

Changing Their Futures



Tyrene Weitz receives the Pat Fencel Scholarship during the 2014 GED/High School completion ceremony

Clark College celebrated its GED and High School Completion Ceremony on Saturday, June 21, capping off graduation week 2014 with a heartfelt ceremony featuring two student speakers and the conferring of certificates for GED or high school completion on more than 60 graduates.



Peter Smith

After a welcome from President Bob Knight and a greeting from Board of Trustees Chair Royce Pollard, the microphone was handed over to two student speakers, Peter Smith and Tyrene Weitz. High school equivalency recipient Peter Smith started his comments by noting that the day had special meaning for him, as he was celebrating not only his degree, but also one year of sobriety.

Smith explained that a year ago, after finding himself in jail for a DUI, he decided the time had come to change his life. Earning his high school degree was the first step toward that; he plans to begin earning a certificate from Clark's welding program this summer as he continues his path toward a better life. "Hopefully, someday soon, someone like me will be standing here and my tax dollars will have helped him or her accomplish their goals," Smith said.

Smith thanked his girlfriend for her role in getting him to come to Clark, and noted that one of the things that many attending the ceremony had in common was support of family and loved ones. The O'Connell Sports Complex gymnasium was filled

with balloons, flowers and the occasional noise-maker—proof of that support.

GED recipient Tyrene Weitz spoke next, saying that she had “given up” on school by the sixth grade and dropped out by the ninth grade. She added that while she had always wanted to get more education, she kept putting it off after beginning a family at a young age. A year ago, she too took the first step. “I know college is not easy, but nothing worth doing is, and to succeed you need to do the best you can, right where you are, with what you have,” she said.

Weitz has not only completed her GED, but she has also completed English 101 and is on her way to achieving her goal of becoming a registered nurse.

Weitz got a surprise boost toward that goal after she left  the stage, when Dean of Basic Education, English, Communications & Humanities Deena Godwin announced that Weitz was the recipient of this year’s Pat Fencel scholarship. Named after a longtime Adult Basic Education instructor, the scholarship provides \$1,500 toward tuition to an ABE student transitioning to college-level classes at Clark.

The day was capped by Associate Vice President of Academic Affairs Tim Cook presenting the class to President Knight, who conferred the degrees on the graduates. After each student crossed the stage to receive their degrees, President Knight sent them out in the sunny day with words of encouragement: “Your time at Clark has provided you with new skills, new perspectives, and new confidence. These are powerful tools. As you take your next step, use those tools to build a bright future for yourselves and for our community.”

See more photos from the ceremony on our Flickr page.

Photos: Clark College/Jenny Shadley