

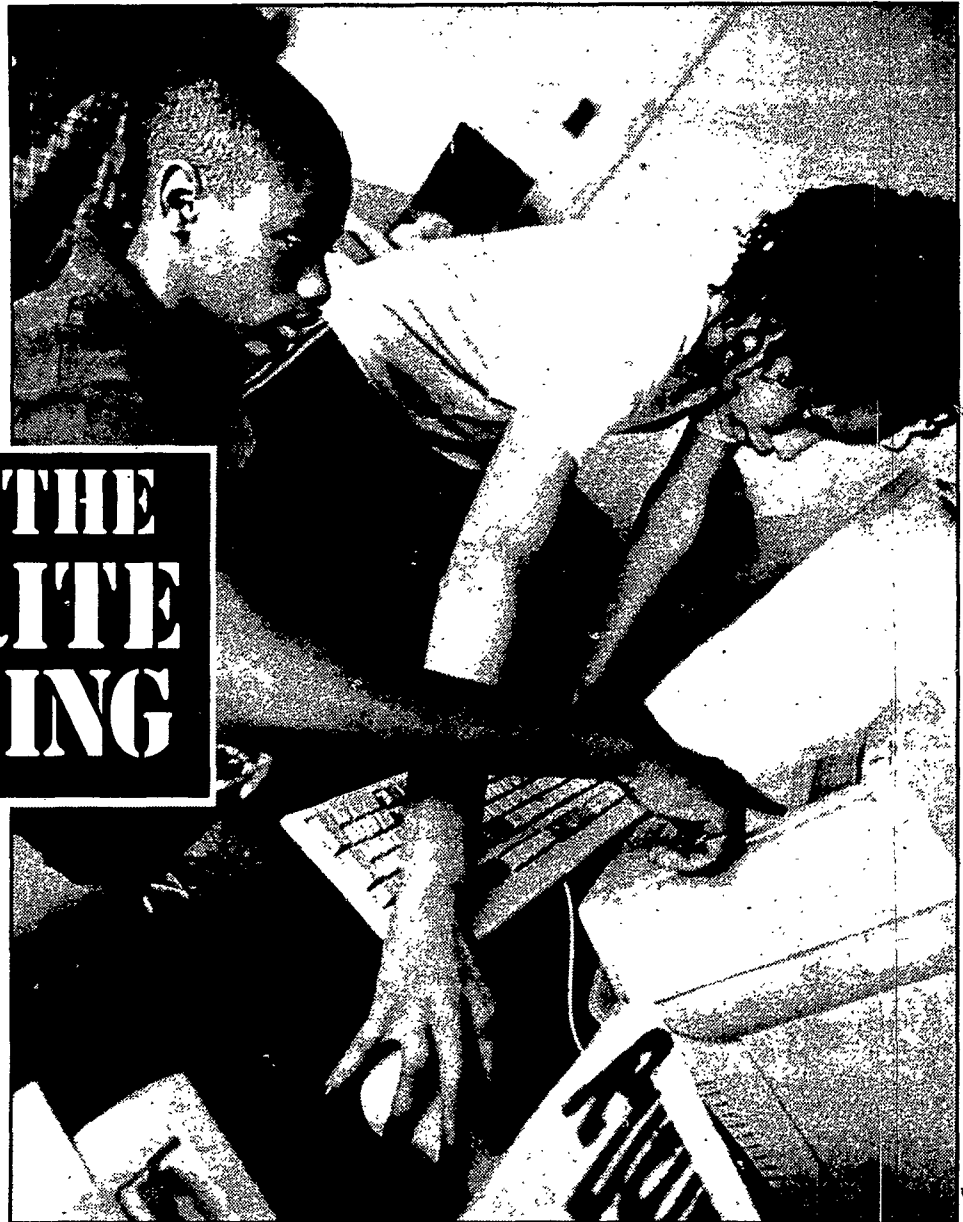


Erica Bryant, left, gives raffle tickets to Shanetra Thomas, 14, to sell during a charity car wash July 13 at the Baden Street Settlement Center, Rochester.



Erica helps student Darwin Taylor-Jones, 14, who was interviewing participants at the car wash. Erica encourages youths at the Baden Street center to pursue various forms of writing.

**DO THE WRITE THING**



Erica works with Kalem Rogers, 14, at the Baden Street Settlement Center July 13. She is teaching a newspaper production class to children at the center.

Story by  
Mike Latona

Photos by  
Greg Francis

**E**rica Bryant's creativity reaches well beyond her own literary works.

Thanks to Erica, a number of inner-city children have had the opportunity to hone their writing skills over the past few summers. Erica, 18, has introduced children to writing short stories, poetry and newspaper articles in her work as a counselor at Rochester's Baden Street Settle-

ment, a child-development center.

In Erica's view, many who attend Baden Street's summer day-care program are talented writers who just haven't been inspired to pursue the craft.

"Everybody has it in them. I like to be able to bring it out of them," said Erica, 18, who graduated from Our Lady of Mercy High School last month.

Two summers ago, Erica guided elementary-school children in producing their very own newspaper, *The Mickey Mouse Times*. The publication contained movie reviews, an advice column and tips for performing household chores.

"Everybody thought it was cute," Erica said.

Last year, Erica encouraged the center's children to write a series of poems and short stories. Her goal for this year is to work with young teens on a business newspaper that will include articles about job shadowing and entrepreneurial projects.

Though Erica has lived in suburban Pittsford most of her life, a big part of her heart is in the city.

"I feel at home at Baden Street. It's great to have a job doing something you like, and bringing journalism to other kids," said Erica, a parishioner at Immaculate Conception Church, Rochester.

Erica is well suited for passing on writing skills. She served as co-editor this past year of *Mercedes*, the literary magazine at Mercy.

"Most of the time that I write, I write about something that's going on in my life," Erica said. She added that she is "especially drawn to eccentric people — people with quirks. I like to observe what they're doing."

Erica said she enjoys writing fiction because it allows her imagination to roam free.

"I can create my own little world. Whatever I want to happen, happens," she said.

Case in point: Erica blended fiction with history when she wrote a story for *Mercedes* about "Miss Ella," a hairdresser who spins improbable tales about her past.

In the short story, Miss Ella claims to have been friends with Rosa Parks — the woman who, in 1955, sparked a major turn in the civil-rights movement. Parks was arrested in Montgomery, Ala., for defying a bus driver's order to move to the back of the bus — an area that was often designated for blacks. Here's how Erica portrays Miss Ella's account of that historic incident:

*(I) was supposed to give Rosa Parks a ride home the day she wouldn't get up for that white man. But there was a shoe sale at J.C. Penney's and I left work early. So Rosa had to take the bus. She was probably so mad at me she forgot about being scared of that bus driver.*

Later in the story, Erica makes some pointed observations about the hairdresser.

*Miss Ella is an enigma. People always want to say she's senile because that's easier than trying to figure her out. Asking her to explain herself is a waste of time because she won't. I think she figures that anyone who is not bright enough to understand her words doesn't deserve her wisdom.*

Erica has earned a full scholarship to Boston University, where she will begin studies in the fall. She is undecided about her major, but — not surprisingly — is leaning toward English.

She graduated in the top 10 in her class at Mercy. She has also been involved with a school group which promotes multicultural awareness.

Erica's accomplishments earned her national recognition this year: she was named to *USA Today* newspaper's All-USA High School Academic second team.

Jim Ditzel, a Mercy physics instructor who nominated her for the award, noted that Erica is equally adept in both science and English.

"To have a student with that capability is very unusual," Ditzel said. "It's obvious that Erica is a special, talented young lady."

Ditzel added that Erica's work with the Baden Street youths was a determining factor in his decision to nominate her.

"She's taken an interest, and provided additional support with inner-city kids. When you lay on all that special care, I think (the award is) rightly deserved," he said.

"She was into helping people and getting her point across. She's a very sincere young woman," said Evelyn Kirst, principal at Mercy. "It didn't seem that she was after the public glory."

Erica said she was indeed caught off guard by the national recognition.

"I was surprised. It was really an honor to be among the top 40 students in the whole country," she said.

**COMING NEXT WEEK:  
Rock for Christ**

GET READY. GET SET. GET SOAKED.

**SOAK ZONE**

THE ULTIMATE SPRAYGROUND

*Seabreeze*  
AMUSEMENT PARK

Just Right for Family Fun!

4600 Culver Rd. Rochester

For Info: (716) 323-1900

**Save \$2 on Summer Family Fun!**

With this coupon, you save \$2.00 off the retail price of a Ride & Slide Pass (reg. \$14.50). Not valid on Kiddie Pass, Night Rider, Admission Plus, or other ride offers. May not be combined with other discounts. Kid Passes and Admission Plus Passes are offered at the gate every day.

Valid any day through 9/6/99.  
One coupon needed per person.

*Seabreeze*  
AMUSEMENT PARK

For Info: 716-323-1900  
Toll Free: 1-800-395-2500



Rochester NY

CAT1 92037

CLIP &

SAVE!