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FEATURED

WKU-O graduates 330: Many juggle work, classes and family

Many juggle work, classes and families

By James Mayse Messenger-Inquirer 16 hrs ago

Photo by Alan Warren, Messenger-Inquirer/awarren@messenger-inquirer.com Tiffany Duncan shows her daughter, Paige Duncan, 10, her WKU buttons on her gown before the start of the Western Kentucky University Owensboro Commencement Ceremony on Monday night at the RiverPark Center.

On Monday evening, about an hour before the Western Kentucky University-Owensboro class of 2018 received their diplomas, Lisa Husk was waiting calmly backstage with two of her daughters.

Husk, who had worked as a substitute teacher at Hancock County Public Schools, was patient, and persistent. Husk, who received her bachelor's degree Monday in interdisciplinary studies with an emphasis on education, was a nontraditional student who balanced years of study with the demands of work and family life.

"Of course, getting my bachelor's degree is something I always wanted to do," Husk said. It's something I wanted to prove to myself."

Husk, who has college-age children, might be a little older than the traditional college student, but she was not the oldest person in the graduating class. Of the 330 WKU-O graduates who received degrees Monday, students ranged in age from 19 to 71 years old.

"I've heard so many older people say, 'I can't do it,' " Husk said. "Yes, you absolutely can."

David Lee, WKU provost and vice president for academic affairs, told the audience that most of the graduates will "stay and work right here in Daviess County ... Most of the students have worked while attending classes, they have commitments to their families."

The majority of the graduates had first obtained associate degrees from Owensboro Community & Technical College before transferring across the street to finish their bachelor's degrees at WKU-O.

Tiffany Duncan, who was also graduating with a bachelor's degree in interdisciplinary studies, was an OCTC employee and obtained two associate degrees from the community college before enrolling at WKU-O.

Family life put Duncan's college goal on hold for a while, but she went back to school full time to get her WKU diploma.

"I'm relieved," Duncan said. "I'm excited to take the next step from here ... but it's very relieving, after having all the work in."

Student commencement speaker Cindy Williams started her college career at WKU's main campus in Bowling Green more than three decades ago, but marriage intervened.

"This was a long journey that began in the fall of 1984," Williams said. "Tonight ... this journey has finally been accomplished."

Williams finished her studies while receiving treatment for cancer, with which she was diagnosed four times over the years.

When she received the fourth cancer diagnosis last fall, Williams told the crowd, "I thought, 'only two classes to go ... How can I give up now? I can't.'

"If you have a dream, I'd encourage you to press forward," Williams told the graduates, "and make that dream a reality."

Madison Silvert, president of the Malcolm Bryant Corp. and former president and CEO of the Greater Owensboro Economic Corp., told the class their WKU-O educations gave them a special responsibility and asked the students to work to be kind and civil to others.

Nationally and in the state and community, "the ability to be kind, as an art form, is being lost every day," Silvert said. The majority of Americans, Silvert noted, think the country is divided.

"We have a responsibility to fix it, and those of you wearing (graduation) caps have an extra responsibility" because their educations had taught them how to consider the ideas and points of view of others without being disrespectful, he said.

"Education is the antidote to a selfish society," Silvert said.

He urged the graduates to 'will the good for every person,' and to approach others with kindness and understanding.

"Be selfless," Silvert said. "Do it for 40 days, and in 40 days, you'll find it's a habit. Treating others with goodness is "the only way we are going to progress as a society and fulfill our mission on earth, which is to love each other," he said.

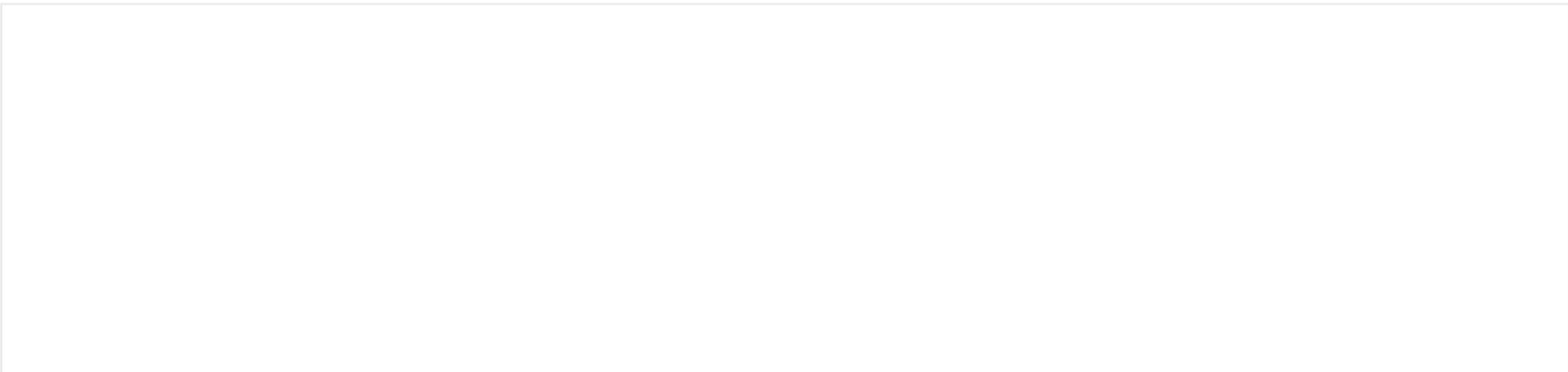
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