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## City Commissioner Tim West inspires CF GED grads



**CF Levy Campus Manager Leah Gamble and Keynote Speaker Tim West pause for a photo opportunity after the program Thursday evening. Story and Photos**

**By Jeff M. Hardison © Dec. 6, 2018 at 8:48 p.m.**

**\* Updated Dec. 7, 2018 at 3:18 p.m.**

**with a photo courtesy of the College of Central Florida (scroll down)**

LEVY COUNTY -- Graduates who received Thursday evening (Dec. 6) the State of Florida high school diploma they earned via the Adult Education GED program at the College of Central Florida heard from keynote speaker Chiefland City Commissioner Tim West.

West's strong speech came from the heart and he certainly captured the minds of the young men and women, who like him, earned a Graduation Equivalent Diploma (GED).

Parading into the auditorium single-file as graduate-candidates and again leaving with the sound of the song Pomp and Circumstance were 15 of the 17 graduates. Two people, although they earned their GED did not participate in the ceremony. Elizabeth Botton and John Kyler did not attend the event.

The 15 graduates who accepted their diplomas, and each who accepted a carnation as well, were Leigha Blocker, Matthew Chapman, Dalton Deavitt, Alyssa Gallion, Cheyanne Hall, Zachary Hill, Taylor Hudson, Charles Keebler, Tyler Lenfestey, Phillip Marks, Shondotta McFall, Kristina Miller, Lynette Rodgers, Megan Walkers and Dusty Wilson.

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**\* This photo provided by the College of Central Florida shows the graduates before the ceremony began, in a group next to the Christmas tree in the front lobby of the beautiful, relatively-new main building on the College of Central Florida Jack Wilkinson Levy Campus, located just south of the City of Fanning Springs on the west side of U.S. Highway 19.**

Lenfestey and Miller earned special recognition as Adult Education Honor Graduates.

College of Central Florida Jack Wilkinson Levy Campus Manager Leah Gamble served as the emcee. Gamble welcomed everyone and introduced CF Levy staff members Enrollment/Student Services Coordinator Christine Dunn, Transition Specialist/Instructor Deanna Sheppard, Adult Education Instructor Will Rucker and Adult Education Instructor Richard Anderson.

City Commissioner West is a 2005 GED recipient. Not only is he one of the five members of the Chiefland City Commission, but he is also a key member of the development, ownership and management team of Strawberry Fields for RV'ers RV Park (1034 N.E. Fourth St., Chiefland).

West shared with listeners that he understands hardships presenting obstacles in life. His parents separated and that can lead some students to have a reduced likelihood for graduation.

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**The graduates face the audience after accepting their GEDs and a carnation each.**



**The graduates move their tassels from one side to the other to demonstrate their moment of graduation.**

As a teen, West said he lashed out. The reason he stood before the auditorium that was jam-packed with people that evening, though, is not to try to justify or glorify any bad behavior of years gone by.

Instead, West came to join the graduates in the celebration of good behavior and making good choices.

As a builder, West shared with listeners a metaphor from a keystone. He was quick to let the people know he was not speaking about the Keystone brand of beer, but instead he told about the keystone that is the wedge-shaped stone piece at the apex of an arch. It is the final piece placed during construction, and it locks all the stones into position, allowing the arch to bear weight.

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**CF Levy Campus Manager Leah Gamble (at the podium, left) and Enrollment/Student Services Coordinator Christine Dunn watch as the graduates move their tassels. Dunn presented each graduate with their GED, and each graduate shook hands with instructors and the keynote speaker.**

“For me,” West said, “my GED was my keystone. It made the bridge crossable; so, I was able to unlock my true potential and accomplish so much more with my life.

“After I received my GED,” West continued, “I quit smoking. Shortly after that, I started to eat healthier and to work out. I took up flying lessons. It was one accomplishment after another.”

Now at the age of 37, West is a business owner and an elected official.

“It doesn’t happen overnight,” he said. “It takes hard work and a good work ethic. You have to be not just a hard worker, but a good employee.”

He explained what he meant by being a “good employee.”

While a hard worker does the job well while they are at work, he said, they might come in late. That hard worker might be a chronic complainer, or he or she might worry about what everyone else is doing rather than focusing on their own shortcomings.

Meanwhile, a good employee comes in early and stays late, West said. That person is the man or woman on the crew who everyone would fight to keep in their position on the team.

Any person who does their job gets paid, West said.

“If you want that raise or promotion,” he continued, “or to be appreciated – You’ve got to do extra to get extra.

West held a dollar bill in the air.

“We all what this is,” he said. “We all know how this works. But do we know why? It’s because of belief.”

Without belief in the value and the power represented by a dollar bill, West

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explained, it is just like any other piece of paper.

“Your GED is the same,” West said. “You gotta’ believe in it!”

West told this most recent set of GED graduates that if they believe in what they just earned, and if they believe in themselves, then they will accomplish great things.

“Thank you and congratulations,” West said in conclusion.

After the speech, Dunn told the grads to move their tassel from one side of the mortarboard they wore on their heads to the other side.

As part of her closing remarks, Gamble told the graduates that they each had been given a carnation with a purpose in mind. She asked each graduate to take that flower and to give it to the person they felt had moved them the most to complete their course of study to earn their GED.

There was punch and cake afterward, as well as plenty of time for photographs by family and friends.

The vision statement for the College of Central Florida, which has campuses in Ocala and Lecanto as well as in Levy County, is “To be the first choice of quality higher education in our community.”