

# Mother fills many roles

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Larissa Sellers' workweek can be divided into two full-time shifts.

The day shift involves taking care of young patients at Carilion Pediatric Associates in Roanoke. The night shift entails a stack of books, a laptop and plenty of background noise from her 6-year-old daughter, Jaylynn, at her house in Bedford County.

When she finally hits the sheets sometime after 1 a.m., she's exhausted.

Call it the unavoidable side effect of being a full-time medical assistant, student and mom. Sellers' schedule overflows with play dates and exams, ballet classes and meetings.

And the responsibilities keep on coming: Sellers is now president of her class at Jefferson College of Health Sciences, and she signed up to be the room mother of her daughter's kindergarten class at Moneta Elementary School.

It's no wonder the New York-based magazine Working Mother chose Sellers as one of its 30 Working Mothers of the Year — along with several high-powered executives and first lady Michelle Obama.

Magazine editor Suzanne Riss said what stuck out about Sellers was her ability to tackle one task after another with a kind of seamless ease.

"It's one thing to work full time and raise a child but she was also going to school full time as well," Riss said. "And her husband has a very demanding career in its own right."

Jason Sellers works 16 hours a day, six days a week, as a customer service manager for Schwan's.

He said his wife's ability to take on the full-time parenting role of their daughter leaves him feeling both amazed and worried.

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"Yeah, I worry she's taking on too much," he said. "I don't know how she does it and does it so well."

## 'Full and passionate' lives

Sellers, 30, was one of 500 women around the country nominated to be Working Mother of the Year for 2009.

Sellers, who was nominated by her sister Carrie Murillo, was clueless about the contest until she received a phone call from the magazine in February.

"I was surprised and a little confused," Sellers said of finding out she was one of the magazine's picks.

Murillo said she nominated her sister as soon as she saw an advertisement for the contest in the magazine's November issue.

"I instantly thought of Larissa," she said. "She is such an overachiever and the best mother."

Murillo, 27, lives on Vandenberg Air Force Base in California. She said she admired her sister's positive attitude in the face of life's stresses.

In her nomination letter, Murillo wrote about her sister's ability to take on several projects at a time and keep her cool in challenging times:

"Throughout all the busyness she still gets up and goes to church every Sunday and finds time to cook dinner for her family mostly every night."

Niss said Sellers and the other women chosen for the award were key contributors in their professions, communities and children's lives.

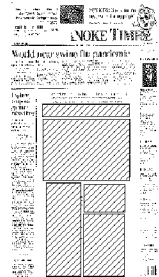
"These women aren't just going through the motions. They are living in a full and passionate way," Niss said.

## Back to school

Sellers said she made the decision to go back to school for a bachelor's degree last summer. Her major is health management, and she hopes the move will allow her to take on a management position in the near future.

She currently works as a certified medical assistant and has an associate degree from Hocking College in Ohio.

Taking a full course load isn't easy,



Sellers said, but fortunately most of her classes are online, meaning she can spend more nights at home with her daughter.

But trying to find a successful balance between schoolwork and parenting is a challenge, she said.

"It's horrible," Sellers confessed. "Jaylynn is always coming up to me saying, 'Mommy do this, Mommy do that.' "

Like any 6-year-old, her daughter has trouble staying quiet in the midst of timed tests or online classroom discussions.

Despite the interruptions, Sellers has managed her course load well, achieving A's in most of her classes, she said.

Several months ago, her classmates nominated Sellers as class president.

"When I found out I was class president, I was like, 'Oh my gosh, another thing!' But I accepted," she said. As president, Sellers introduces incoming freshmen to the major and discusses various aspects of the health management field with them.

Sellers said that although these commitments temporarily tie up her time, they will be a benefit to her family in the long run. She expects to receive her degree next spring.

"I went back to school to better Jaylynn's life. I think it's good for her to see me do this. That way she'll know if you want it bad enough, it happens."

## Balancing responsibilities

At work last Thursday, Sellers moved from one patient's room to another, checking youngsters' blood pressure, vital signs, eyes and ears.

She wrapped a blood pressure cuff around an 18-month-old's chubby arm, looked over at his wide-eyed big sister and smiled. "You're cute," she said.

According to co-workers, Sellers is no complainer. She doesn't grumble when it comes to setting up appointments or making referrals, and she has a special knack for communicating with patients.

"She's always willing to help," said supervisor Susan Welch. "She's very calm and reassuring with patients."

Sellers shrugged off the compli-

ments with an embarrassed laugh.

"It's all about them. They make what I do possible," she said.

Although it seems as if she's at ease with her busy lifestyle, Sellers said she still struggles with feelings of guilt.

She sometimes catches herself buying Jaylynn things as a way to make up for lost time with her, she said.

Sellers even signed up to be the room mother of Jaylynn's classroom to balance the scales between motherhood and work.

"I thought at least I can do this for my daughter," she said. Mostly, Sellers said, being room mother involves organizing all the holiday parties for the class.

How does she find the time for it?

"I use my PTO [paid time off] time," she said.

When asked how she felt about spending her cherished time off handing out heart candies to kindergartners, she said she didn't mind.

"I'd have a thousand of them [children] if I could," Sellers said. "It's just a joy — watching her grow."

Sellers is featured in the May issue of Working Mother. She will be one of the 30 women honored at the magazine's gala luncheon in New York City on May 8. She plans to attend along with her husband and daughter.

## 29 other Working Mothers of the Year

by Working Mother magazine (job, number of children)

**Jenny Barrett** VP and bank branch manager, 2  
**Belinda Caballero Sloat** Bank of America senior VP, 3  
**Blair Christie** Cisco senior VP, 2  
**Yolanda Conyers** Lenovo VP, 3  
**Kim Deschamps** Social worker and college student, 1  
**Kimberley Euston** Executive at PricewaterhouseCoopers, 3  
**Colleen Fahey Rush** Executive with MTV Networks, 2  
**Cheila Fernandez** Senior consultant, 3  
**Alexis Franzese** Teaching and research assistant, 2  
**Vivian Fresco** Senior manager at Astraeneca, 2  
**Lisa Gurry** Senior director at Microsoft, 3  
**Theresa Heaney** Personnel manager at Wal-Mart, 6  
**Laurelle Johnson** Business owner, 2  
**Cheryl Keegan** Scientist, 2  
**Rose Kirk** VP of distribution at Verizon Wireless, 2  
**Shannon Kirkpatrick** Tax managing director at KPMG, 3  
**Dr. Mary Ranee Leder** Children's physician, 4  
**Janet Liang** President of a health organization, 2  
**Harriet Mendi** Teacher, 3  
**Dr. Linda Mona** Clinical psychologist, 2  
**Michelle Obama** First lady, 2  
**Denise O'Brien** E-business consultant, 1  
**Maruel Perkins-Chavis** VP at Marriott, 2  
**Jennifer Roxburgh** Manager at IBM, 2  
**P.J. Scelfo** Recruiter for Army National Guard, 3  
**Susan Sabbott** President of American Express Open, 2  
**Shantelle Thomas** Director and senior actuary at Allstate, 2  
**Nicole Dawn Vetter** Teacher, 3  
**Tujuanna Williams** Senior director at Freddie Mac, 2



Larissa Sellers of Bedford County is a full-time medical assistant at Carilion Pediatric Associates in Roanoke.



Photos by SAM DEAN | The Roanoke Times

Larissa Sellers tries to balance her career and education with time at home with her husband, Jason, and daughter, Jaylynn.



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In addition to working full time, Larissa Sellers is studying health management at Roanoke's Jefferson College of Health Sciences.