

Pomp and circumstance

Pride in OCC comes through at ceremony

BY TIM CARVELL
STAFF WRITER

When nearly 2,000 students are graduating, the ceremony's bound to run a little long. And when the ceremony runs a little long, friends and family are bound to get a little impatient.

Such was the case at Friday night's graduation of Oakland Community College, where much of the audience — and even a few graduates — wandered the halls of the Palace of Auburn Hills as the awarding of the diplomas passed the 60-minute mark.

Among those patrolling the hallways, there was a general consensus on the ceremony.

"It's a little long," said Debbie Deschamps, of Belleville. "It would be a lot better if my sister ever gets up there," said George Klison, of Ferndale. "It's kind of long."

Before the hall-walking commenced, Rev. William Cunningham, a founding member of Focus:HOPE, spoke about the need for community colleges. Community colleges, he argued, prevent a work force from becoming obsolete.

"What we accomplish and learn today is not sufficient. And so there are institutions, exemplified

by OCC, which continue the learning process," Cunningham said.

Warns of obsolescence

Obsolescence, Cunningham warned, is the side effect of major technological change.

"Today, there is a new tidal wave that's rising in our very sight. Most do not notice it because it is only two or three inches deep, and it's rising over a huge space in industry and technology," he said.

If this sounds a bit daunting, Cunningham added some reassuring words.

"For you who graduate tonight, I don't mean to frighten you with the promise of obsolescence and tidal waves," he said. "I want to encourage you to take risks. If you don't want to take risks, take a job at Wendy's. . . What a joy it is to have a variety of opportunities and to look at life as a continuum of adventures. That's what this institution has prepared you for tonight."

Reaction to Cunningham's speech was mixed among the audience members. Some felt he added to the length of the ceremony.

"The keynote speaker was way too long," said Rhonda Nelson, of Canton. "He just went off on a tangent."

But Cunningham also had his fans.

"I especially enjoyed Father Cunningham," said Metha Coe, of Farmington Hills. "He gave a fantastic message."

If opinions were divided on Cunningham, they were fairly unanimous about the quality of OCC.

OCC praised

Student speaker Rubye Maria Tarrent-Lee praised the school for helping her out with the apprentice cook program, despite a thyroid tumor that took her out of school.

"Because of the strength and support of my family and the strong support base at OCC, I was able to return to school," said Tarrent-Lee. "OCC and the apprentice cook program helped me attain what I wanted and needed most."

Those attending the ceremony — graduates and well-wishers — also commended the school.

A past graduate of OCC, Pat Andrus, of Birmingham, had

come to see her daughter Rene graduate.

"I went back, and as a home-maker, it gave me a chance to go back without the pressure of a big college campus," Andrus said. "Also, it was less expensive for me. And it was less expensive for my daughter, who's a single mom."

Annette Berry, of Southfield, who took home a degree in applied science and a certificate in gerontology, said she appreciated the accessibility of OCC.

"It took some time, but I'm real glad I did it," Berry said. "OCC offers a lot to the community. They've got campuses everywhere."

One member of the graduating class had his own reasons for liking OCC. Randy Cook, of Royal Oak, brought his guide dog, Shadow, along to the ceremony, and the dog — with mortarboard in place — walked up with him to claim his diploma. Cook, who picked up an associate's degree in liberal arts, said he appreciated the campus' facilities for the disabled.

"OCC has all the resources to help out the challenged," said Cook, who is considering a return to OCC in the fall.



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Estate tax replaces inheritance tax

BY TIM RICHARD
STAFF WRITER

If he can't cut property taxes, Gov. John Engler will cut the inheritance tax.

"To cynics and naysayers, it's a sign of the end of gridlock," Engler said last week at a ceremonial signing of House Bill 4597.

At center stage, literally, with Engler was Rep. Willis Bullard, R-Milford, sponsor of the bill cutting the cost of dying by \$70 million.

Engler had advocated eliminating the inheritance tax since the mid-1980s, when Hudson Institute, a think tank, proposed that as a way of keeping senior citizens in Michigan and shoring up the economies of northern tourist towns.

"It's going to make money," said Engler, when asked about the revenue loss.

The Republican-controlled Senate twice had passed the bill only to have the Democrat-run House Taxation Committee refuse to take it to public hearings. Bullard, though Republican co-chair of that panel, didn't take it into his own committee but ran it through the House Commerce Committee.

But this time around, it got 91

LANSING

votes in the House and a healthy majority in the Senate — enough to let it take effect Oct. 1. Support came from both sides of the aisle, though not from the Democratic leadership.

"It's interesting you can attract other people for wanting to keep their own money," said Republican Michael Bouchard of Birmingham. "They earned it. They paid sales taxes, income taxes and property taxes on it. The government seems to think it has a right to people's money, assets and life."

The Senate vote was 31 to 7. Voting yes from our area were Republicans Bouchard, Mat Dunnaskis of Lake Orion, David

Honigman of West Bloomfield and Democrat Jack Faxon of Farmington Hills.

The law:

■ Abolishes the inheritance tax on bequests to heirs, a \$110 million item in the general fund budget.

■ Substitutes an estate tax that piggybacks on the federal estate tax and will bring in \$30 million to \$40 million.

■ Exempts estates valued at less than \$600,000.

■ Junka a multi-page form in favor of a single-page form.

■ Extends the filing deadline from the current 105 days after death to nine months after death. Sen. Joanne Emmons, R-Big Rapids, said the inheritance tax has cost Michigan 16,000 residents a year to places like Florida,

which has no such tax. The Senate Finance Committee chair said the figure was provided by Comerica Bank economist David Littmann.

"They (retirees) vote with feet, dollars and word of mouth. States like Michigan emerged as losers among allent losers," Emmons said. "NBD and Comerica banks said there is \$4 billion in their Florida branches from former Michigan residents."

"Michigan loses valuable sales, income and intangibles tax dollars when its residents flee to other states. We tax them when they earn it, we tax them when they spend it, we tax them when they invest it — must we also tax them when they die?" Emmons said.

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