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Many YTI grads talk of returning to school for a new start

From layoffs to divorce, several grads told their reasons for heading back to school.

By DAVID BLYMIRE
For the Daily Record/Sunday News

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YTI Career Institute graduates get ready in the second floor staging area at the Strand-Capitol Performing Arts Center Wednesday before graduation started. (FOR THE DAILY RECORD/SUNDAY NEWS -- JEFF LAUTENBERGER)

When Mike Ditzler lost his job, it felt like the wind had gone out of his sails.

Laid off from his job as house manager of a theater in May 2011, the 43-year-old Lancaster man found himself looking for a job in a market ravaged by a slumping economy.

He said he felt wounded and perplexed about what to do.

"I believed I was still a marketable person," he said. "Unfortunately, nobody was believing that with me."

He was invited to see a friend graduate from YTI Career Institute and after listening to the speakers that night, he decided within a few days to go back to school.

He said the experience made him feel motivated again, so he started taking classes in August 2011.

Ditzler graduated from YTI Wednesday with an associate's degree in business administration and

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YTI Career Institute graduate Adrienne Grant-Lane, center, walks out of the Strand-Capitol Performing Arts center after getting balloons and her diploma Wednesday. (FOR THE DAILY RECORD/SUNDAY NEWS -- JEFF LAUTENBERGER)

received the school's president's award.

In January, he got a job in sales support for Fastenal Co. in Coatesville, he said.

He was one of nearly 175 students to graduate in ceremonies at the Strand-Capitol Performing Arts Center.

Family and friends packed into the crowded theater, with many people who were unable to find a seat forced to stand in the back.

Heather Goodwin, operations manager at Laugherman's Harley-Davidson, told the graduates in her keynote speech that in today's marketplace, qualities like flexibility are important.

They also need to show employers they're a team player.

And, while customer service has always been important, "now it's a priority,"

she said, adding that the graduates can help to make lasting relationships with their customers.

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"Attention to detail will be deeply appreciated," she said.

As graduates walked across the stage to get their diplomas or degrees, cheers erupted from various corners of the theater. One even prompted a chorus of kazoo.

Following the ceremony, the theater crowd emptied onto the sidewalks on North George and West Philadelphia streets, where students posed for pictures with relatives and friends.

Erin Mumma of Hanover, one of 29 students to earn a 4.0 grade-point average, said she was a stay-at-home mom until divorce forced her to look for a new career.

"I chose the medical assistant program because I always thought health care was interesting," she said.

At age 38, it had been a while since she last attended college. She said she dropped out after three semesters because "I decided it wasn't for me."

This time, she earned an associate's degree.

"I finally accomplished something," she said. "I'm proud to say I have a degree and I can start my career."

She had help from family and friends in caring for her children, Camden and Luke.

And Zoey, a 6-month-old, was born on Thanksgiving Day 2012. She said she gave birth and returned to school the following Monday.

She hopes to land a job by mid-summer, she said.

Steve Olsen of York graduated with a diploma in electrical technology, a program that emphasized hands-on learning, he said.

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"I got two job offers before I even finished," he said, adding he works for a local electrician.

YTI Career Institute Class of 2013

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YTI Career Institute graduates wait for the start of Wednesday's commencement ceremony at which nearly 175 students received diplomas. Of all the degrees and diplomas offered, the Motorcycle Technology Center had the most students, at 38. (FOR THE DAILY RECORD/SUNDAY NEWS -- JEFF LAUTENBERGER)



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