

Penguins shine



The skies above Sleep Country Amphitheater filled with heavy gray clouds on June 21, but nothing could dampen the bright spirits of the more than 700 students participating in Clark College's 2018 Commencement ceremony.

Members of the college's 82nd graduating class encompassed every imaginable background, age bracket, and life goal. Approximately 75 of them wore the light blue robes that indicated they were celebrating their high school diploma or GED completion; another two dozen or so wore the white robes reserved for those receiving their Bachelor of Applied Science degree. The class included a record 476 Running Start graduates who were graduating from high school and college simultaneously; meanwhile, other graduates were old enough to have children of their own—and, in at least a couple cases, dressed them in matching royal-blue robes so that they could

cross the stage as a family.

All told, more than 2,300 degrees and certificates were conferred upon the Class of 2018.

As the ceremony began, however, it became clear that certain themes held these graduates together. When President Bob Knight asked all graduates who had worked while attending Clark to stand, almost the entire class rose to their feet. When he next asked the first-generation college graduates to rise, the result was only slightly less unanimous.



Valeria Flores

Student speaker Valeria Flores spoke about her experiences as the first in her family to attend college. "Being a first-generation student in college is like learning a foreign language," she said. "You don't become fluent overnight. I had no idea where to begin. I did not know that I could apply for FAFSA. I didn't know how to register for classes, or even how to *find* my classes."

Flores went on to say that she did eventually find her path through college, and that working at the college's child care facility had led her to decide on a career as a speech pathologist, a path that would require her to continue her education to a master's degree.

The ceremony's keynote speaker, retired Evergreen Public Schools superintendent John D. Deeder, spoke of his own

experiences as a first-generation college student. “I recall that 51 years ago tonight, I finished my junior college career in Couer d’Alene, Idaho,” he said. “It was a big deal, because I was the first in my family to ever graduate beyond high school. It opened so many doors—I can’t tell you how important this night is for you.”



John Deeder

Deeder also spoke about the importance of education in broadening people’s perspectives. “I really believe we need to be more tolerant, we need to be more inclusive, we need to be better listeners, we need to be accepting of differences in every way—cultural, religious, political, social, etcetera,” he said. “If we do that, this society and the world that you’re going to lead in the next few years will be a better place, and that is critical.”

As is traditional, the ceremony was occasion to announce two major awards. Early in ceremony, President Knight announced the names of the recipients of the 2018 Exceptional Faculty Awards: computer technology instructor Bruce Elgort; English as a Second Language professor Sara Gallow; music professor Richard Inouye; mathematics professor Dr. Kanchan Mathur; and addiction counselor education instructor Don Wissusik. Later during the ceremony, he announced that graduate Grace Moe was the recipient of the 2018-2019 Community College Presidents’ Award in Honor of Val Ogden. This annual scholarship is given to a Clark College graduate who demonstrates leadership

potential, a commitment to community service, and academic achievement. The scholarship award provides full-time tuition at WSUV and is renewable for one additional year, essentially providing full tuition to complete a bachelor's degree.



Grace Moe

Thanks to the Clark College Foundation, scholarship finalists Chad Lipka and Mckenna Pozsgai also received \$1,000 each to attend WSUV.

The ceremony ended with the traditional sounding of bagpipes. And as for those looming storm clouds? By the time the last graduate had crossed the stage, they'd broken up to reveal patches of golden sunshine. And when the graduates left the amphitheater and headed toward what their new futures held, they walked into the last golden rays of a gentle sunset, with the cheers of family and faculty greeting them on every side.

Photos: Clark College/Jenny Shadley. To see more photos, visit our Flickr album.

‘I did it!’



Alina Gonzalez, *left*, and Madison Moore, *center*, stand with a classmate as they wait to receive their high school diplomas at Clark College’s 2018 Commencement.

At 22 years old, Madison Moore was ready to receive her high school diploma at Clark College’s 82nd Commencement ceremony—beyond ready, really. She knew that not having graduated from high school had held her back in job searches and other opportunities.

Now she was just moments away from entering the Sunlight Supply Amphitheater so she could walk across the stage and be recognized for her achievement. There was only one thing to fear: “As long as I don’t fall, I’m good,” she said, laughing.

“If you do, it’s OK,” said her friend Alina Gonzalez. “You just get up and keep going.”

It was apt advice for this graduating class. Each robed figure waiting to enter the amphitheater—more than 700 in all—contained their own story of resilience and endurance, whether they were earning a high school diploma or a bachelor’s degree.

Gonzalez had needed both qualities herself to earn her second high school diploma, this time in a second language (her first had been earned in her native Mexico). “The English was hard for me,” she said. “I can tell you, there were times when I cried, it was so hard. But you know, I think I’m going to be graduating with a 4.0 [GPA].”

Not only that, both of her daughters would also be graduating that night with associate degrees that they had earned through Running Start. More than 470 members of the Class of 2018 were graduating through that program, which allows high school students to earn college credit and, in some cases, enter four-year universities as rising juniors.



Emily Hain, who began taking classes at Clark while still in high school, and Elizbeth Browne, who simply said it had “been a while” since she was last in school, take a

moment to rest before
graduating at Clark's 2018
Commencement.

Not everyone took the fast lane through college, however. For Maegen Davidson, whose graduation cap was adorned with the message "It always seems impossible until it's done," the journey had taken four years. Because she'd had to work while attending Clark, she'd needed extra time to earn her associate degree in Medical Office Technician and certificates in Medical Reception and in Medical Billing and Coding—and, technically, she still had a couple more classes to take over the summer, though she was being allowed to walk with her classmates.

"It feels so good to know I'm *right* there," she said, pinching her fingers together to show how close she was to earning her degree.

"Yeah, she's only been posting about it on Facebook like 20 times a day," cracked a friend standing beside her.

"Well, hey!" laughed Davidson. "Some things are worth making a big deal about!"

For others, simply *getting* to college had taken a while. Originally, Elizbeth Browne had come to Clark just to learn some American Sign Language to help her in her work with toddler-age foster children. But once at the college, she decided instead to pursue an associate degree in Early Childhood Education. Now she was wrestling with how to get her honors and Clark tassels to both hang from her mortarboard cap. After graduation, she said, she planned to become a "traveling granny nanny."

Browne was not the only graduate who was older than what's frequently considered "college age." Wayne Schmasow was a Vietnam veteran earning his fourth college degree, this one in

network technology. "I think I might come back to earn a certificate in Network Plus," he added.



Daughter-and-father team Edna Stultz and Wayne Schmasow get ready to graduate at Clark's 2018 Commencement.

Beside him stood his daughter, Edna Stultz, who was earning her associate degree in pharmacy technician leadership. Both had woven feathers into their regalia to honor their Native American heritage. As she stood waiting to graduate, Stultz was approached by her daughter, who took a string of beads from her to give to a friend who was also graduating.

For Stultz and Schmasow, Clark truly was a family affair: Schmasow's wife (and Stultz's mother) Anna Schmasow works at the college and earned her degree there as well. Stultz said that along with her family support, she appreciated the support provided by her program's cohort model.

"Having the same classmates for three quarters was amazing and helpful," she said. "Everybody wanted you to make it."

Stultz also appreciated the opportunities to put what she was learning into practice, both through Clark's simulated pharmacy and through externships. "The hands-on experience, that was a fantastic opportunity," she said.



Raymond Gutierrez, *far left* poses with some Diesel Technology classmates at Clark College's 2018 Commencement.

Raymond Gutierrez also enjoyed getting to learn on-the-job skills and work with cutting-edge equipment in his Diesel Technology program. He fondly recalled the wireless helmets he and his classmates had worn that allowed them to communicate while working on heavy equipment.

Gutierrez came to Clark after the birth of his child. "I had a baby, so I had to start thinking about a career," said the former auto-body and -paint worker. "I went to diesel because so many things are diesel these days, there are lots of jobs."

Gutierrez said he appreciated how much his family supported him while he pursued his degree. "I'm going to be the first in my family to graduate from college, so they were really behind me," he said. "It became a priority for me."

Now that he was almost about to walk across the stage as a Clark graduate, Gutierrez said, "I feel good. I feel happy. You know, people say, 'Oh, if I can do it, you can do it,' and you think 'whatever,' right? But you know what? I did it!"

Photos: Clark College/Jenny Shadley. For more photos from the 2018 Commencement, see our Flickr album.

A student leader with community roots



Grace Moe is congratulated by President Bob Knight at the 2018 Commencement ceremony.

This year's recipient of the Community College Presidents' Award in Honor of Val Ogden was Grace Moe, who graduated with an Associate of Arts transfer degree. "She has shown an exemplary work ethic, participating in student government and volunteering with community organizations while maintaining a high GPA," said Clark College President Robert K. Knight in announcing the scholarship during the college's 2018 Commencement ceremony.

Moe came to Clark College through the Running Start program, which allows high school students to earn college credit. A first-generation college student, Moe has excelled at Clark, serving as the president of the Associated Students of Clark College (student government) and earning a cumulative GPA of 3.82. In addition, she has volunteered with Friends of Trees, the Clark County Food Bank, and New Heights Church.

Moe, 17, says that this scholarship will allow her to complete her bachelor's degree in finance and marketing in two years, when she will be 19 years old; because her parents are unable to financially contribute to her college tuition, without the scholarship she would have had to attend WSUV part-time in order to earn enough to cover the costs. After earning her bachelor's degree, she intends to spend a year volunteering with her church before beginning a career at a local business.



"My roots are definitely ingrained in this area," said Moe, who has lived in Vancouver her whole life. "I plan to give back to the community that raised me, by working in the area so that I can continue to volunteer and serve for Vancouver."

Because Moe was already sitting on stage during the Commencement ceremony in her capacity as ASCC president, Knight invited her to the podium as he announced the scholarship. "You've been a wonderful leader and I know we're going to hear a lot more about you," he said.

Photos: Clark College/Jenny Shadley.

Commencement coming June 21

On Thursday, June 21, Clark College will honor its 82nd graduating class at the 2018 Clark College Commencement ceremony. The ceremony will take place at 6:30 p.m. at the Sunlight Supply Amphitheater. The keynote speaker is John D. Deeder, recently retired superintendent of Evergreen Public Schools.

More than 700 students are expected to participate in the ceremony, celebrating the completion of their bachelor's degree, associate degree, certificate, and/or high school diploma or equivalency.

The ceremony also will include the announcement of 2018-2019 Community College President's Award. This annual scholarship is given to a Clark College graduate who is transferring to a degree program at Washington State University Vancouver (WSUV) and who demonstrated leadership potential, a commitment to community service, and academic achievement. The scholarship award provides full-time tuition and is renewable for one additional year, essentially providing full tuition to complete a bachelor's degree.

The Sunlight Supply Amphitheater is located at 17200 NE Delfel Road in Ridgefield, Wash. Tickets are not required to attend. Anyone needing accommodation due to a disability in order to fully participate in this event should contact Clark College's Disability Support Services Office at (360) 992-2314 or (360) 991-0901 (VP), prior to the event. For more information visit www.clark.edu/cc/commencement.

About John D. Deeder



John D. Deeder

John Deeder served as Superintendent of Evergreen Public Schools for 15 years. He retired in 2017 after 48 years as an educator. Prior to his time at Evergreen, he was an administrator, principal, teacher, counselor, and coach in several Oregon school districts.

Deeder received his Bachelor of Science in Education from the University of Idaho and his Master of Arts in Teaching from Lewis and Clark College. He has his Principal Credential from Portland State University and Superintendent Credential from Lewis and Clark College.

Deeder has done private consulting, including work for the Northwest Regional Laboratory as an “Onward to Excellence Trainer” and as an adjunct professor of instructional theory for Portland State University.

While in Clark County, Deeder has served on the boards of numerous organizations and non-profits, including the Fort Vancouver National Historic Trust, Greater Vancouver Chamber of Commerce, the Columbia River Economic Development Council, the Southwest Washington Workforce Development Council, Partners in Careers, nConnect, the STEM Network, Columbia River Mental Health, Boys and Girls Club, and others.

Deeder and his wife, Janet, have two grown children. They recently welcomed their first grandchild.

This article was updated on June 8 to reflect a change in keynote speaker.

Congratulations, Class of 2017!



Happy graduates prepare to walk in the 2017 Clark College Commencement ceremony.

On June 22, approximately 800 graduates gathered at Sunlight Supply Amphitheater to participate in the 2017 Clark College Commencement ceremony. A strong breeze tried to whip their carefully decorated mortarboard caps off their heads, and the summery sunshine forced many to unzip their gowns to avoid

overheating, but nothing could stop them from celebrating their achievements.



Amanda Owens with her daughter, Naya, at Clark's 2017 Commencement.

This year marked the first time that graduates wore differently colored robes based on the degree/certificate they earned. Bachelor of Applied Science recipients wore white robes; associate degrees and certificates, royal blue; and GED completion and high school diploma, light blue. This is the second year that the college graduated baccalaureate degree-holders, and the third year that GED/High School Diploma graduates from Transitional Studies students participated in the ceremony.

Graduates hugged each other to celebrate the momentous day. Some held their children in their arms. Associate degree recipient Amanda Owens watched her 5-year-old daughter, Naya, play with bubbles as she waited to enter the amphitheater. The two had lots to celebrate: Not only was Owens graduating, but the single mother had recently found out she would have stable housing for the first time years, thanks, in part, to her part-time job as a program coordinator in Clark's Workforce Education department.

In line with Owens was her friend, Amanda Williams, who was

also graduating with an associate transfer degree. Like Owens, Williams had enrolled at Clark straight out of high school but then dropped out—in Williams's case, because of a family crisis. By the time she returned to school, she had a family of her own to care for. "Juggling being a mom with schoolwork was the hardest thing," said the mother of two. "There were some late nights doing homework after the kids went to bed."



Amy and Tom Merfeld get ready to graduate together.

Williams, who plans to continue her education at Washington State University Vancouver to become a social worker, did not have her children with her in line—they were being watched by her husband, which only seemed fair since she had watched them during last year's Commencement ceremony, when he graduated with a welding degree. A few yards down the line, Amy and Tom Merfeld were doing the Williamses one better: The couple, who have been married for 10 years, were graduating together.

The Merfelds pursued different educational paths at Clark—Amy earning her degree in Addiction Counselor Education and Tom, one in merchandising management. As such, they were never "study buddies," but they did support each other's educations with some creative scheduling. "When she was at school, I was at work," said Tom, who installs windows and runs his own entertainment company. "A lot of classes I was able to do online, which helped."

Clearly, many graduates struggled with competing time commitments while pursuing their educations. When, during the ceremony, President Bob Knight asked all graduates who had worked while attending Clark to rise to be recognized, the vast majority of graduates stood up.



“Remember the feeling of what it’s like to complete something you set out to complete,” said actor Ernie Hudson during his 2017 Commencement keynote address.

This year’s keynote speaker, actor Ernie Hudson, could empathize with those students. As he described during his keynote address, Hudson had grown up poor, and by the time he tried to enter college, he was working as a janitor in order to support his wife and young son. “I was at my wit’s end,” he recalled. “It was a rough time.”

Hudson went on to recount how he enrolled at Wayne State University and fell in love with acting—how he helped found what is now the oldest African-American theater company in the United States, and then drove with his wife and two sons from Michigan to Connecticut in order to personally convince the admissions staff at Yale University to allow him into its celebrated Master of Fine Arts program in drama. He also spoke about the difficulties of trying to launch his acting career

while simultaneously adjusting to being a single father, balancing the duties of work and family—and the work ethic that helped him eventually find success in films like *Ghostbusters*, *The Crow*, and *Miss Congeniality*.

“I’m not that brilliant,” he said. “I know how to work hard.”

But Hudson added that, along with his work ethic, he credits trusting his “spirit” to get him where he is today. “There’s a part of you, and it speaks to you in the strangest ways, in the middle of the night,” he said. “You have to listen to it.”



Student Ambassador
Abigail Volk was
the 2017
Commencement
student speaker.

The ceremony was also occasion to announce two major awards. Early in ceremony, President Knight announced the names of the recipients of the 2017 Exceptional Faculty Awards: economics instructor Patricia Atkinson; English instructor Dr. John Caruso; American Sign Language instructor Becky Engel; computer science and engineering instructor Dr. Nicholas Macias; and welding professor Brian McVay. Later during the ceremony, he announced that

graduate Nicholas Freese was the recipient of the 2017-2018 Community College Presidents' Award in Honor of Val Ogden. This annual scholarship is given to a Clark College graduate who demonstrates leadership potential, a commitment to community service, and academic achievement. The scholarship award provides full-time tuition at WSUV and is renewable for one additional year, essentially providing full tuition to complete a bachelor's degree.

Thanks to the Clark College Foundation, scholarship finalists Sarah Moe and José Augusto Barcelos Espindola Neto also received \$1,000 each to attend WSUV.

In all, more than 2,100 degrees and certificates were conferred upon the Class of 2017, Clark's 81st graduating class. Of those graduates, 413 were Running Start students—a record number for the college, which has the largest Running Start program in the state.

At the end of the ceremony, President Knight said, "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 a video of memories from the Class of 2017:

Photos: Jenny Shadley/Clark College. To see more photos, visit our Flickr album.

Video: Nick Bremer/Clark College

To watch the Commencement ceremony in its entirety, visit CVTV's website.

Exceptional faculty



During the 2017 Commencement ceremony, President Robert K. Knight announced the names of the recipients of the 2017 Clark College Exceptional Faculty Awards. The awards are presented annually to full-time and part-time faculty members. Nominations can be submitted by Clark College students, faculty, classified employees, administrators, alumni, Board members, and Foundation directors.

The awards are made possible through an endowed trust fund established by the Washington State Legislature and the Clark College Exceptional Faculty Endowment Fund, which was established in 1993. That fund provides recognition of exemplary work performance, positive impact on students, professional commitment, and other contributions to the college.

This year's Exceptional Faculty members are:

- Patricia A. Atkinson, instructor of economics
- Dr. John Caruso, instructor of English
- Becky Engel, instructor of American Sign Language
- Dr. Nicholas Macias, instructor of computer science and engineering
- Brian McVay, professor of welding

Patricia A. Atkinson, Economics



When Patricia Atkinson was an undergraduate, she was an enthusiastic student—but not a focused one. “I loved all my studies, from history and geography to math and science,” she said.

It was only in her junior year of college, when she took her first economics course—a field that combined aspects of all those disciplines—that Atkinson found her true academic passion.

Today, Atkinson passes that passion on to her students. “She made me enjoy and understand a subject that I disliked and struggled with in the past,” wrote one nominator. “She always would go out of her way to make sure we understood the material by relating it to real-life experiences.”

Another student wrote, “She allowed me to understand and appreciate what college can be. ... Professor Atkinson showed me that college is about learning, engaging, participating, and enhancing your personal capital.”

Atkinson, who has taught at Clark since 2009, is currently a tenure-track instructor at the college. She has also taught at Portland Community College, University of Phoenix, and Portland State University, where she earned her master’s degree in economics. She is currently completing her doctorate degree in education leadership at Washington State University Vancouver.

Dr. John Caruso, English

Most kids' first jobs are something along the lines of babysitting or mowing lawns—John Caruso's, which he began at age 13, was writing book reviews for the local newspaper. So it's not all that surprising that he grew up to be an English professor.



"I love learning, and I love helping my students learn," Caruso said. "When you have an active, alert mind, talking about ideas and language is like playing your favorite sport. I feel blessed to spend my days doing something that I enjoy, and doubly blessed that what I enjoy also improves the lives of my students."

Students clearly count Caruso as a blessing, too. "John makes everyone want to engage in class activities and discussions," wrote one nominator. "Even the more shy kids are raising their hands. We all felt safe and valued in his class."

Caruso said that his own experience as a first-generation college student helps him create a welcoming environment for the diverse student body he teaches at Clark. (He also teaches at Marylhurst University.) He earned his bachelor's degree at UCLA; his master's, at California State University Chico; and his doctorate in English at the University of Washington. He has taught English for two decades, and at Clark for the past six years. A frequently published writer of short fiction, Caruso is expecting his first full-length novel, *The Lawn Job*, to be published by Cloud Lodge Books later this year.

Becky Engel, American Sign Language



When students describe Rebecca Engel, they mention her supportiveness, her individual attention, and her flexibility in presenting material in a range of teaching styles.

“I see myself as a chameleon of sorts, always adapting to the different needs and learning styles the students present,” Engel said. “I picked up this skill in my first teaching job in the K-12 system. I had deaf students of all levels, so I was constantly adapting to meet their needs and learning styles.”

Students say they appreciate Engel’s adaptability, as well as the unique perspective she is able to provide as a Deaf person herself. “Becky strives to teach her classes about Deaf culture and how to interact within the Deaf community,” wrote one nominator. “Not only does she teach ASL, but she also teaches us proper etiquette, what to expect when in a Deaf community event, and other important things that help us learn how to interact with the Deaf community.”

Engel earned her bachelor’s degree from Oregon State University and her Master of Deaf Education from Western Oregon University. She taught at the Washington School for the Deaf before becoming an instructor at Clark College. Currently she is a tenure-track instructor at the college, teaching not only standard language classes but also a course in American Deaf Culture and a special Honors Program language class. She serves on the ASL advisory boards for the Vancouver, Battle Ground, Evergreen, and Camas school districts, as well as on Clark College’s Social Equity Task Force and Emergency Building Coordinator Committee.

Dr. Nicholas Macias, Computer Science and Engineering

Dr. Nicholas Macias has had an almost life-long fascination with computers. He began playing around with programming on the computers at his high school, even though he wasn't yet old enough to take the school's computer science classes. "I'd pull people's code out of the garbage, uncrumple it, type it in, and try to figure out what it did," he recalls.



That boundless curiosity and enthusiasm is still on display now that he teaches computer science himself. "He's intensely passionate not just about teaching, but also about learning," wrote a student in nominating him. "He's dedicated so much of his life to the work that he loves, and it always shines through."

Dr. Macias earned his master's degree in computer science from George Washington University and another in mathematics from Duke University. He earned his Ph.D. in electrical engineering from Virginia Polytechnic University. He spent many years as a computer scientist in both government and private enterprise before deciding to focus full-time on teaching. He has taught at Clark since 2011 and has served as a faculty advisor for both the Computer Science and Engineering and the MARS Robotics student clubs.

"Knowing that this award is based in part on student input means so much to me," said Dr. Macias. "I like to believe that I'm helping students, even when I know I'm making them work hard and they'd rather have the weekend free! This award feels like a very big 'Thank You,' and gives me hope that what I'm doing really is making a difference."

Brian McVay, Welding



You could say welding runs in Brian McVay's blood—both his father and stepfather were welders, and his mother worked as a machinist on nuclear submarines. "In the eighth grade, I knew what I wanted to do," he said.

McVay studied welding at Clark College before being accepted into a boilermaker apprenticeship. Later, he returned to Clark for further studies to prepare for an apprenticeship as an ironworker, a job he held for 17 years. "I always came back to Clark," he said, noting that he returned to the college again for management classes later in his career. "Education has been something that I really value. I wake up in the morning looking forward to learning something new that day."

In 2014, he found himself returning to Clark again—this time, to teach. He said he enjoys being able to give back to a place that taught him so much, preparing students for today's industrial jobs.

"I tell my students on the first day of class, 'I don't *give* you a grade. You *earn* your grade,'" he said. "I run my shop like it would be run in the industry."

Students appreciate his "tough love" approach. "Mr. McVay has a very 'let's get it done now' attitude," wrote a nominator. "However, he never teaches us to prioritize the work over safety. ... He pushes us ahead in order to help us achieve more."

Photos: Clark College/Jenny Shadley

“I want to be a role model”



Nicholas Freese '17 waits in line to participate in commencement.

When Nicholas Freese heard his name announced as the recipient of the Community College Presidents' Scholarship in Honor of Val Ogden, there was one person he wanted to discuss it with, above all others: his 4-year-old daughter, Sadie.

“I really want to know what my daughter thinks about this,” he said as he stood in line to receive his degree, clearly still stunned by the news that he would be able to attend Washington State University Vancouver for two years, tuition-free, in order to complete his bachelor's degree. Clark College President Bob Knight made the announcement during the 2017

Clark College Commencement ceremony.



Nicholas Freese stands, stunned, as he learns that he has received the 2017-2018 Community College Presidents' Scholarship.

It might seem strange to want to know a toddler's opinion on your academic achievements, but for Freese, Sadie has been at the heart of his pursuit of higher education. "With her, I have the opportunity to be awesome, just from the get-go," he said during an interview prior to Commencement. "She can just think of Daddy as this great guy who's worked hard and pursued his goals."

Freese is painfully aware that many people who have known him since his own childhood might not see him in such an unambiguously positive light. Growing up in Albuquerque, New Mexico, Freese began getting into trouble around the time he entered high school. Trying to escape a violent home life with an alcoholic father, Freese began staying with friends—including "some people I probably shouldn't have been hanging out with," he said.

By his junior year, Freese was struggling with his own addiction issues. He bounced between alternative schools, but didn't graduate from any; he tried rehab, but it didn't stick.

For the next few years, he wandered from city to city: Denver, Seattle, Honolulu, Saipan. By the time he landed in Vancouver, he had made the commitment to get sober, but hadn't found much direction past that.

All that changed after Sadie was born. "At first, it was like, 'Daddy's being clean,' but after a while I felt like, 'That's great, but what's Daddy going to *do*?' " Freese recalled. "I don't want to be borderline poverty, like I grew up. I want to be a role model."

Freese enrolled at Clark College. At first, he found college daunting—less academically than logistically. "I didn't understand how registration worked," he said. "I had to use my resources. I had to ask for advice, and I'm not used to asking for advice. I'd be in the Financial Aid Office every day for a week, trying to figure things out."

But as Freese continued at Clark, he learned how to navigate its support systems. Advisors showed him how to plan his degree; he met friends while working out in the Fitness Center; he took advantage of other free and subsidized services like the Counseling and Health Center and the college's dental clinic. In the end, Freese graduated with honors, earning a cumulative GPA of 3.77.



Clark College President Bob Knight congratulates scholarship recipient Nicholas

Freese.

It hasn't always been easy. Freese had to balance his studies with caring for Sadie and volunteering in his community. He serves as a mentor to other recovering addicts, works on clean-up parties in his neighborhood, and participates in activities aimed at improving police-community relations. Additionally, he has worked during much of his time at Clark, though he credits his wife, Ashley, with keeping the family financially afloat while he pursues his education.

"She's paying the bills," he said. "She's working toward this just as much as I am."

Freese, now 28, plans to major in public affairs at WSUV, with the long-term goal of becoming a lawyer. "I want to be a voice for those who don't have a voice," he said. "I want to help people."

A first-generation college graduate, Freese said he hopes that sharing the story of his struggles and success will help to inspire others who might be facing their own challenges. "I want to show people in a similar case that this is possible," he said.

For Freese, earning this scholarship means that he will be able to concentrate on his studies at WSUV instead of on how to pay for them. But it also carries deeper meaning than the easing of financial burdens.

"What it means to me is that I'm there, I've reached that level," he said, raising his hand to about chest-height. "I'm not just getting an associate degree—I'm *doing well*."

And he knows just the little girl to celebrate that with.

Photos: Clark College/Jenny Shadley

Commencement keynote speaker announced



Ernie Hudson

On Thursday, June 22, Clark College will honor its 81st graduating class at the 2017 Clark College Commencement ceremony. The ceremony will take place at 7 p.m. at the Sunlight Supply Amphitheater. The keynote speaker is actor Ernie Hudson.

More than 700 students are expected to participate in the ceremony, celebrating the completion of their bachelor's degree, associate degree, certificate, and/or high school diploma or equivalency.

The ceremony also will include the announcement of 2017-2018 Community College President's Award. This annual scholarship is given to a Clark College graduate who is transferring to a degree program at Washington State University Vancouver (WSUV) and who demonstrated leadership potential, a commitment to community service, and academic achievement. The scholarship award provides full-time tuition and is renewable for one

additional year, essentially providing full tuition to complete a bachelor's degree.

The Sunlight Supply Amphitheater is located at 17200 NE Delfel Road in Ridgefield, Wash. Tickets are not required to attend. Anyone needing accommodation due to a disability in order to fully participate in this event should contact Clark College's Disability Support Services Office at (360) 992-2314 or (360) 991-0901 (VP), prior to the event. For more information visit www.clark.edu/cc/commencement.

About Ernie Hudson

Ernie Hudson is a successful actor best known for his roles in *Ghostbusters*, *The Crow*, *Miss Congeniality*, NBC's *Law and Order*, and HBO's award-winning series *Oz*. His road to fame, however, had its share of hardships. Hudson was born in poverty and raised in the housing projects of Benton Harbor, Michigan. His mother died when he was young and he was raised primarily by his grandmother. He was already married and had a young son when he enrolled at Wayne State University in Detroit, Michigan. He began his theatre career as the resident playwright at Detroit's Concept East, the oldest African-American theater company in the United States. Later, he founded Actors Ensemble Theater, where he and other African-American performers staged and appeared in their own original works. After attending Wayne State, Hudson accepted a full writing/acting scholarship to the prestigious Master of Fine Arts Program at Yale University. After graduation, Hudson balanced his responsibilities as a working actor with those of being a single father to two sons. His talent, hard work, and persistence eventually earned him a successful career in Hollywood. He now divides his time between his homes in Minnesota and Los Angeles, and continues to appear in many critically acclaimed productions on stage, screen, and television.

Penguins Fly



Graduates from Clark College's welding program wait to enter the Sunlight Supply Amphitheater before the college's 2016 commencement ceremony.

"Mommy did it!" read the message on Ashley Ellis's mortarboard cap, the glittery writing sparkling in the sun as she waited outside the Sunlight Supply Amphitheater before Clark College's 80th Commencement ceremony on June 16.



Ashley Ellis

Ellis wrote the message for her 2-year-old son, Paul, who would be in the stands watching his mother receive her Associate in Applied Technology degree in pharmacy technician—making her the first generation of her family to earn a college degree.

“I just wanted to show my family that I could do more,” Ellis explained. “I dropped out of high school at 16, and now here I am graduating with honors.”

As was the case for many of the approximately 720 Clark graduates waiting to process, Ellis’s achievement did not come without sacrifice. “I didn’t sleep a lot,” she said with a laugh. “I got up at 3:30 a.m. to study sometimes.”

While many graduates, like Ellis, came to Clark after time away from school, others had attended Clark before they’d even graduated from high school. This year’s graduating class included 346 members of Running Start, the Washington State program that allows high school students to attend college tuition-free. This was a record number of Running Start graduates for the college; 170 of them graduated with honors.

“I really felt like the experience I had at Clark prepared me so much—not just for college, but for life,” said Running

Start graduate Anita Bejan; the three fellow Running Start graduates standing with her nodded in agreement.



Bachelor of Applied Science
in Dental Hygiene graduates

Another large group of graduates stood together, chatting and playing with the oversized paper teeth necklaces hung around their necks. These women were some of the 23 graduates from the college's new Bachelor of Applied Science in Dental Hygiene program. This is the first cohort of students to earn their BAS since the program launched in fall 2014, making it the college's first baccalaureate degree. The college is in the process of getting a second BAS program, in Applied Management, accredited and able to enroll students in the 2017 winter quarter.



Bruce Becker

Graduate Bruce Becker, who was waiting to receive his Associate of Arts in Business Administration, said he hoped to enroll in the new BAS. Becker came to Clark after a traffic accident left him unable to do his old job. "It had been 47 years for me since I'd last been in school, so it was a little challenging at first," Becker said. "But it's been really fun. I've had a blast."

Jessica Sanchez was also ready for more school. Sanchez was one of about 20 Transitional Studies graduates waiting to receive their High School Diploma or GED recognition. This is the second year that Transitional Studies graduates have been recognized at Commencement.

For Sanchez, this moment had been four years in the making—two spent learning English through Clark's English as a Second Language program, followed by two of basic education. "I already had a high school diploma," said the 26-year-old native of Mexico, who plans to continue in Clark's for-credit classes. "And then I had to do it all over again, but in another language. I really liked doing it at Clark College, because you can get one-on-one tutoring and there's great support."



Jessica Sanchez, *third from left*, stands with some of her fellow 2016 Transitional

Studies graduates.

Another high school diploma recipient, Esmeralda “Vita” Blanco, addressed the audience inside the amphitheater as one of two student speakers included in the ceremony. Blanco, a single mother of two who dropped out of high school after becoming pregnant, spoke movingly about the ways pursuing her education has changed her and her family’s life. “I strongly believe I’m taking away more than a diploma,” she said. “What I’m really getting is a world of new opportunities, one I can share with the two most important people in my life: my daughters.”

Associate of Arts degree recipient Megan Cook, who attended Clark through Running Start, spoke about the wide range of students she’s encountered at the college. “There are graduates here who are the first in their family to go to college, and those who are learning right alongside their parents,” she said. “I’ve met people of all ethnicities, ages, and genders, and that isn’t necessarily something you find at every college or university.”



Left to right: Washington All-Academic Team member Tammy Senior, ASCC president Sarah Swift, student speaker Megan Cook, Washington All-Academic Team member Qi Wu, Clark College President Bob

Knight, keynote speaker Jessica Lynch, and student speaker Vita Blanco smile with Oswald before going onstage for the 2016 Commencement ceremony.

This year's keynote speaker was former prisoner of war Jessica Lynch. "Each one of us has some type of obstacle, some type of struggle that wants to hold us down," she said. "Do not let it."

The ceremony was occasion for Clark College President Robert K. Knight to announce the names of the recipients of the 2016 Exceptional Faculty Awards. The 2016 awardees are history instructor Joseph Cavalli; business technology instructor Dr. Kathleen Chatfield; geography professor Heather McAfee; and French professor Doug Mrazek, who is retiring after 38 years at the college.

President Knight also announced the recipient of the 2016-2017 Community College Presidents' Scholarship in Honor of Val Ogden, which is given to a Clark College graduate who demonstrates leadership potential, a commitment to community service, and academic achievement. The scholarship award provides full-time tuition at Washington State University Vancouver (WSUV) and is renewable for one additional year, essentially providing full tuition to complete a bachelor's degree. This year's recipient was Holly Varner. Two other nominees, Abigail Bambilla and Adeena Rose Wade, received \$1,000 each.

President Knight concluded the evening by saying, "We are excited to think of the ways in which you will change the world. And we are glad to know that Clark College will always hold a special place in your hearts. Remember: Once a member of the Penguin Nation, always a member of the Penguin Nation!"

Approximately 2,000 degrees and certificates were conferred in total on the Class of 2016.

Photos: Clark College/Jenny Shadley

See more photos from Commencement in our Flickr album.

See full video coverage of the ceremony online from CVTV.

Exceptional Faculty



The 2016 Exceptional Faculty Award recipients are, *left to right*, Joseph Cavalli, Dr. Kathleen Chatfield, Heather McAfee, and Doug Mrazek.

During the 2016 Commencement ceremony, President Robert K. Knight announced the names of the recipients of the 2016 Clark College Exceptional Faculty Awards. The awards are presented annually to full-time and part-time faculty members. Nominations can be submitted by Clark College students, faculty, classified employees, administrators, alumni, Board members, and Foundation directors.

The awards are made possible through an endowed trust fund

established by the Washington State Legislature and the Clark College Exceptional Faculty Endowment Fund, which was established in 1993. That fund provides recognition of exemplary work performance, positive impact on students, professional commitment, and other contributions to the college.

This year's Exceptional Faculty members are:

- Joseph Cavalli, instructor of history
- Dr. Kathleen Chatfield, instructor of business technology
- Heather McAfee, professor of geography
- Doug Mrazek, professor of French

Joe Cavalli, History

Joseph Cavalli has taught history at schools in Croatia, Italy, and Bahrain. He began teaching at Clark shortly after returning to the Pacific Northwest in 2006. For the past five years, he has also served as the director of Clark's award-winning Model United Nations program. He also teaches history through Clark College's non-credit Mature Learning program and at Mt. Hood Community College.

Cavalli says he sees history more as a context for understanding the world than as a rote memorization of names and dates. "It's not about me giving students information," he says. "What I want to impart is the love of learning and the need to be curious."

Students appreciate Cavalli's efforts to make history relevant to their current lives. "I had no interest in history whatsoever until I took his class," wrote one student. "After my first class with him, I was enthralled. Now, history is my favorite subject and my current major."

Dr. Kathleen Chatfield, Business Technology and Management

Over the course of her 21 years at Clark, Dr. Kathleen Chatfield has taught a variety of courses, including keyboarding, microcomputer applications, Microsoft Excel, e-commerce, and project management. In truth, however, her influence goes far beyond those subjects. In fact, she has been a part of every online class offered at Clark College through her work as the senior instructional designer for the college's eLearning Department, where she helps Clark faculty learn how to develop online classes.

"It is a daunting task to guide so many full-time and part-time instructors through all the different learning systems, while also helping them to maintain their unique styles and philosophies of teaching," wrote one nominator. "Yet Dr. Chatfield manages to accomplish this task."

Dr. Chatfield continues to teach classes to students as well, saying that this experience helps her better understand the needs and challenges of faculty. This adds up to more than a full-time workload, but Dr. Chatfield says, "I'm doing what I love. I've never woken up in the morning and said, 'Oh no, I have to go to work.'"

Heather McAfee, Geography

Heather McAfee first became interested in geography while working for the U.S. Department of Defense, doing cultural analysis of Iraq that included mapping the civilian population there. "I love geography because it is the most interdisciplinary subject you can study," she says. "It touches everything, even health—we have medical geography. Recently in my classes, we've looked at and mapped the spread of the Zika virus."

McAfee serves as chair of the Geography Department at Clark; she also serves on the college's AA Transfer Committee, the Library of the Future Taskforce, and the Learning Communities Taskforce. Additionally, McAfee has worked to create

connections between Clark and community organizations, including the Water Resources Education Center and the Vanport Mosaic.

“She made her classroom a comfortable area where every person’s opinion and outlook was highly valued,” wrote one student. “Her teachings went much deeper than the textbook material. She wanted us to dig deep and relate every lesson to our personal lives and experiences, and it taught all of us so much about the world around us.”

Doug Mrazek, French

When Doug Mrazek was job-hunting after receiving his master’s degree in French from the University of Illinois in 1978, one of his professors told him that the Pacific Northwest was so beautiful that if he took a job there, “you’ll never want to leave.”

Those words turned out to be prophetic; Mrazek has devoted 38 years to teaching French at Clark. He has taught generations of Clark students how to conjugate *être*, led dozens of them on trips through France and Quebec, and helped the French Club put on countless events as its academic advisor.

Small surprise, then, that Mrazek received more than 30 nominations for this award this year. “I’m in amazement,” he says. “It’s a tremendous sense of closure. After a career of 40 years, it’s a nice way to move on.”

Photo: Clark College/Jenny Shadley