreams, no matter how unreachable they seem.”

And if those dreams ever land you on “Wheel”—or if you’re a game show junky intent on dominating the show from your sofa—Kendra’s advice is simple: “Pay attention to the categories, since they give you hints about which letters to choose. And always buy vowels. Sure, they cost more in the short term. But in the long run, they’re the most helpful way to solve the puzzle.”