

She's the senior of adult ed grads

BY CASEY HANS
STAFF WRITER

Farmington Hills resident Freda Lewis gave herself one heck of a birthday present this year.

The 84-year-old Farmington Hills resident was one of 52 adult graduates to receive high school diplomas through Farmington Public Schools' Adult Education program last week.

The oldest graduate in this year's class, who will be 85 in August, couldn't be prouder.

"It had been a long, long time," Lewis said. "They're very proud of me — that I know."

The octogenarian said it was "mostly fear" that caused her not to go back to school sooner. It was her daughter Marion Severs, with whose family she lives in Farmington Hills, who motivated her to try again.

"I kept encouraging and encouraging," Severs said. "It took three years. She has so much enthusiasm for learning."

"She's the angel that pushed me," Lewis added.

This "going back to school" was contagious in the Lewis-Severs household. Her mother's ambition gave Severs the impetus to complete her bachelor's degree at Mar-

donna University recently.

Freda Lewis had to drop out of grade school in Pennsylvania after her father died and the family with 11 children needed help with money. "My mother needed the help," she explained. "We just dropped out. She (her sister) and I cried when I left."

Although she was born in the United States, her Lebanese parents spoke Arabic around the house, so learning English was made even more difficult without school.

She went on to get married and raise five children, and today has 10 grandchildren, nine great-grandchildren and one great-great-grandchild.

Severs said she saw her mother's self-worth suffering because of the lack of a high school degree. She said she has seen her mother blossom academically, as well as socially. The experience has given her a whole new set of friends and a fresh appreciation of education.

Mathematics was the subject she enjoyed most and English was the toughest. Next, she hopes to enroll in a word processing class "not for a degree, just for learning," she said.

And what will Lewis do with her degree? "Pin it on the wall," she said.



Never too old: Freda Elias Lewis, 84, crosses the stage to receive her diploma from the Farmington Public Schools.



Donning mom's cap: Five-year-old Katelyn Buckner wears the hat her mother, Kelly Buckner, wore during commencement ceremonies last week. The graduate's husband, Rick Buckner, helps his daughter.

Their achievements were a lifetime in the making

Take your dream, make it happen. Life's a ship, but you're the captain. Nothing can stop you now.

Farmington Community Children's Chorus

BY CASEY HANS
STAFF WRITER

Muzio Accettura always wanted to complete high school, but never found the time.

He finally achieved his goal this year.

"You feel complete — that's the way I feel," said Accettura, a native of Italy who received a diploma for his academic efforts last week.

through the Farmington Adult Education program. "I always wanted to go to school, but never had the opportunity."

Accettura was born and raised in Italy where schools closed down due to World War II. After serving two years in the service, he got married and had three children who all went on to higher education; one is a lawyer and two are doctors.

Accettura gave one of three graduate speeches at the June 10 ceremonies held at Farmington High School. More than 50 adults who had come back to school received their diplomas. Community Education director Terry Klenczar said this year's class ranged in age from 18-84, including one student who had never attended high school, and had natives of Italy, Iraq, Syria and Hong Kong represented among the graduates.

Nine students were from the first graduating class of the Farmington Alternative Academy, an alternative high school program piloted in the district this year in the Farmington Training Center building in downtown Farmington. A former academy student, Jennifer Talarezyk, thanked her parents for their patience in helping her get through school.

She was a good student and athlete until reaching high school, Talarezyk said, where "I often made all the wrong choices." She said it was easier to hang out on the school patio than attend class.

Last January, the senior was referred to the academy.

"I found that school wasn't so bad after all," she added.

'You feel complete — that's the way I feel. I always wanted to go to school, but never had the opportunity.'

Muzio Accettura
adult ed
high school grad

Michael Davis, who dropped out of Harrison High, came back to school two years ago and earned his diploma last week after realizing he needed a degree to get a good job.

Davis said he grew up the 11th of 13 children, and spent much time intimidating others. He was a poor reader which eventually caused him to become frustrated and quit school.

"The anger directed toward teachers was anger at myself," he explained. After dropping out, he worked as a gas attendant and dishwasher while his youngest classmates went to college and moved on with their lives.

At commencement last week, he said fellow graduates were "taking the first steps through the open door to our future" and said "we share the same feelings of accomplishment and pride."

Entertaining at the commencement were the Farmington Community Education Children's Chorus and the Farmington Adult Community Chorus. Diplomas were handed out by school board president Jack Cotton, and students enjoyed a sort of "video yearbook" — a slide show put together by the staff.



New life: Ray Smith, 18, holds his 8-month-old son, Daniel before the ceremony.

Adult grads: Older and wiser

The following students graduated through the Farmington Public Schools' Adult Education program on June 10:

Maria Accettura, Mark Allen, Ronald Ayres, Laura Bisiosek, Crystal Borno, Maxine Brainer, Du-Chuina Brown, Kelly Buckner, Shannon Cairns, Douglas Chelland, Christopher Cheuk, Alina Datto, Michael Davis, Michael Domrowski, Sandra Ely, Anthony Engelberg, Christian Flood, Kimberly Garant, Patrick Gantner, Derek Golay, Brian Gray, Vanessa Hill, Stephen Humphrey, Christopher Jacobs, Constance Jukiel, Paul Karas, Margaret Kasorgis, Freda Lewis, Rachel McKeithen, Kenneth McLaurin, Tammie Moore, Kristin Nelson, Kyle Pace, Jeri Pearce, Suzanne Randall, Tracy Robinette, Ranya Sabbagh, Nicolas Schram, Laura Seman, Scott Silardi, Sean Silver, Arnold Smith, Danielle Smith, Christian Stiehl, Jennifer Struble, Jennifer Talarezyk, James Tomassi, Virginia Waara, Dawn Walker, Scott Wigner, Helen Wright and Mark Zemnickas.

BECAUSE HE'S ALWAYS A GOOD SPORT

Beautifully crafted Hobby Boxes™ from Kirk Stiff for the sporting buff dad. Handsome walnut boxes with sculptured pewter lids capture all the action of a favorite pastime. Open the box to find a surprise more realistic sporting action detail on the underside of the lid. Choose tennis, golf, sailing or snow skiing. 11 1/2" x 11 1/2" x 5 1/2".

Jacobson's

Ann Arbor • Grosse Pointe • Birmingham • Dearborn • Rochester • Livonia

Shop until 9 p.m. on Thursday and Friday. Until 6 p.m. on Monday, Tuesday, Wednesday and Saturday. Shop Sunday Noon to 5 p.m.

Jacobson's Charge, MasterCard®, VISA®, and American Express®.