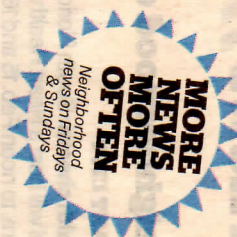




# South Shore & Brandon Times

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# Driven by her daily devotion

"She has no agenda," said Jomo Cousins, the pastor at her church, Love First Christian Center in Riverview. "With her, it's just about giving God glory. She's just incredible."

Williams, who is in her 50s but refuses to disclose her exact age, knows some might not understand, but she doesn't mind.

"Some people think I'm crazy," she said recently as she waved at drivers passing under the Lee Roy Selmon Expressway on Channelside Drive. "I just have a lot of faith."

A sign seemed like the best way to share that faith.

"Everybody doesn't want to hear about Jesus," she said. This is a nonconfrontational way to remind people he's in their lives.

There was a time when even she could have used a message like this.

Williams married young to a military man. They traveled a lot, moving from base to base. But he was abusive. Still, she stayed — for her daughters, for herself, out of fear. When she finally built up the courage to leave, she became a heavy drinker.

But, soon, she found strength in God. She remarried and raised six daughters and divorced again. She worked two jobs to pay the bills. She retired early from Time Warner in 2000 and now gets by on alimony and retirement pay.

Her future was unclear, until a few years ago, when God called out to her.

"God laid this on my heart and I pictured the sign in my head," she said. "At first, I thought, 'Oh, no, I couldn't do that.' Now, I consider this my job."

The task isn't easy.

On Tuesdays, Fridays and Saturdays, Williams hauls an old black stool she found sitting unused in her garage to the day's



DIRK SHADD | Times (2011)

**Jomo Cousins is Diane Williams' pastor at Love First Christian Center. "With her, it's just about giving God glory," he said.**

location. In summer heat and winter chills, she sits for hours on end without bathroom breaks.

Her smile never falters and her wave stays friendly yet polished, like a beauty queen in a parade.

She stands out in a sea of noise and clutter on the side of the highway, dressed in a pristine white coat, a white visor and black pants that are slowly fading from the sun. She pulls her blond hair back into a ponytail and uses a hairnet to hold it in place when big trucks pass by, leaving wind and debris in their wake.

She's been doing this so long, people have come to expect her. She even has some regulars, who walk by or pull off the road, just to pray with her.

On the back of her sign, she taped a cheat sheet of sorts. On it, she has scripture and words to say to those being introduced to God for the first time. She invites everyone to church.

"I never know who is coming by, who is going to stop," she said. "It's exciting."

Rochelle Weems sees a difference in her mother since she

began her crusade.

"I've watched this grow her, take her out of her shell," Weems said. "I'm just proud of her because she stepped out and didn't care about what anybody thought."

To show their support, Weems and the rest of the family join Williams on her birthday each year, holding their own JESUS CARES signs.

They proudly refer to Williams as the "Jesus Cares Lady" in conversations.

"She's an inspiration," said Pastor Cousins. "It's so refreshing to have a person who just wants to give you love."

Despite the problems in her life, Williams never utters a negative word, Cousins said. She just continues to give.

"If I could have a hundred Dianas," he said, "I could change the world."

*Times researcher John Martin contributed to this report. Shelley Rossetter can be reached at srossetter@tampabay.com or (813) 661-2442.*