

» TAP

# Teach Your Children Well

With two kids prepping for college, Tricia Harris uses TAP to lead by example

BY JOHN PATRICK PULLEN

**W**ith two teenage kids, a husband, four horses and a bunch of cats and dogs kicking around Tricia Harris' miniature farm in Kokomo, Ind., there are very few "typical" days. But if forced to describe one, Harris reveals this school-day schedule: The UAW Local 977 member wakes up around 7 p.m. for her midnight shift as an inspector at Marion Metal Stamping, where she checks fenders as well as panels. It's a job that requires Harris to be sharp and on-task for every minute.

"Lately I've also been checking tags on racks to make sure we have quality product going out of the plant," she noted. But once her shift ends, her day certainly isn't over. Harris then heads to her morning class at Indiana University at Kokomo, where she is currently pursuing her bachelor's degree in psychology. "By 9:45 a.m., I'm on my way home. I literally let the dogs out, watch an hour's worth of TV and go to bed. Then I get up, we cook dinner, eat and I get in the shower and go do it all again."

Harris has taken on this manic schedule not only as a means to an end — she will have a psychology degree along with minors in women's studies and labor studies — but also as a lesson to her two children, who at ages 17 and 13 are nearing college themselves. "It's showing them

that if mom can do it, they can do it," she noted.

Harris' college career began 13 years ago, a timeline that could have been shortened, Harris said, if she had graduated before starting her family. That's also part of her message to her kids. "I wanted to show them that it's hard to have a family and go to school — so finish school first."

All this schooling in the Harris family means a lot of studying. Nevertheless, there are times when all the books are shut. "When we're at the table, we're just eating together," said Harris. "There are no books, no cell phones, no nothing."

Harris acknowledges that she would have a hard time earning her degree without the assistance of the UAW-GM Tuition Assistance Program (TAP). "I'm happy that they offer TAP — I really am. College is expensive, and I'm really grateful for the help."

Though it has taken Harris a few years longer to graduate than she might have preferred — she is now a senior — she is proud of her accomplishments and thankful for the chance to reach her goals. "TAP gave me the opportunity to go back." And once Harris has earned this degree, she plans to teach her children another lesson — how to keep the momentum going toward graduate school. ■



TOD MARTENS