



To Serve and Protect

By Carrie A. Crouch, Director of Communications



While she stands a mere 5-foot-4, junior Stacey Pratt has a large desire to make a difference in the lives of others.

Currently serving in a two-year, paid internship with the U.S. Secret Service in Columbus, Ohio, Pratt must maintain full-time student status, a required GPA and a minimum number of weekly work hours. Her daily activities vary, forcing her to learn on the fly.

“On a typical day, I handle all of the counterfeit bills that pass through the central Ohio area. I have to verify that each bill is counterfeit and, after determining that it is, I process each one individually,” said Pratt. “I edit and send out official reports when needed and stand ready to assist agents with investigations. I’ve also gone to the shooting range while agents attempt to qualify. Afterward, they give me the privilege of cleaning their weapons,” she joked.

When asked if she was ever afraid, especially as a female, in her current or future position, she answered, “It isn’t about how muscular you are or how well you can fight; it’s about how well you can communicate. It doesn’t take much to get into a fight, but it takes a lot to be able to talk a person out of a fight. I know female police officers much smaller than me who are effective because they listen and empathize—defusing potentially harmful situations. When people say I’m too small to do this, it just motivates me even more to accomplish my goals.”

Pratt’s timing for the internship couldn’t have been better. The 2008 presidential election year afforded her some unique opportunities. She helped agents with the protective paperwork that goes along with dignitary visits and rode in the motorcade to see exactly what it takes to protect these individuals.

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“It’s amazing how detailed and precise the Secret Service has to be in order to protect a life. Countless days are spent preparing for a visit that may last only one hour,” Pratt explained. “It has made me respect the behind-the-scenes aspects of security. It is definitely an eye-opener and one of my favorite parts of the job. I am very fortunate to have experienced these things.”

Pratt credits MVNU’s criminal justice professor Merel Pickenpaugh for encouraging her to apply for the internship and the Career Services department for preparing her for the interview. “If I had gone to another school, I believe I would not have an internship with the Secret Service. My professors have taken a huge interest in my life and career that I would not have received anywhere else,” she said. “Mount Vernon has taught me to

take pride in what I do and to do it to the fullest of my ability. I once heard a pastor say that ‘in the opportunity of a lifetime, you must act within the lifetime of that opportunity’—I feel that MVNU has helped instill that in my life.”

But Pratt’s interest in criminal justice didn’t start at MVNU. “Law enforcement runs in my family. My uncle and great uncles were police officers,” she said. “I’d always been interested in criminal justice, but MVNU helped me realize I could accomplish my goal of making a difference in someone’s life through law enforcement.” Through this internship, her original focus on missing persons is now shifting to a federal career, perhaps with the Secret Service.

Her twin sister, Stephanie, is a constant encouragement. “I wouldn’t be the person I am without Stephanie’s influence. She has been extremely supportive throughout this experience, and her presence in my life has helped form me into who I am,” she explained. “While we both have different career goals and interests, we support each other’s goals.” Stephanie majors in business management and assists the campus Special Events office.

Pratt has learned to weave her faith into her work in subtle yet meaningful ways. “I believe actions speak louder than words. Everyone at my office knows that I am a Christian and they respect that,” she commented. “I feel as though I can influence others by just being myself and doing the best job that I can. They notice that I put forth more effort than most people.”

For more information about MVNU’s criminal justice program, visit academics.mvnu.edu.