



## Alumni Profile

# A Whole New World

## and a Career in Hospitality Management

### Unfolds for Middlesex Graduate

# Dianne Mills



*Dianne Mills, a graduate of MCC's Hospitality Management Program, is now a supervisor and hostess at the Wyndham Hotel, Billerica*

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*Dianne Mills*



*Mills was named the Wyndham Hotel Billerica's Employee of the Year 2000.*

*For more information about the Hospitality Management Program at Middlesex Community College, call Program Coordinator Barbara Dexter-Smith at 781-280-3170.*

**D**ianne Mills got a lot more than she bargained for by enrolling at Middlesex Community College. What began as an exercise in parenting – she wanted to set a good educational example for her seven children – has led to a career in the hospitality industry, including being named Employee of the Year at the Wyndham Hotel in Billerica.

Starting her college education at the age of 48 wasn't easy, Mills admits, but almost immediately she knew it was the right thing to do – and that she'd come to the right college. "My first day, sitting in class with all these young kids, I thought, 'What am I doing here?'"

"But after a week, there were no barriers – no age barriers, no racial barriers, nothing. We were just a great mix of students -- all ages and ethnic groups. After that, I just loved it. I loved going there every day.

"MCC made me feel like I belonged," said Mills, now 52. "I never felt like I was an older person. It opened up a whole new world to me."

A big part of that world involved learning the business side of running hotels and restaurants. After having worked off and on as a waitress over the years, Mills decided to major in hospitality management. She graduated in May 2000 with an Associate in Science degree in Business Administration. Her course load included classes in accounting, communications, computers, food and beverage management, innkeepers' law and human resources management, plus basics such as math and English.

Mills was especially happy with the class size at MCC, where the average number of students per class is 18. "We had a one-on-one with our professors and the other students. When I had trouble with algebra, I went to the Learning Center and got tutoring in math. And the MCC counselors helped me with my resume and job-interview skills."

Middlesex also arranged for Mills to complete two semester-long paid internships with the Wyndham Hotel in Billerica. Gaining that real-world experience was invaluable, she said. "It was great -- I worked in the kitchen, I shadowed the food and

beverage manager, I did liquor inventory, and worked in the dining room," she explained. "And, the Wyndham managers really sat down and taught me things – I wasn't just following them around all night."

After working part-time at night, while finishing up her degree during the day, Mills was hired as a full-time hostess by Wyndham following graduation. She was tapped Employee of the Month in October 2000 and was named the hotel's Employee of the Year 2000 in January. She's now in the running for the hotel-chain's national employee of the year award, and has since been promoted to supervisor.

"There's no question that it's been a good fit from the beginning," said Beth Mitchell, Food and Beverage Manager at the Wyndham, Billerica. "It's hard to find people like Dianne. She has such a commitment to her job, and she's very committed and loyal to Wyndham."

Now that she's working for an international corporation with an emphasis on employee training and internal promotion, Mills foresees plenty of opportunity to work her way up to her ultimate goal: becoming the manager of a hotel food and beverage department. The key to her success, however, was enrolling in that first class at MCC.

"As I progressed at Middlesex, I gained the confidence to do a resume and go on a job interview," said Mills. "Before I came to MCC, I'd never even turned on a computer! Now, I have two at home."

Her transformation into a computer-savvy student even included taking a world geography class via computer and the Internet. "I was in on one of the first Distance Learning courses at MCC," said Mills proudly. She was able to complete her degree while working at the hotel, thanks to the innovative class – which allowed her to work at her own pace and entirely from home.

"Everybody is important at Middlesex," said Mills. "Everybody tells you, 'You are a good student, you can make it.' And they do everything they can to help you succeed."