

## Peoria woman struggles through 'nightmare' year

By **Steve Tarter**  
of the **Journal Star**

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PEORIA — It hasn't been a good year for Tenshar Farmer.

The 35-year-old Peorian lost her job, her home and so far has been unable to collect unemployment insurance.

But she's not giving up. This fall, she plans to resume taking classes at Illinois Central College through the University of Illinois at Springfield.

"I'm going to do it one way or another. I'm going to get my degree," she said.

Continuing with her education despite all that's happened is Farmer's way of getting through a year she calls "a nightmare."

It started when she lost her job as a material analyst at Caterpillar Inc.'s Morton plant last February. Farmer, who worked at Caterpillar for two years, said she started getting nervous when the company announced layoffs at other plants.

After getting laid off, Farmer, who had been taking several classes while working, said she was unable to receive unemployment compensation because of being classified as a student.

"I've appealed the decision (about not getting unemployment insurance), but it was denied. Now I have to get an attorney. Workforce Development has tried to help. I just want to be treated fairly," Farmer said.

When she's not working toward her degree, Farmer's typical day involves "going down to the library or Workforce office to search for jobs for a couple of hours," she said.

"I've had a few close calls," said Farmer of job offers she's had this year.

"I'm open on jobs. I have children. I have no choice but to be open. I'm basically networking with different individuals. I'm trying to find something to take care of myself and my children," she said.

As a single parent, Farmer takes those responsibilities seriously. "My mother was a single parent, and we were used to going without a lot of things while growing up," she said.

Her two children, TraShanna, 18, and Tyrin, 14, are both in school this fall. Her daughter will attend Illinois Central College, while her son is a ninth-grader at Manual High School.

"My greatest disappointment this year is the feeling that I failed my kids. My daughter sacrificed going away to school. That was because of me," said Farmer, referring to a scholarship her daughter received at Northwest Missouri State University.

As if searching for a job wasn't enough, Farmer and her children also had to search for housing this year.

"That was a battle, too," she said of a rented home she was forced to leave earlier in the year when the landlord failed to make repairs. "He expected me to pay for it," Farmer said.

"There was a period there of 2 1/2 months when we were basically homeless. I have to admit there were a couple of nights I spent in my car," she said.

Farmer relied on friends for housing during her homeless period but now rents a home on Virginia Avenue. "I'm thankful for the little savings we had. I don't know what we would have done without it," she said.

As if the year hadn't been eventful enough, now Farmer is coping with another problem. "The car is giving me the blues right now. I pray to God that it's OK. I don't need a problem right with that now," she said.

### Goodwill tour

Patty Isit is another Peorian who lost her job this year. After 13 years working for DHL, a delivery company that did contract work for Caterpillar, Isit was laid off in February.

"I cleared shipments that came from overseas, mostly getting shipments for Caterpillar through customs," she said.

"I knew I wouldn't be going back, so I started looking for a job," said Isit, who picked up a flier for Goodwill Industries of Central Illinois at a job fair she attended.

That led her to attend free computer classes at Goodwill. "I wanted more skills," said Isit, 48, whose husband, Fred, is a sheet metal worker.

"I feel more confident. I felt lost before. I feel tougher now. Now I'm ready to do something different," she said.

Along with learning about programs like Word Perfect and Power Point, Isit said she's also picked up life skills from the Goodwill program, things like stress management and time management.

"I might need another class," she said, noting that her present eight-week computer class will soon wrap up.

Brenda Wilder, program developer at Goodwill's Peoria office, said the classes have benefited Isit in other ways.

"Thirteen years ago, it was a totally different job market. You no longer make 100 copies of a single resume. Now each resume has to be tailored to an individual employer. That's something you have to do on a computer," she said.

"If employers like you, they print you out," said Wilder, adding that a complete schedule of classes offered locally by Goodwill is available at [www.goodwillpeo.org](http://www.goodwillpeo.org).

As for Isit, she's leaving nothing to chance.

"I started forklift training last week," she said.

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