

Multi-talented mom of seven earns PhD at



SUE REEVE/The London Free Press

DR. MOM: Angie Mandich will receive her PhD in kinesiology at convocation today at UWO. Shown here, Mandich gives her gown a test run with her husband, Mark, right, and seven children from left: Matt, 15; Scott, 13; Colin, 8; Hilary, 10; Meghan, 7; Genna, 11; and Gillian, 16.

BY DEBORA VAN BRENK
Free Press Reporter

Angie Mandich officially becomes "Doctor" Mom to her blond brood of seven today.

Her husband, Mark, and their children — ages seven to 16 — will cheer her on as Mandich graduates with a PhD in kinesiology at convocation ceremonies at the University of Western Ontario.

Together the family will ride a limo to UWO — where 1,600 students graduate today and tomorrow in fall convocation — to celebrate the achievement.

Mandich began working on her doctorate, specializing in how kids learn motor skills, a little more than three years ago.

To put full-time effort into her studies, she cut back on her teaching load at Western's school of occupational therapy. She is director of the Kids' Skills Centre at UWO, where children with developmental difficulties learn better co-ordination.

Mandich is also head of the parents' council at school and coached her seven-year-old daughter Meghan's soccer team this year. Coaching helped reinforce her belief in working with special-needs kids that "we need to advocate for these kids so that everybody can participate."

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The family maintains order with a master list of chores and events: where's the soccer game, whose turn is it to do dishes, when is that math test, who has a dentist's appointment this week?

"It's taught me organization, that's one thing," she says.

Then there is homework — the kids all guide each other and turn to Gillian for help with their assignments when mom is studying and dad is working.

Mark, a London firefighter, has quarterbacked most of the chores around the house. "You talk to anyone at work and they think Mark is a saint," she says.

The children say his cooking specialty is ribs. Mom's specialty is "calling the pizza guy," Mark jokes.

They've all earned a degree in co-operation and compromise, they say.

There were sacrifices: Times they wanted their mom to attend their school events and she had to study instead, days when she would have preferred a nice vacation with them instead of picking away at research at 2 a.m.

"On the other hand, I think it's important for the kids to see us setting a goal and relentlessly working towards that goal. . . . The PhD process is really about persistence and perseverance."

Upon convocation, Mandich will return to teaching full-time at UWO as an assistant professor on the tenure track. Her hours won't be quite so bizarre.

As for the kids, they're happy to have more time with their mom for practical reasons.

Genna already has a plan to celebrate with her mother: "We can go shopping!"

They'll have a party this evening with family and friends who have been supportive.

Meghan proudly says her mom's new name is "Angie Doctor Mandich."

"It's the end of the road, I guess. Or, the beginning of a new road," the graduate says.

Meghan is the youngest. Colin is eight, Hilary is 10 and Genna is 11. The teenagers are 13-year-old Scott, 15-year-old Matt and 16-year-old Gillian.

Collectively, the kids play football, basketball, volleyball and soccer. A few of them ski and snowboard, Meghan is a Brownie and Gillian works part-time.

Angie doesn't look frazzled this day, but she says there have definitely been moments.