

Patricia Ann Timmons-Goodson '76

Patricia Ann Timmons-Goodson regularly faces two strikingly different audiences.

From the judge's bench, she looks out at, and dispenses justice to, an involuntary audience — juveniles who have been caught breaking into houses, habitual drunk drivers, husbands and wives who can no longer sustain the bonds of matrimony. “My greatest challenge,” says Judge Timmons-Goodson, “is to face each day in district court. The overall picture is the same there every day — and it is very negative. It is hard work not to become hardened and callous, not to become what I see every day.”

But when she takes off the robe, Pat Timmons-Goodson, role model for African-American young people, finds ready, eager, voluntary audiences. With glee in her eyes, she tells a close friend from her old days in the district attorney's office about a slumber party she recently went to. Yes, a slumber party! She agreed to talk with teenage girls from her old high school in Fayetteville about social and moral issues they will face. Not content with simply serving as a mentor, Pat solicited businesses to donate gifts to the project — to increase the self-esteem of the girls who attended this slumber party — and drove two hours herself on her day off to pick up the donations. And she tells only that old friend. The newspapers do not know. There is no political gain. There is just doing what is right. One of Pat's main goals for her life is to leave the world a little better than she found it.

Just last month, one of those voluntary audiences was composed of honors and award winners at Fayetteville State University. To them, her message was direct: “There are many roads to success. Take advantage of every opportunity. Do your best where you are with what you have.”

Pat is a living example of that message.

Her father, an army man, brought his large family to Fayetteville in 1968. With the tenacity to take advantage of opportunities that Pat was later to exhibit, he and his wife earned their college degrees while raising their six children. Four of those children, including Pat, went on to get their undergraduate degrees at Carolina. Three of those earned advanced degrees at UNC while the fourth earned his MD at East Carolina University. Another sibling graduated from the University of North Carolina at Wilmington while the youngest is a junior at the University of North Carolina at Charlotte. Quite a UNC family!

Pat continued through UNC Law School, and then had the wisdom to find opportunity where it lay. “My first job upon completing law school and returning to Fayetteville was as a secretary in the detective's division of the Cumberland County Sheriff's Department,” she told the Fayetteville State audience. “I took the job because I needed a job. I remained here just a few weeks before I was appointed district manager of the 1980 census (for a 10 county area around Fayetteville.) Two years after finishing law school. I was able to assume a legal position and went to work in the district attorney's office as an assistant district attorney. What did my secretarial position and managerial position have to do with being a judge? My experience in these jobs helped make me the type of person someone said might make a good judge. So I say to you again, there are many roads to success. Take advantage of every opportunity. Do your best where you are with what you have.”

When she was appointed judge by then-Governor Jim Hunt '64 in 1984, Pat was the youngest person (29 years) ever to serve on the bench in the Fayetteville-based 12th Judicial District, and the first black person

She brings to her courtroom what she brings to those groups of impressionable teenagers and to those eager audiences of college students and to her family: a will to find the road to success, and a compassionate, nurturing view of people.

We are her willing audience today.