



Illinois Wesleyan University Magazine, 2002-2017

Volume 15
Issue 3 *Fall 2006*

Article 3

Fall 2006

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IWU Magazine

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Recommended Citation

Magazine, IWU (2006) "Hoping for the best, ready for the worst," *Illinois Wesleyan University Magazine, 2002-2017*: Vol. 15 : Iss. 3 , Article 3.

Available at: <https://digitalcommons.iwu.edu/iwumag/vol15/iss3/3>

This is a PDF version of an article that originally appeared in the printed Illinois Wesleyan University Magazine, a quarterly periodical published by Illinois Wesleyan University. For more information, please contact iwumag@iwu.edu.

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Hoping for the best, ready for the worst

Name: Kandi Currie

Position: Public Safety Officer

Years with IWU: Seven



Currie scans the campus landscape. Her diligence as a security officer comes, in part, from her strong sense of family values.

Kandi Currie feels inspired. It is a feeling she often gets as she strides along the tree-lined sidewalks of Illinois Wesleyan's campus. "This is a great place to walk and think about plans to do something in life," she says.

Currie has been walking the campus for seven years as part of the University's Security Department. A gorgeous day greets her as she makes her rounds. "I like to walk the perimeter of the campus and then crisscross inside," she says, with a wave to a grounds worker. "I like to get out and eyeball what's happening."

That's a 24/7 job for Currie and her fellow officers, who are entrusted to aid in the enforcement of all the University's rules and regulations and provide for a safe and secure campus. That entails a long list of specific duties, from emergency response to crime investigation, from parking to building security and "keeping the area free of people who are not supposed to be here," as Currie puts it.

The Security Department is also proactive in educating the University community on ways to reduce the opportunities for criminal activity on campus. Crime-prevention programs are provided to new students, upperclass students, residence hall staff, Greek units, and special interest groups on various topics — from fire safety to how to secure a bicycle. "People come here from bigger cities and their guard is down," says Currie. "Bloomington—Normal and the campus here are relatively safe, but nothing can be 100-percent safe. We help students be aware that they are not separated from the world."

Despite such outreach efforts, Currie believes students are often put off by security officers. "It isn't very cool for students to be seen talking to security," she acknowledges with a laugh. Such attitudes are often the result of misunderstandings, she notes. "A lot of students think we ask them to register their cars just so we can give them tickets," Currie says. "But if someone breaks the windshield of your car, we can let you know if we know who you are."

"You know, there's a lot of misconceptions overall about this job," says Currie, but her security responsibilities all boil down to one simple fact: "We're really here to look out for people."

The drive to look after people has long been part of Currie's life. Born in the Twin Cities, Currie's parents separated when she was in the second grade. She spent summers in Bloomington with her father, and the school year in Dalton, Mo., with her mother. Living in Dalton left an impression on Currie that would influence her

choices. “It was such a small, rural place that there were no police, no fire department.” She recalls a fire that destroyed a home and killed one of its residents. “That stays with you,” she says.

Prior to joining IWU Security, Currie worked for the City of Bloomington, enforcing codes and parking laws. When Currie landed the job at Illinois Wesleyan, she was the first — and still only — female security officer of 11 full- and part-time officers.

“I worked nights the first year, then I switched to days,” she says. “The difference is ... well, like day and night,” she quips.

Like anyone in public safety, Currie says, IWU Security has to be ready for the worst, and hope for the best. Such was the case last fall when a fraternity’s kitchen caught on fire. “When a fire alarm goes off, it’s usually burned popcorn,” she says. “But we have treat all alarms as emergencies. That time we were able to help.”

People seem to sense Currie’s willingness to help and often seek her out. “My godson has friends who come and stay with us for three or five nights at a time,” she says. Many of them are troubled kids who are trying to find their way out of a difficult situation.

The 5’7” public safety officer is the smallest in a family that comes from a tradition of food service. “My father was the assistant manager of the Bloomington Country Club for 57 years. My sister manages the kitchen at the county jail. My brother has worked as a cook,” she says, adding that opening a restaurant has always been a family dream.

Currie plans to pursue that dream by opening a soul food restaurant in downtown Bloomington in the near future. Even with preparations for the restaurant moving ahead, she said she plans to stay with her shifts at campus security. Why? “Because I know we make a difference,” she answers matter-of-factly.



At home, Currie and her godchildren bond during breakfast.