

Several Firsts at Centralia College Graduation Friday

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Another academic year at Centralia College closed Friday with a large graduation ceremony that offered a series of firsts in the 89 years of the college.

The first group of students that achieved bachelor's degrees at Centralia College walked the stage with their two-year graduate counterparts, the first group in the college's history to do so. Donning yellow caps and gowns that complemented the two-year graduates' blue garb, several future business managers walked the stage — a scene that one would not have seen in Centralia not too long ago.

Larry McGee, associate dean of the bachelor's programs at the college, offered an exhortation to those who spent four years at Centralia College.

"I think you should say yes as often as you can to new opportunities," McGee said. "You're going to learn more, and make a big contribution."

The college also gave out its first-ever honorary bachelor's degrees at the ceremony, honoring three longtime community members who played a hand in making the college what it is today.

The late Gail Shaw was named a posthumous recipient of an honorary degree at Centralia College. Shaw, who died last Saturday, chaired the Industrial Commission for many years and most recently donated to the bachelor's degree program. He also provided scholarship funds for many students.

Shaw also recently provided \$60,000 in stocks to the Chehalis Community Renaissance Team.

Shaw's wife, Carolyn, son and daughters all accepted the award on his behalf.

Judy Guenther, who served as a trustee for more than 15 years, was honored for her service to the college and her method of increasing the college's recognition and response to community needs. Her husband, Bob, was honored for his recognition of workforce needs and work with the college to improve its workforce education operations. Bob Guenther also helped form the Center of Excellence for Clean Energy.

"This is your special day, but us being able to share our special day with you makes it all the greater," Judy Guenther told the students.

Centralia College Distinguished Alumnus Pat Kemp gave the keynote speech. The 1973 graduate went on to the University of Washington and today serves as commissioner for Transportation and Public Facilities for the state of Alaska.

Kemp, who originally came to Centralia College to play basketball, reflected on the time he spent at the college, noting the economic differences between the early 1970s and today.

“In-state tuition was \$83 per year in 1971, and yes, we complained about it then too,” Kemp joked, drawing laughter from the crowd.

Kemp urged each graduate to continue pursuing their education, and make sound judgments

“If you make it to leadership, make sure you hire good people,” Kemp advised.

Kemp remembered the instrumental role the college played as a catalyst for his own career, and praised the college for doing its part in educating the community and preparing people for the general workforce.

“It’s dog-eat-dog out there for welders, engineers, surveyors — jobs that Centralia College is in good position to provide that education for,” Kemp said. “It’s great to see that the Centralia College engine is alive and well.”