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## Dianne Williams Wilburn—Creating her own destiny

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### Creating her own destiny

Dianne Williams Wilburn does not have an ounce of pretension or narcissism. Nominated by multiple Los Alamos colleagues as an inspirational woman, the always-smiling Wilburn deflects attention.

When asked about challenges she has overcome or how courage has touched her life, she does not mention the fact that she recently battled breast cancer.

Instead, she focuses on the positive, focuses on the achievements of others.

## **Choosing the right thing—even if it is difficult**

The biochemist tells her sons “to be, rather than to seem,” the motto of her home state, North Carolina, where she was raised in the Appalachian Mountains.

Wilburn is inspired by women dedicated to learning and to creating their own destinies (such as Madeleine Albright, the former Secretary of State who decided to enter politics when she was nearly 50). Like Albright, Wilburn obtained her graduate degree, a master’s in environmental science, well into adulthood.

Having monitored environmental compliance for New Mexico State and analyzed water chemistry for a nuclear power plant in Virginia, Wilburn is well versed in environmental health and radiation safety. She is a glovebox safety manager at the Lab, where she has also managed protection of air quality, endangered species and historic sites on the Lab’s 36 square miles. She’s mentored more than a dozen students and served as a manager at different levels.

## **Helping others get the job done**

Lauded for always helping others, Wilburn says, “I like to think one of my character traits is to help people get their job done. I like helping people understand the environmental and safety requirements and how they can meet those requirements and still get the job done, be an enabler as opposed to an obstructionist.” Wilburn recalls how her former group leader Jean Dewart handled a really tough question before a group with strength and dignity. Later, when she became group leader, speaking before the same group, asked the same tough question, Wilburn says she just channeled Jean.

## **A strong support network leads to success**

To succeed, she advises young women to seek a mentor to teach them the ropes, to guide them to opportunities and to give advice. As far as balancing family with career, Wilburn says, “there is no one right way to balance things; you have to figure out what works for you.” Find support in all kinds of relationships, and nurture them. Often seen driving down the highway in her old pickup truck, hauling chickens or ducks or her son’s dairy goats, Wilburn volunteers for many youth organizations, including Boy Scouts of America and 4-H.

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