

## Helping People Is This Physical Therapist's Cool Job

by Judy Shepherd, Special SVCC Correspondent

Dr. Yasmen Ibrahim's job is cool even when she is working in the 92-degree rehabilitation pool. Any weekday will find this physical therapist working with a patient in the medical fitness center, in the physical therapy clinic or in the pool. She is very visible and very busy and it is easy to see that she enjoys her chosen career.

"I like the variety of patient problems; in one session, I may be working with a post-surgical patient and in the next session I may be working with a patient with neurological problems or sports-related injuries," she said.

Employed by VCU Community Memorial Hospital, she works at the Rehab Center in South Hill. Interestingly, she visited this very place early in her college career and shared her dream of one day becoming a physical therapist.

Donna Jarrell, Director of Rehab Services at VCU CMH commented, "It has been great to watch Yasmen achieve that dream and then choose to work locally."

Thanks to the advice of one of her brothers, Ibrahim decided to delay her VCU admission and attend Southside Virginia Community College upon graduation from Brunswick Academy in 2008.

"He said I could save money and stay close to home and I really liked the idea," she said.

She enrolled at Southside and attended for a year and a half and then decided to travel to Egypt, a country she left with her family when she was only two years old.

"I just needed to get in touch with myself and what I wanted to do", she explains. She returned to SVCC and graduated in 2010 with an Associate in Arts and Science.

Yasmen was fairly certain that she wanted to work in a health career area so she majored in biology when she entered VCU. To complete the 40-hour on-site experience requirement at VCU, Yasmen not only "shadowed" Dr. Jesse Jorde at the VCU CMH OP Rehab Center, but also Dr. Harrison Vaughan at In-Touch Therapy in South Hill during the summers of 2010 and 2011.

She notes, "these shadowing opportunities really solidified my decision that physical therapy was what I wanted."

Yasmen then changed her major from biology to exercise science and then back to biology. She realized that a biology degree provided a back-up plan for teaching since acceptance into a physical therapy program was extremely competitive.

"I thought that if I didn't get into a PT program, I could teach biology. My SVCC biology instructor, Martha Reed, provided a wonderful example of how it can be done," she noted.

Yasmen did very well with the coursework at VCU graduating in 2013 with nearly a 4.0 average.

“I wasn’t in any rush. I took extra courses that were additional prerequisites for physical therapy and took the time to learn all I could.” Her bachelor’s degree was followed with the Graduate Record Exams, a PT admissions requirement. She added, “my scores were only just above average and I worried about being accepted even with my high GPA.”

She got an interview at Marymount University and an acceptance into the program. She points out that students should not let test scores be a discouraging factor. Out of 2,000 applicants to this program, only 200 got an interview and between 50 and 60 students were accepted. In the end, there were around 40 in her class with double the number of women than men. Her program at Marymount University was three years long and she was enrolled from 2014 through 2017. After another trip to visit family members in Egypt, she began her present employment in December 2017 grateful to be working in the community in which she grew up.

As Yasmen reflects on SVCC, she says that it was a “good stepping stone.”

She found everyone helpful from the faculty advisors to the faculty in the classroom. She especially remembers the transfer help from Bernadette Battle including the transfer trips to Longwood University and University of Richmond. She feels that it is so important to visit college campuses when making transfer decisions.

“The Alberta Campus is really a beautiful one. I enjoyed lunch with my friends and the various activities in the student lounge. One time a handwriting analyst was on the campus and I remember this as one of many fun events. One of my assignments was to interview Dr. Terry Whisnant, my psychology instructor, and I recall that he said the one thing each of us can control is our perspective and outlook on life. This comment has had a positive impact on me in living my life.”

Rehab Director Jarrell finds Yasmen a very compassionate, caring therapist who focuses on patient-centered care. And Yasmen Ibrahim enjoys her work at VCU CMH Rehab where she can help people and really make a difference.