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YTI grads talk of overcoming obstacles to receive diplomas

Roughly 90 students participated in Wednesday's winter commencement.

By DAVID BLYMIRE
For the Daily Record/Sunday News

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Cyndi Black, who studied at York Technical Institute's medical assistant program, picks up her grandson, Aiden Chapman, 4, upon greeting her family after her graduation ceremony Wednesday at the Strand-Capitol Performing Arts Center. The YTI York Campus and its Motorcycle Technology Center graduated about 90 students at its winter ceremony. (DAILY RECORD/SUNDAY NEWS - CHRIS DUNN)

York, PA -

Donna Wells knows all about struggle.

The 54-year-old Springettsbury Township woman saw her home and livelihood vanish after her husband, John Wells, was struck by a bacterial lung infection three years ago and collapsed.

For a moment, her life seemed to hang in the balance. Her husband survived, but was unable to continue working, spelling the end of the electrical contracting business. It also was goodbye to a comfortable lifestyle that included a six-figure income, a half-million-dollar home, BMWs and all the other perks that go with it.

"I went from getting my hair done every Friday night to wondering how I was going to put food in my mouth," Wells said.

In her 50s, she had never finished high school, and now she had to become the bread winner. She took a job at Walmart to try to get by.



Nicholas Houser, who graduated with a degree in motorsports technology, proceeds out of the Strand-Capitol Performing Arts Center Wednesday. (DAILY RECORD/SUNDAY NEWS - CHRIS DUNN)

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She got her GED and immediately enrolled at York Technical Institute where she earned an associate in specialized technology degree in the medical assistant program.

She was among the 91 graduates who earned degrees or diplomas Wednesday in graduation ceremonies at the Strand-Capitol Performing Arts Center.

Monday, she starts a new job with WellSpan.

"I'm a different woman than I was before I started at YTI," she said Wednesday.

Aside from the academic challenges, she had to learn how to type and work with computers.

And the first day of class was a little unnerving. "I walked in to a room full of girls young enough to be my daughters," she said, laughing.

Wells wasn't the only one dealing with an age gap.

Glen Trezise, who received a diploma in motorsports technology and was one of two students to receive the president's award, told the audience that the younger students called him "the old man."

He said he found himself the butt of jokes such as: "Is your Social Security card a rock?"

"I was born before Social Security," he cracked.

But, he said, a common love of motorcycles helped to bridge the gap.

Trezise, from Millersville, spoke about working in sales before he started at YTI.

The other student speaker, Marino Mota-Perez of Lancaster, also a president's award winner, said he was "doing nothing with my life" before he enrolled.

He went to a YTI orientation with a friend and began to explore what he could do. He said he gained an opportunity to learn more about what he loves -- computers.

Jennifer McCoy, 41, of Mount Holly Springs in Cumberland County, said she had been working as a park ranger at Gifford Pinchot State Park when her work schedule was reduced from seven months per year to five or less.

Then she began taking classes in YTI's computer aided drafting and design program.

Having been out of school for 20 years, she wasn't sure how it would go.

"I definitely was nervous at first, and I remember worrying," she said.

But she found the teachers were supportive and she got through it. She got a job with a telecommunications firm based in Washington, D.C.

Christina Hahner of Baltimore said she decided on YTI after graduating from high school a year early in 2010.

Initially, she felt the challenge of being the only woman in her motorcycle repair program, but she always had an interest in cars, so learning about motorcycles wasn't so hard.

"Of the 16 students I started with, I was the one who knew the least," she said, adding that by the end of the nine-month program, "I was giving the guys a run for their money."

She got a job with Harley-Davidson of Baltimore, she said.

The graduates

YTI Career Institute York Campus and the Motorcycle Technology Center graduated approximately 91 graduates Feb. 27. Local graduates include the following:

Motorcycle Technology Center's motorsports technology graduates:

Clinton Shearer, Dillsburg; Jonathan Leonard, York Haven and Sean Singer, York.



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YTI Career Institute York Campus graduates:

Business administration-management -- Justine Bupp, York; Chelsea Gebhart, Dover; Evelyn Rivas, York and Amanda Woodworth, Thomasville.

Computer aided drafting and design -- Alan Brooks, Hanover and John Dailey, Red Lion.

Computer systems specialist -- Anthony Beckhardt, Mount Wolf; Zachary Bievenour, Red Lion; Dayna Ness, Red Lion; Shane Osborn, Red Lion; James Swan, York and Cody Weinreich, Felton.

Electronics engineering technology -- Adam Becker, York and Cal Richmond-Gladieux, York.

Golf course management -- Ryan Klunk, Hanover and Walter McCarthy, Shrewsbury.

Heating, air conditioning & refrigeration technology -- Louis Amandola, York; Brandon Butt, Hanover; Vernon Cox, New Oxford; Kobi Patterson, York; Derek Pickett, Etters; Phillip Place, Brogue; Brian Sharp, Windsor; John Townsley, Wrightsville; Joshua Weaver, Arendtsville; Daniel Himes, York; Kevin Krzysko, Hanover; Larry Lake, York; Matthew Leber, York; Jonathan Mummert, Shrewsbury; Matthew Showers, Lewisberry; Timothy Smith, Manchester; Paul Stevens, Seven Valleys and Ronald Whittaker, Glen Rock.

Medical assistant -- Brittany Bowers, York; Ronisha Glover, York; Jana Harrison, Red Lion; Asia Jones, York; Dawn Noguerras, York; Jennifer Pacheco-Curet, York; Jessica Watson, York; Donna Wells, York; Olivia Benner, York; Cynthia Black, York; Nicole Nelson, York; Tiffany Osborn, Red Lion; Sara Snyder, York; Abby Ullman, Manchester; Jennifer Altland, York; Rebecca Miller, Dallastown; Deana Reichard, Hanover; Gloria Reyes, Felton; Elizabeth Rivera, Red Lion; Stephanie Roth, Dover and Stuart Wagman-Leppo, York.

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