

## Black Widows #45 Sonia Qualls, Manager of Support Services



Photo by JoAnn Baeton. Article by Amytra

Sonia Qualls, Manager of Supports Services, began her career at TCRC as a receptionist from 1987-1990 before embarking on a 15-year career in law enforcement commencing with the Police Explorer Program, graduating the Police & Sheriff Academy & Correctional Officer Academy, to becoming a sworn peace officer in 1990. For years Sonia had a rewarding position in the California Youth Authority as a Correctional Officer, "I like this much better because you get physical and the adrenaline rush is incredible!" In this job she often found herself in the position of having to defend herself one-on-one with the inmates, "Mace only goes so far. In a weird way I miss the fights." Suddenly, things turned, "I was diagnosed with diabetes. I decided to step back and re-evaluate." The focus of her decisions was to consider a change in careers and lifestyle that would support optimum health.

Sonia returned to TCRC in 2002 on the support staff team, became executive assistant to Lorna Owens, was promoted to HR associate, and then promoted to her current position, Manager of Support Services. Having earned her B.S. at UCSB in 1994 she returned to school, attending the University of Phoenix in 2005 and graduated with an MBA in Business & Organizational Management. Admittedly, Sonia misses the excitement of enforcing law, which for her was invigorating, "I consider my [current] job a stressful job and I like aggressive sports to release the stress." Amid her quest to find a suitable physical outlet, well-meaning friends have suggested yoga to which she says, "That's not my deal. Too slow" Then, during last Thanksgiving dinner her sister mentioned that a semi-pro women's football team was looking for new players. Sonia was intrigued. She had two weeks to make up her mind and, if moving forward, to get her game on.

Sonia lives with her husband of 7 years, LaShane Qualls, who shared the story of how they met, "My sister set us up on a blind date about 10 years ago and, basically, we've been *set* ever since." He says they have always made health and

fitness a priority. "Sports have always been a part our house." Mr. Qualls belongs to 3 local softball teams and plays 5 nights a week. Sonia participated in a 200-mile Ragnar relay last year and has qualified for a roller derby team. "I tried it for 30 days but it wasn't for me." So, Mr. Qualls couldn't have seen it as much more than natural when Sonia was on her way to semi-pro football try-outs December 2011. He says, "I thought it was cool, except she doesn't know squat about football," which left him wondering, "How is that going to work?"

The Ventura Black Widows (VBW) is the 5th Western Division Team of the Women's Football Alliance. They joined the Women's Spring Football League in 2009 and were purchased in 2010 by Ahmad Newton, who is also one of four coaches. Sonia's initiation with the rigors of full contact, tackle football was grueling. "I trained two weekends, back to back, in December, worked with coaches on conditioning drills, mobility exercises, catching and receiving, things like that." From eleven new contenders, Sonia, 42, was one of only four players to make the cut. Now an official Black Widow, she received a moniker, Krash, and jersey number, 45.

Newton found Sonia's roller derby experience relevant to the game and said it inspired him to give her the name. "There are a lot of collisions. It's crazy." No understatement there, as on April 14 in their first full game on a regulation field the VBWs lost their quarterback who suffered a broken clavicle in a take down during the first half against the Salt Lake City Archangels while another player suffered a hyper-extended knee. Qualls herself took a hard hit in face with her helmet as she took down an opposing player and abruptly found herself under the weight of several players, "I thought my nose was bleeding. When I got up I was dizzy." Then the crowd heard, "That was Krash with the take down, she's a little shaken, but she walks off the field on her own accord."

Sonia started the game playing fullback position, but due to fellow players' injuries and low roster numbers has to be flexible, so she did play linebacker for a couple of plays by necessity. However, by 3rd quarter she was scoring the first touchdown of her career with 51 seconds to go. An impressive moment for an athlete who, just 4 months ago, was studying the playbook on her way to a scrimmage in Nevada, "In Vegas I was hesitant on my plays, but today I actually had fun. Learning the intelligence of the game makes all the difference."

Newton said that the VBWs played the Las Vegas Showgirls in Nevada on St. Patrick's Day weekend, "Salt Lake City played them first that day and scored 0, we scored 6 to come back to win 48-12 against Salt Lake City." Obviously, each player makes a difference, but Newton shared what makes Qualls a stand-out, "Sonia shows me she's willing to learn, to tackle and get tackled, and she lived up to what she said she was going to do."