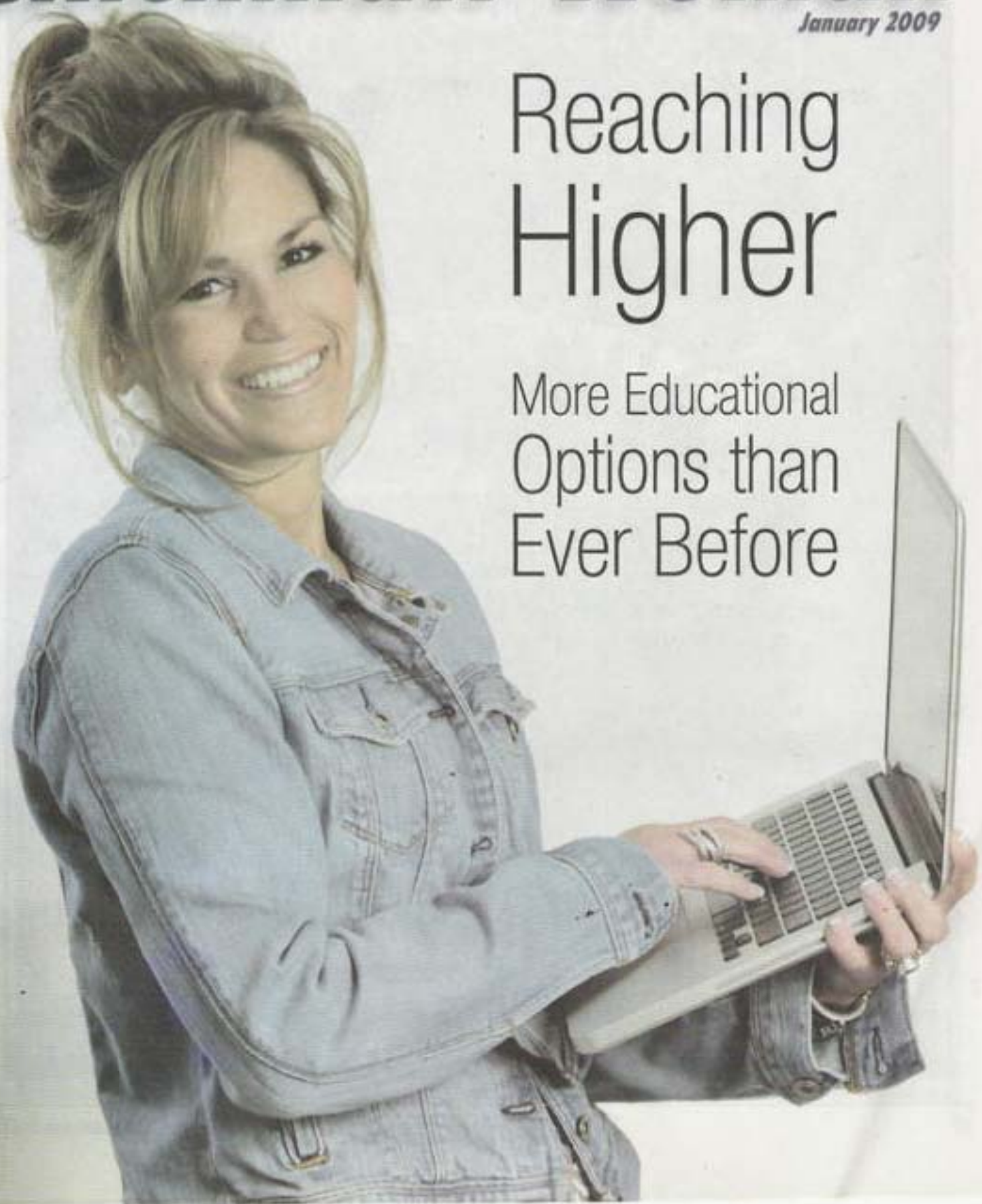


Cincinnati **Woman** MAGAZINE

January 2009

Reaching Higher

More Educational
Options than
Ever Before



Reaching Higher

More Educational Options than Ever Before

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Reaching Higher: More Educational Options than Ever Before

By Jennifer Davis
Cincinnati Woman Magazine

There is a certain image that comes to mind when one brings up the notion of a college education. Bright, eager young coeds, bursting at the seams with naivety and potential; nights filled with pizza, parties and cramming for biology exams; days spent on the quad, watching the frat boys play Frisbee and the sorority girls host yet another bake sale...

And then, of course, there is reality. There are classes to attend, and cars to park, and families to get home to.

Families? Come again?

It seems an odd piece of the collegiate puzzle, but, for a steadily increasing number of women, it is among the most important. As more and more adult women opt to either return to college or attend for the first time, facilities of higher learning are stepping up to create an experience that not only breeds success in their students, but redefines what being a student means.

Return and Learn

Wendy Creekmore was in her late thirties when she decided that the time had come to earn her bachelor's degree in political science. There were a number of factors that played a role in her decision — primarily, that her husband had become permanently disabled and was no longer able to work. Creekmore knew she had to step in and compensate for two incomes, so she contacted Northern Kentucky University's Grant County campus in search of an opportunity to increase her earning potential.

"I made an appointment to go in and speak to Sam Lapin. He made me feel so comfortable, and I signed up for four classes that day," she says. For Creekmore, the presence of the Grant County campus was a major part of her decision to choose NKU. At that time in her life, the commute to the main campus in Highland Heights would have been a major stumbling block.

"I did the first two semesters at Grant County. They're very helpful with the transitions for an adult learner," she says. After switching over to the Highland Heights campus, Creekmore found further accommodations in the form of evening classes, the Future Leaders Intern Program (FLIP) and the abundant opportunities for on-campus employment.

Photo courtesy of
Life Photography
Studio.



"If you're already out there working, and just need to keep up with the trends or get a promotion, you can through PDI," says Hizer. Raymond Walters also offers weekend and evening courses to accommodate an adult lifestyle.

Growing Number of Choices

It can be intimidating to return to a college setting as an adult, but because of the demand for more options for working families, the proliferation of adult learner programs is ever growing. Union Institute and University is one such example.

"We exclusively deal with adult learners. The average learner who comes to Union has an average of two years of education somewhere else," says Greg Stewart, Vice President for Enrollment Management at Union. In addition to the main campus in Cincinnati, Union offers locations from California to Florida to Vermont, with programs for all degree levels.

At Indiana Wesleyan University, 100% of the student body is comprised of adult learners. Ohio Assistant Director of Admissions Richard Hartman touts the school's convenience and reputation as major selling points for the non-traditional student.

"It's a convenient location to work or home, it's a small campus and our parking lot is well lit and right outside the door, so it's a safe environment. We have a small group learning environment, which I think women feel comfortable in," he says, adding, "Recently we were ranked in *US News*' 'America's Best Colleges' as one of the top Midwest master's universities."

Looking for Flexibility

While the College of Mount St. Joseph is not exclusive to adult learners, that has not prevented administrators from creating an environment in which the non-traditional student can thrive. In fact, Assistant Director for Adult & Transfer Students Nikki Veldhaus credits the school's increasing adult population to its reputation for accommodating non-traditional students.

"I would say that the reason that people choose the Mount has been, traditionally, word of mouth," she says. "I can't tell you how many women have ended up in my office that have been recommended to come see me. It's a very nurturing environment."

Like the other schools, College of Mount St. Joseph offers evening and weekend classes that have proven popular with adult learners.

Non-traditional Students

NKU is not the only local university making strides to accommodate the non-traditional student (commonly defined as a student over the age of 25). Xavier University is proud of their Center for Adults and Part-time Students (CAPS), which acts as a support program for adult learners.

"We have staff here who help with the admission process," says Kimberly Dulin, an Academic Advisor at Xavier. "Classes are small — there are no more than thirty students per class. We have evening and weekend degree programs that fit professional adult situations."

University of Cincinnati Raymond Walters College was specifically designed as a venue for adult learners. Gianny Hizer, Director of College Relations, says that over 75% of students at the school also work while attending. In addition to offering regular degree programs, Raymond Walters also works with employers under their Professional Development Institute (PDI) to allow for continuing education and certifications.

They also promote a feeling of flexibility in scheduling to make room for the inevitable changes life can throw at a student.

"We don't tie them into a particular format. If for some reason weekends work for them one term, and then their schedule changes and they can only do daytime, they can. They can come a couple of days and mix in a couple of nights and then come on the weekend. It makes it very, very flexible for them," Veldhaus explains.

Work and Family

Perry Richardson, Campus Communications Officer of Miami University's Hamilton location, talks about the convenience of the college's regional campuses for the largely adult student population.

"Because so many of our students are non-traditional, they work at least part time, and many of them have families of their own, so they are place-bound," he explains. "Miami's regional campuses really bend over backwards to accommodate non-traditional students."

At approximately \$4200 per year, Richardson says that Miami is one of the most affordable colleges in the state of Ohio. The school is also actively involved in raising funds to provide scholarships and other financial assistance. He also makes a point to mention Miami's Saturday Select program, wherein students working towards an Associate of Arts degree can attend some classes on Saturdays and then complete the remainder of their coursework online.

The Greater Cincinnati area is rich with opportunity for women (and men!) with an interest in furthering their personal growth and education. From affordable on-site childcare to evening and weekend classes, there is a program for anyone who has the desire and drive to step out there and follow a dream. All of these schools offer extensive and friendly programs designed with the adult learner in mind.

Wendy Creekmore hasn't forgotten how it felt to dip her toe into the pond of higher education. "I was nervous about it, and I can still remember stepping into that first classroom," she recalls. "After my first semester I made straight As and I realized - I can do this."

Jennifer Davis is a freelance writer based in Northern Kentucky, where she lives with her husband and daughter. She is currently studying theatre at Northern Kentucky University, and is working her way towards a career as a full time arts writer.



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