

Our vision was to create a youth based organization that would provide at-risk youth in particular, a complete approach to personal development. We stress the educational, personal, community, occupational, ecological and human connections that compose our world and life choices. Using aquatics and travel as major incentives, we organized The Tennessee Aquatic Project and Development Group (TAP) for youth ages 8-18.

Since 1995, TAP has influenced the lives and choices of more than 250 young people. As leaders of the organization, we have expanded to include a group of four adult advisors and corporate supporters with specialties suited for the needs of the young people and the mission of TAP. This has afforded us the opportunity to expand our view to what we feel is the only program of its kind in the state of Tennessee.

Because of TAP, young people are able to receive tutorial services, seminars on money management, personal development, anti drug awareness, healthcare information for men and women and occupational opportunities. TAP reinforces life skills development through conflict resolution training, Wilderness Survival Training, swimming, snorkeling, scuba diving and travel. Advisors monitor youth members' scholastic performance and are granted permission to visit school administrators on behalf of any youth. This allows us to target specific educational needs particularly for at-risk members before they become forgotten statistics in the educational system.

At TAP, we value the lives of all young people and seek to expand the world they exist in. Only through dedication, participation and the expansion of knowledge can this program continue to evolve and meet the needs of its mission.

For more information please visit our website at tennesseeaquaticproject.org.

TAP

Tennessee Aquatic Project and Development Group, Inc.
1309 Jackson Street, Nashville, TN (615) 730-4906
tennesseeaquaticproject.org info@tennesseeaquaticproject.org

PROGRAM COMPONENTS

AQUATICS

EDUCATION

COMMUNITY SERVICE

WILDERNESS SURVIVAL

TRAVEL



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AQUATICS

Swimming

Drowning is the 3rd leading cause of death among African American youth, ages 12-24; therefore, all TAP youth are taught to swim. Through TAP programming:

- 26 youth have earned Red Cross Certification as Life Guards
- 14 youth have earned Red Cross Certification as Water Safety Instructors
- 7 youth have earned Red Cross Certification as Life Guard Instructors

Each year TAP members and alumni provide lifeguard services to Metro Parks and private facility pools throughout the Nashville community. Approximately one-third of the guards employed by Metropolitan Parks and Recreation have been TAP trained and certified.

Scuba Diving

Through the TAP scuba diving certification program youth receive an extensive 4 month training course, as opposed to the adult based scuba diving courses that last a week or less. We ensure that TAP youth understand the dangers that may be encountered underwater with safety being the first objective of our training mission. TAP youth with a membership longer than one year, who have reached the age of 11 and who have met all remaining requirements can participate. Through the TAP scuba diving training program:

- 26 youth have earned PADI (Professional Association of Diving Instructors) Certification as Open Water Divers
- 3 youth have earned PADI Certification as Rescue Divers
- 1 youth has earned PADI Certification as a Hard Hat Diver
- 13 youth have earned PADI Certification as Master Divers



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EDUCATION

The Tennessee Aquatic Project and Development Group, Inc. understands how providing highly engaging STEM (Science, Technology, Engineering, and Mathematics) learning opportunities for youth can increase their future options and success in the science, technology, engineering, and math fields. The world needs creative thinkers who can help develop new ideas and invent solutions to future challenges. In order to participate in aquatic and travel opportunities TAP youth must maintain a 2.5 GPA, with no failing grades. TAP program staff, mentors, and parents monitor participants' progress to inspire them to remain committed to the program over time.

Through successful collaborations with the National Association of Black Scuba Divers, The National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration, REI®, REEF®, and Biscayne National Park, TAP youth are engaged in structured out-of-school activities that provide depth and context for their regular classroom studies. TAP offers educational resources, a supportive learning environment, hands on activities, near-peer mentoring and community involvement to 1) stimulate the youth's understanding of local and global environmental issues and research, 2) inspire a sense of personal responsibility for the care of the environment, and 3) build interest and awareness of STEM-related career opportunities and the academic preparation needed for success.

TAP youth have participated in out of school learning experiences:

- National Hispanic Environmental Council Institute * (1)
- Diving With a Purpose at Biscayne National Park * (5)
- National Association of Black Scuba Divers Youth Educational Summit * (33)
- Field Experience at NOAA Thunder Bay National Marine Sanctuary * (3)
- Diving the Aquarius * (1)
- Mammoth Cave Wilderness Experience (20)
- Diving with the Manatees at Crystal River (5)
- Remotely Operated Vehicle building (30)
- Youth Diving with a Purpose * (5)
- Jr. Ranger Camp (16)

*Scholarship awarded for Field Experience



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COMMUNITY SERVICE

In order for TAP youth to qualify for participation in aquatic and travel opportunities they must perform annually a minimum of 20 hours of community service. Through community service youth learn the value of giving back which instills in them the true meaning of community stewardship. Some of the many community service opportunities TAP youth have participated in include:

- L. A. S. Therapy Network & Development Group, Inc. – Health Fair/Gala
- Senator Thelma Harper’s Annual Easter Egg Hunt
- Nashville Tree Foundation – ReLeaf Day
- Exotic Plant Removal – Metro Parks and Recreation
- Oyster Bag Fill Project – UG Shellfish Lab at Priest Landing
- The Zoo at Grassmere – Harvest Days at the Zoo/Ghouls at Grassmere
- American Cancer Society – Susan G. Komen Race for the Cure
- Whites Creek Watershed Clean-up
- Night at the Inn – Mt. Nebo Baptist Church
- Hunger Action – Food Sort –A-Thon
- Kids & Kites – Representative Brenda Gilmore
- Tennessee Scenic River Association (TSRA) – Access Ramp building
- Hurricane Katrina Relief – pack care packages
- Martin Luther King March
- Cumberland Manor Nursing Home – visitation and care
- Community Garden building
- Salt Marsh Restoration – Savannah Georgia
- Bahia Beach Cleanup – Bahia Beach, Florida and Sapelo Island, GA
- Souls4Souls project – Collecting shoes for Africa
- Haiti Relief – Care Packages
- Henrietta Marie Memorial site clean up



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WILDERNESS SURVIVAL TRAINING

All TAP youth must participate in Wilderness Survival Training. In this uncertain world it is important to provide youth with the skills necessary to survive in the event of a disaster and to be in position to assist others.

The benefits that stem from an outdoor education program are numerous. TAP youth are trained in fire building, outdoor cooking, orienteering, basic knot tying, First Aid, spelunking, tracking and trailing. They are taught to recognize the benefits of the land, natural shelters and its production of edible foods. They become familiar with our eco system and the need to preserve our natural resources. Wilderness Survival Training promotes leadership skills through positive role modeling and serves as an opportunity for personal growth.

Wilderness Survival training has yielded:

- 52 youth have completed the 4 part Wilderness Survival Training
- 23 youth have earned Certification as Wilderness Survival Counselors



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TRAVEL

Since TAP was established in 1995 youth have been given opportunities to travel. Travel allows the participants to experience new places and expand their horizons beyond the communities in which they live. It also provides a vehicle for the at-risk youth to “Dream of Possibilities” and raises awareness of minority contributions by familiarizing youth with the history, peoples and cultures of the regions visited. Tours of historically significant buildings and landmarks, as well as institutions of high education, particularly HBCU’s (Historically Black Colleges & Universities), are always included in TAP travel.

Several partnerships with internationally recognized organizations have further enhanced the opportunities afforded TAP youth. TAP youth have been awarded scholarships and internships through the National Park Service, National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration (NOAA), and the National Association of Black Scuba Divers.

TAP travel opportunities have included:

- Florida Keys
- Washington, DC
- Savannah, Georgia
- Ft. Lauderdale, Florida
- Crystal River, Florida
- Alpena, Michigan (Thunder Bay)
- Cincinnati, Ohio
- Jackson, Mississippi
- Tampa, Florida
- Jacksonville, Florida
- Galveston, Texas
- Houston, Texas
- Sapelo Island, Georgia
- Mammoth Cave, Kentucky
- Cairo, Egypt
- Curacao, Netherlands Antilles
- Nassau, Bahamas
- Freeport, Bahamas



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TAP ALUMNI

TAP's record speaks for itself...100% of the TAP members who have remained in the program through high school have graduated from high school! Moreover, 98% of all TAP alumni are currently enrolled in college or are college or professional school graduates. In 2006, TAP celebrated the graduation of its first Marine Biologist, Savannah Williams (Nashville School of the Arts, 2002) who is currently employed by Vanderbilt University in the Department of Molecular Physiology and Biophysics. Read her story in "House Organ" as she tells how the TAP program changed her life and assisted her in realizing her dreams. Where are other TAP alumni? Let us proudly tell you:

- Theron Johnson, (Hunters Lane) Tennessee State University
- Michelle Wray, (Stratford) Middle Tennessee State University, ER Tech
- Clarice Salone, (MLK) Tennessee State University, U.S. Navy Officer
- Kimberly Frits, (MLK) Fisk University, Political Consultant
- Linda Franklin, (NSA) Middle Tennessee State University, Music Teacher
- Savannah Williams, (NSA) Alabama State University, Research Asst. III, Vanderbilt
- Blaine Anderson, (Hunters Lane) University of Tennessee, Retail Manager
- Hashim Beard, North Carolina A&T University/TSU *
- Yousef Boyd, Nashville Auto Diesel College, Mechanic & Lifeguard Manager
- Kye Stewart, (Pearl-Cohn) Illinois State University/University of Memphis
- Sabrina Williams, (Pearl-Cohn) Middle Tennessee State University *
- Marcus Johnson, (NSA) Tennessee State University, Wall St. Financial Analyst
- Chris Cannon, (MLK) Tennessee State University, Mississippi College of Law
- Tiphani Lampkin, David Lipscomb University
- Terrance Adams, (Hunters Lane) Middle Tennessee State University *
- Muzon Henderson, (Pearl-Cohn) Middle Tennessee State University *
- Gerard Johnson, (Hillwood) Tennessee State University *
- Benjamin Littleton, (East Literature) Middle Tennessee State University *
- Brennan Christmon, (East Literature) Tennessee State University *
- Andrew Johnson, (Hume Fogg) University of Tennessee Chattanooga *
- Jamal Young, (Antioch)
- Evan Mann, (Hume Fogg) University of Tennessee Knoxville *
- Jeffrey Sweet, (East Literature) U.S. Marines *
- Teacon McCarroll, (McGavock) NW Mississippi Community College *
- Matthew Edwards, (Pearl-Cohn) Tennessee State University *
- Collin Christmon, (MLK) Tennessee State University *
- Toure' Henderson, (Pearl-Cohn) Tennessee State University *
- Gary Faulcon, (University School) Hampton University *

*Currently Enrolled



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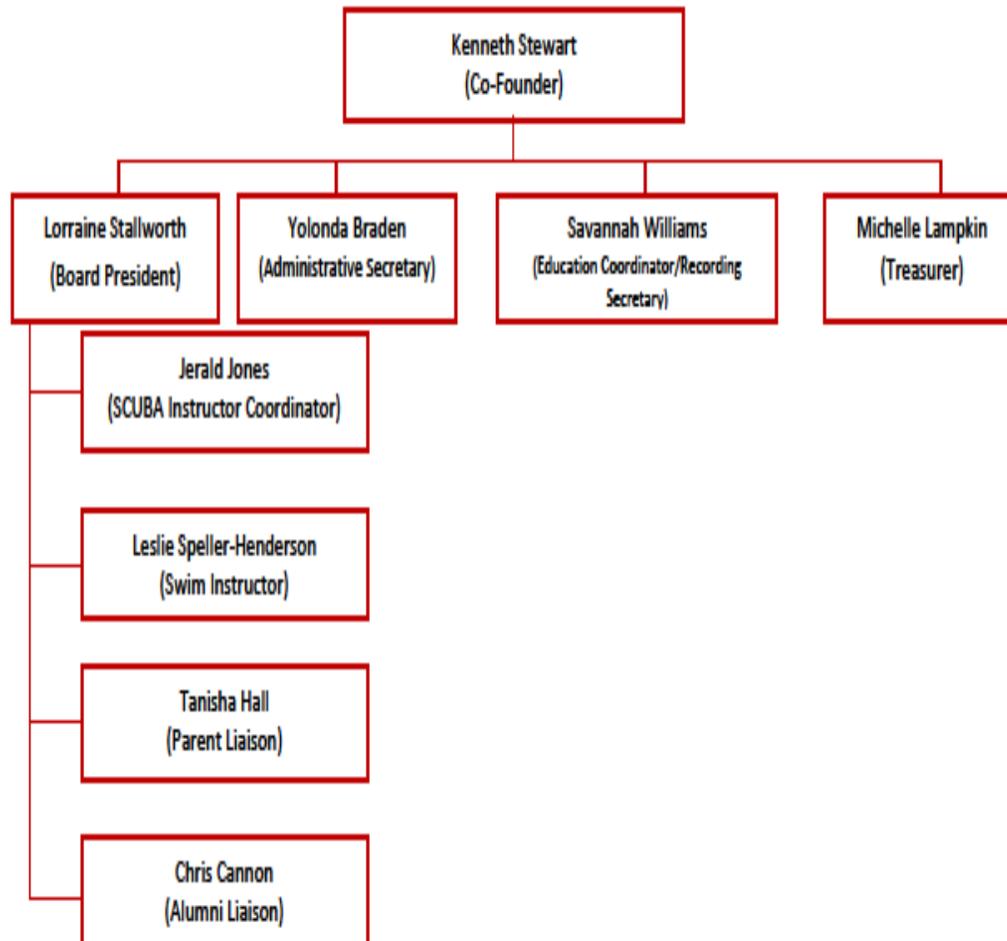
1309 Jackson Street, Nashville, TN

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BOARD MEMBERS 2013-2014



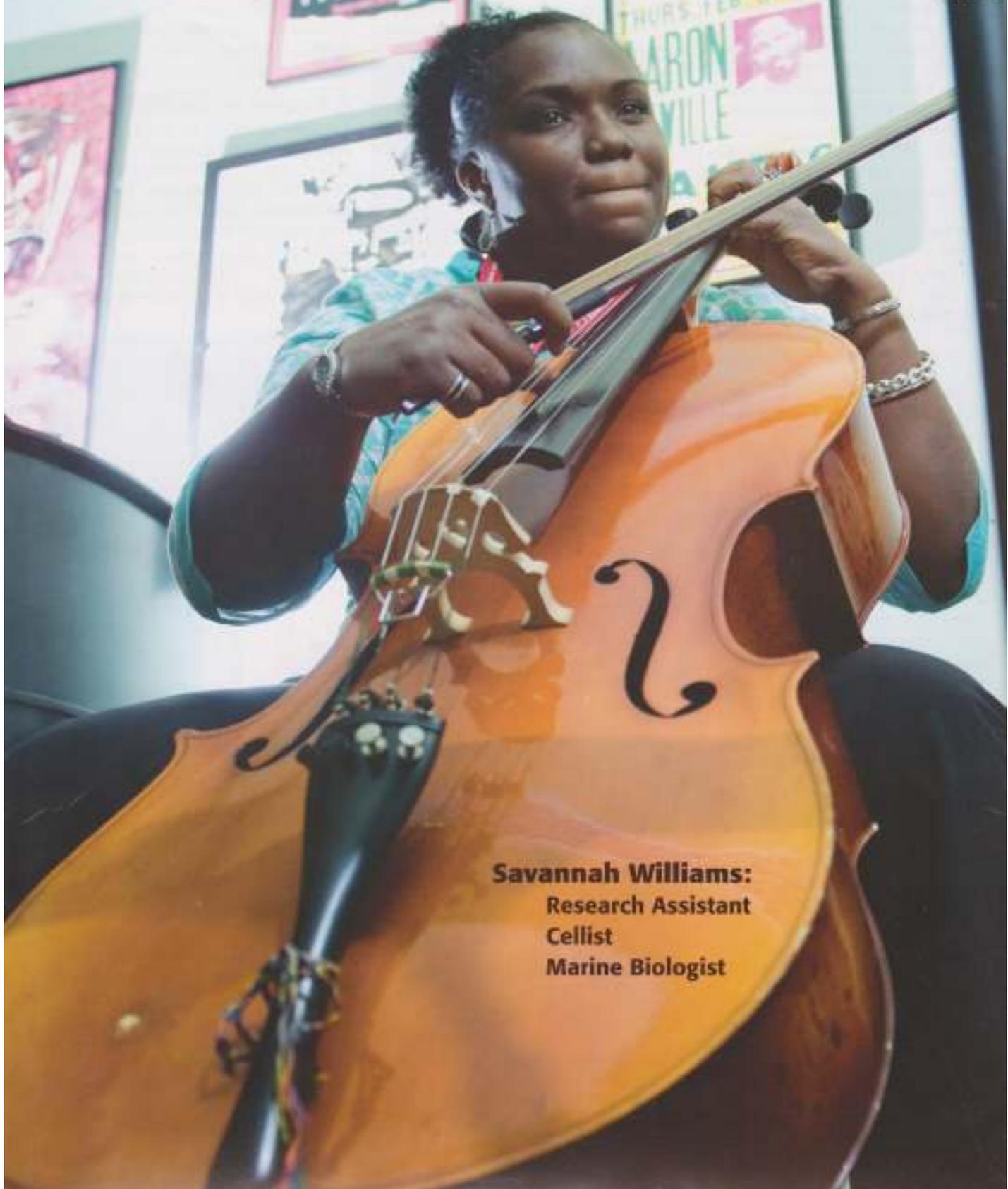
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VANDERBILT UNIVERSITY MEDICAL CENTER

HOUSE ORGAN

www.mc.vanderbilt.edu/houseorgan

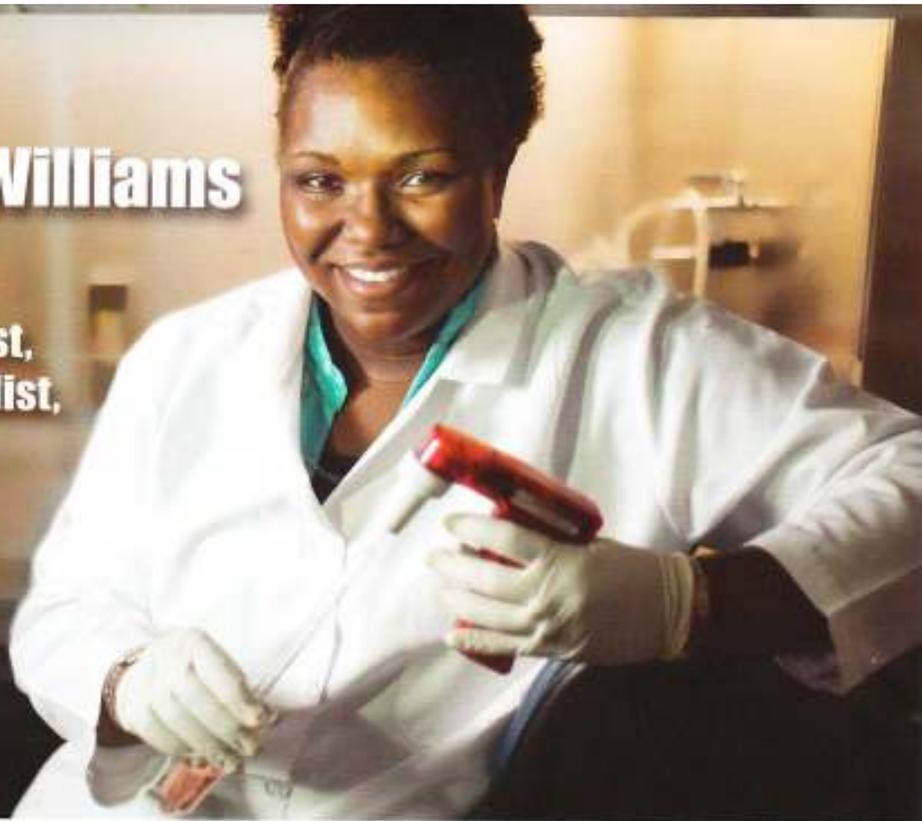
April 2011



Savannah Williams:
Research Assistant
Cellist
Marine Biologist

Savannah Williams

**Marine biologist,
molecular scientist,
accomplished cellist,
and more**



BY LURMA RACKLEY

Savannah Williams, a research assistant in VUMC's Department of Molecular Physiology and Biophysics, never behaved like the typical little girls in her neighborhood in Nashville. As a result, she's a 26-year-old marine biologist who plays the cello.

She didn't find her inspiration from anyone she knew in her lower-income community. Instead, her favorite pastime as a kid was sitting alone watching arts and sciences programs on public television.

"One day I was watching a program on PBS that introduced young artists, and a boy was playing the cello so beautifully. I said if I ever get the chance to learn to play a musical instrument, that's what I'm going to do," Williams recalled.

In 5th grade, she saw her chance. With a determination that has stayed with her, she took advantage of the W.O. Smith/Nashville Community Music School, a local music school program that provides financially disadvantaged students with free musical instruments and low-cost lessons from area volunteer musicians and teachers.

After a couple of years, she entered a program called the Nashville Career Advancement Center's (NCAC) Summer Youth Employment that gave young teens jobs. Hers was with the Development and Housing Agency (MDHA). She saved up and found a great deal to buy her own cello for \$500—a lot of money for anybody, but certainly for a teen whose single mom was raising seven children.

Williams has been playing cello ever since.

"No one from my neighborhood was in the same music program. But I was doing something I liked. I was keeping out of trouble and having great experiences in the process. Being there opened a lot of doors for me. I played at different events and met people who would ask me about my career endeavors. I got to travel with the ensemble and see new venues," Williams said.

One of the doors that opened as a result of the career advancement program led to her next atypical move—learning to swim and scuba dive, which gave her a running start on her ultimate career path. No one in her family or community, she says, had ever been near an ocean.

As part of the program, every Friday a professional would come speak to the students about career paths. One such person was Kenneth Stewart, co-founder of the Tennessee Aquatic Project and Development Group Inc (TAP).

"Ken and his son, Kye, came in and spoke to us about their recent trip to Egypt. Kye was my age, about 12 or 13, and he told us about his first big dive. He was doing something most of us would not do," Williams said. The idea of expanding her knowledge of the world through travel grabbed her imagination. She approached Ken at the end of his presentation.

"I relentlessly called him throughout the summer. He later said I was the only student in his three years of presenting to this group to ever take him up on his offer and to bug him about wanting to join the program. I did not know how to swim, had never been near a large body of water. But I wanted to see the world. I knew there was more out there than what's in my neighborhood. When he said I could travel and only learn to dive if I wanted to, I said 'That's for me.' I got the call from him at the end of the summer when school started."

On the Ocean

This is where Williams' two passions took a dual track. As a first-year student at the Nashville School of the Arts, she played in her school's orchestra and choir and continued to play with the W.O. Smith String Ensemble.

But on weekends, and eventually weekdays after school, she devoted herself to the aquatic program. It wasn't easy at first. The other students knew how to swim already and had parents who could drive them to and from the lessons.

Williams' first trip to the program was alone by bus. Thereafter, Ken Stewart volunteered to pick her up because he was so impressed by her dedication.

"At first, it was difficult. I had never put my head in the water, so I'd sit on the side of the pool. What got me was I saw all those kids having so much fun. They'd get out there and I'd be on the edge of the pool. They were learning snorkeling and dive techniques. I said, 'Maybe I can learn how to snorkel,' and I thought I was ready.

"Then I went to the National Association of Black SCUBA Divers (NABS) Youth Educational Summit, where we had the opportunity to snorkel in the middle of the Atlantic Ocean from a beautiful boat. I stepped to the edge of the boat and looked up at Mr. Stewart and said 'You told me you'd never make me do anything I didn't want to do. I don't want to get in the water.' That first time on the open ocean terrified me. I stayed on the boat the entire time, watching everyone else have fun," Williams said.

"I told myself 'You didn't come this far to let fear keep you from enjoying this experience.' When we got back to Nashville, we worked on me being more comfortable in the water and becoming a stronger swimmer. The next time we went out on a boat I got in the water, snorkeled, and saw everything there was to see."

It took her a little longer to want to dive, but her natural tendency toward advancing herself clinched the deal. Her high school counselor knew Williams liked science. So she introduced Williams to the Earthwatch/Durfee Foundation Student Challenge Award, an opportunity for high school students to do research around North America. Williams won entry into a program that attracts thousands of applicants but accepts only 75. To boost her potential for acceptance, she went after her scuba diving certificate. She thinks that gave her the edge.

"I actually got to go to Mexico for eight weeks to study an endemic fish there," she said, still awed by the experience and the beauty of the surroundings.

From the Lab to the Great American Outdoors

By the time Williams became the first person in her family to go to college, she had \$100,000 in scholarship offers and was a certified scuba diver. She chose Alabama State University. There, she pursued a degree in marine biology, taking classes on campus and at the Dauphin Island Research Lab. She continued to play the cello in the school's small string ensemble, and participated in every program—often at the leadership level—that would advance her career and teach her new skills.

"I am a program person. We should not let the money go to waste; we should step up and take those opportunities," she explained.

Right out of college, Williams worked as an instructor at Dauphin Island Research Lab and then as a research assistant. There, she met international scientists and collaborated on research projects that studied various deep water fish.

"There is nothing like being in the middle of a beautiful seagrass bed. I could say, 'This is my office. This is where I work.' It's a great feeling," Williams said.

In September 2008, she joined the Department of Molecular Physiology and Biophysics.

"I was excited to come back to Nashville, and I've always wanted to work at Vanderbilt. This university has award-winning scientists researching molecular techniques to study gene-gene and gene-environment interactions." She said working at Vanderbilt is an opportunity to gain more skills in the molecular field and to add to what she's learned about ecology.

"You see some fields come and go, but environmental science we can't get away from," Williams said. "We need to know how what we are doing affects the ecosystem. We need to change people's behavior by getting them to understand why scientists are trying to restore the environment."

Public outreach is critical, Williams said. That's why she is working with the National Park Service to go out and teach people the importance of her work. She encourages young people to consider careers as wildlife biologists and other fields in the "green" economy. Organizers invited her to speak at a first-of-its-kind conference last September, "Breaking the Color Barrier in the Great American Outdoors," designed to showcase and promote people of color in outdoor activity and the environmental movement.

"At Dauphin Island, I have watched a natural marsh that helps filter out pollution begin to erode. Chunks of marsh are gone," Williams said. "Scientists are building oyster reefs to counteract wave action and to provide a habitat for animals. They're studying how the makeup of the fish population is changing due to the loss of seagrass beds. If the babies don't have a place to live, where will the adult fish come from?"

While her accomplishments and publications up to this point are impressive, Williams said her next goal is to complete her master's and doctorate degrees within the next five years, and to involve herself in research that melds the skills she has learned in the water and in the labs.

That's not all. She plans to keep playing the cello.

(Rackley is a writer who lives in Atlanta)



Despite having never seen the ocean, Williams was drawn to scuba diving and marine biology.



Williams keeps a watchful eye on student Harmoni Woods at the W.O. Smith School in downtown Nashville.