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## San Francisco Bay View

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4/30/03

### Valerie Smith, young woman on the move

*by Dr. Veronica Hunnicutt  
Dean, Southeast Campus  
City College of San Francisco*

*San Francisco* – Valerie Smith is a young, assertive woman of academic excellence and outstanding character. She has prevailed against personal illness and physical challenges. Valerie, who is taking classes at the Southeast Campus, is on her way to even more success in the field of biotechnology.

The mother of two children, ages 9 and 14, Valerie, 31, attended Lincoln High School and the Ocean and Southeast Campuses of City College of San Francisco. At CCSF, she majored in Early Childhood Education. On dialysis for four years as she waited for a kidney transplant, Valerie waited five years before receiving her wish. Valerie needed and received a kidney transplant. As a result of this surgery in July 2002, Valerie takes 16 pills a day and participates in frequent doctor visits to Stanford University. She will follow this regimen for the rest of her life to maintain her health.

None of these issues deterred Valerie from eventually returning to school; she had always been interested in either becoming an educator or working in a profession that expedited kidney donations to people who desperately need organs. Valerie discussed the issue with her mother, Charlene Smith-Henderson, an employment trainer and counselor at the Department of Human Services office at 1800 Oakdale Ave. She directed Valerie to the Southeast Campus program. Motivated by her interest in DNA and its relationship to the human genome project and cloning as a potential method to increase available transplant organs, Valerie enrolled in the biotechnology program.

Valerie enrolled in the OnRamp biotech program first. This program is sponsored by City College of San Francisco, SF Works and Jewish Vocational Services. This unique pre-entry biotech offering allows students to fine-tune their English, math and biotech laboratory skills and gain internship experience as well. Students in the OnRamp are folded into the Bridge to Biotech, a more advanced pre-entry laboratory program at Southeast.

Smith indicates that the courses in the Bridge to Biotech, which include basic science, chemistry, biology, math and English, are fun. She thought the classes would be difficult, but she indicated that the teachers in the Bridge to Biotech made the coursework and classes practical and interesting. One of the classes this week will require students to examine aseptic techniques by evaluating bacteria on their hands and desks.

After completing the Bridge to Biotech, Valerie plans to work fulltime at Genentech or Chiron. She is currently completing an internship as a lab assistant in the office of Research Services at the University of California in San Francisco. Valerie, who is very interested in the area of bioinformatics, the utilization of computers for coding DNA data, plans to take additional classes to earn a biotechnology certificate at City College's Ocean Avenue Campus and a B.A. in biotechnology.

Her advice to people is, "If I can do it, anybody can. Don't miss out! Biotechnology is a fast growing career, and some companies will even pay you to attend school to further your skill level and career in biotechnology. When you gain some experience, you can even work at a biotech company. Salaries for entry-level jobs start at \$19 to \$20 an hour, and there are many jobs available if you are qualified. If you persevere and work hard,

you can succeed. After I had my transplant, I was supposed to recuperate for a year. Unfortunately, my daughter was involved in a car accident, and I had to return to work earlier than expected. I returned for two reasons - to help my daughter and to pursue my dream.”

Valerie adheres to a grueling schedule; she commutes by bus and BART to work at UCSF-Mission Bay from Alameda, returns to Alameda to pick up her children from school and drives back to San Francisco three nights a week to take biotech classes at the Southeast Campus. Valerie Smith is an exceptional young woman; she knows what she wants to achieve with her life, and she is working diligently in spite of her personal challenges to accomplish her academic and career goals.

For further information about the Southeast Campus Biotechnology programs, call Marlene Walker at (415) 550-4514.

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**Please attend the following activities at the Southeast Campus:**

Southeast Campus Open House, April 30, 10 a.m. to 2 p.m., showcasing programs at the Southeast Campus, including Transitional Studies, Hospital Unit Coordinator and Biotechnology, to name a few

Cinco De Mayo Celebration, May 5, 12 to 2 p.m., in the Alex Pitcher Community Room

Asian-Pacific Islanders Celebration, May 14, 12 to 3 p.m., in the Alex Pitcher Community Room

Call Mila Moreno at (415) 550-4347 for further details