

## POWERED BY A DREAM

**OLD BRIDGE** — Some individuals living with disabilities might listen to the dissenting voices that tell them that reaching for their dreams might be futile.

Not Yvonne Singer.

The Old Bridge resident always accepted her severe case of a developmental disability, cerebral palsy, and forged forward to earn three degrees, teach an online course for Middlesex County College in Edison and inspire the students who have come to admire her for embracing a lifelong challenge despite the naysayers.

“From the ages of 4 to 10, I received intensive physical, occupational and speech therapies at the Vermont Achievement Center. At the age of 10, I was mainstreamed into my local public school. I always wanted to attend college and obtain gainful employment,” said Singer, adding that she was “extremely determined” to earn her high school diploma.

While grappling with the average obstacles facing most high school students, Singer also had to advocate for her student rights.

“After graduating high school, I wanted to live independently from my parents,” Singer said. “Unfortunately, I was severely abused in two state institutions for eight months. After I returned home, I earned my

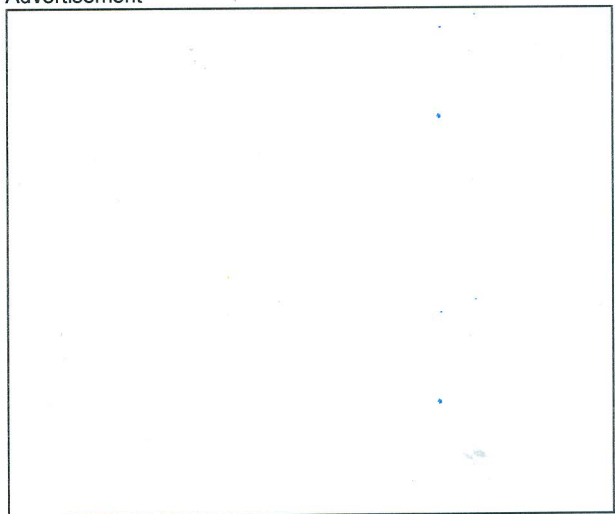
associate degree from Brookdale Community College, bachelor’s degree in psychology from Monmouth University and master’s degree in psychology from Walden University.

Achieving a high school diploma and three degrees already seemed like an enormous accomplishment. But, it wasn’t enough for Singer, who was determined to become gainfully employed.

“Nobody expected me to do anything due to my physical disability. It was recommended that I should sort nails and learn numbers and letters at a sheltered workshop on numerous occasions. This was not an option for me,” she said.

“I contacted many disabled advocates and organizations throughout the country. Nobody helped me to find Web design or online writing jobs,” she said. “Then, I contacted the United Way of Monmouth County regarding designing websites on a voluntary basis. The United Way put me in touch with the Monmouth Housing Alliance.

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I volunteered to edit the Monmouth Housing Alliance's website for a year. Then, the Monmouth Housing Alliance hired me to edit their website for another year."

Singer wanted to teach community courses online after receiving her master's. She contacted several colleges throughout the country, but most of them didn't consider hiring her because they required all professors to teach on-ground courses before teaching online courses, and her disability prevents her from doing so.

Hope came when Dr. John Gutowski, previous chairman of Middlesex County College, hired Singer to teach the college's Introduction to Psychology course online.

"It was a lot of hard work to teach my first online course," Singer said. "Before I taught the course, I had to design the course. This involved learning Middlesex County College's course management system and CampusCruiser portal. Unlike the nondisabled adjunct, I quickly taught myself these online tools from home."

Singer trained herself in TimeCruiser, Moodle, Angel, WebCT and Blackboard course management systems, enabling her to teach Introduction to Psychology, Psychology of Women, Psychology of People with Disabilities, Exceptional Development and Educational Psychology online courses.

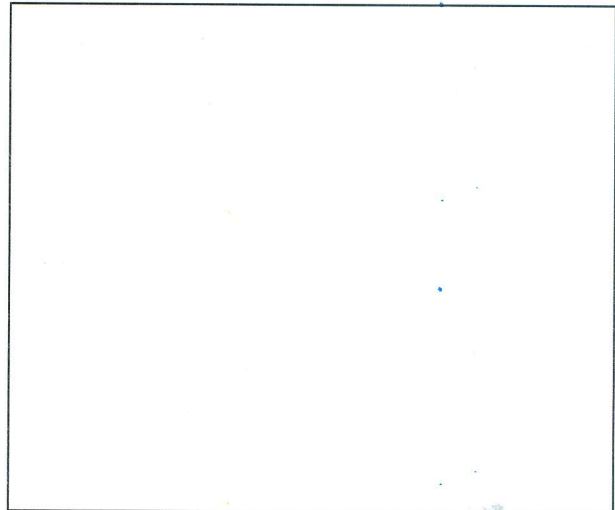
"My responsibilities include communicating with the students through email, communicating with the social science dean through email, making class

announcements on the CampusCruiser portal," Singer said. "Also, I am responsible for presenting lessons as PowerPoint slide shows, presenting learning resources as Internet links (HTML) and assorted videos from YouTube, administering objective and subjective assessments, assigning weekly discussion and close-ended questions, annotated bibliographies and five-page research papers, informing students of their progress, and submitting grades to the Registrar's Office."

Unlike an ordinary adjunct professor, Singer can teach five online courses during the fall and spring semesters.

"I can choose appropriate sample textbooks and software for my courses," Singer said. "Also, I can quickly resolve classroom problems. For example, Pearson textbook company suddenly terminated an online lab called MyLabSchool. Immediately, I replaced the MyLabSchool with brand-new PowerPoint slides. Then, I notified the students about this, and I advised them to exchange their new

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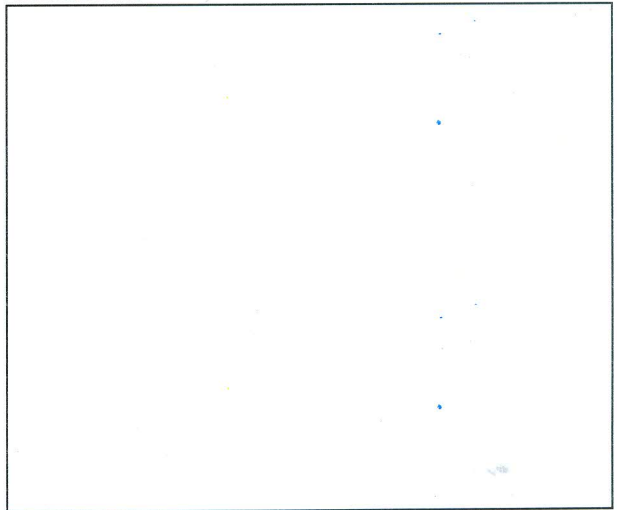
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textbooks for used textbooks.”

The opportunity to inspire students in her Psychology of People with Disabilities course came about when Dr. Steven Barnhart, the current chairman at Middlesex County College, asked her to teach the class, which she has been advertising in local newspapers.

“I am very grateful that Dr. Barnhart judges me by my work,” Singer said, when asked about what it has been like to achieve her dream goal of teaching online. In the future, she would also like to teach online courses for other schools, such as one of her alma maters, Monmouth University.

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