

Life's lesson

Graduates celebrate their second chance

BY LARRY O'CONNOR
STAFF WRITER

A recent high school graduate, Colleen Bradley of Farmington Hills is talking about college and career, as well as her hopes and aspirations.

In that sense, Bradley is no different than any teenager who has just been handed a diploma. Her accomplishment came 20 years later.

Bradley, 37, left high school at 16. A job, marriage and having children seemed more appealing at the time, she said.

After a series of jobs in nursing home and restaurants, Bradley realized an impetuous decision made in her youth wasn't paying dividends. So, she went back to school, which wasn't easy as a working single mother.

On Wednesday, Bradley was one of 65 graduates — ranging 18 to 47 years in age — from the Farmington Public Schools Adult and Alternative education programs to receive a diploma during commencement ceremonies at Farmington High.

"Once you learn to stick things out, when there are other things that are hard, you learn to stick that out too," said Bradley, who related her adult education experiences to audience members. "With my high school diploma I learned whatever it was, I can stick it out."

"Once you quit, you keep quitting. Once you achieve, you keep achieving."

Many wonder if adults like Bradley will have such second chances in the future.

The state Legislature and Gov. John Engler are debating adult education funding. The legislature has agreed to restore \$110 million — up from a proposed \$65 million but far its current

■ 'Once you achieve, you keep achieving.'

Colleen Bradley
—adult ed graduate

\$185 million. If passed, speculation is Gov. Engler will not sign the bill.

Bradley earned a Farmington Adult Education scholarship, which she will use at Oakland Community College in the fall. She wants to earn an associate's degree and become a veterinarian technician.

Bradley worked three years to complete her high school education.

After putting her daughter to bed, Bradley would be up until midnight studying. She'd awake at 5 a.m. to be to work at 7:30 a.m. followed by school in the afternoon.

The average female adult education graduate is 28 years old whereas the average age for male adult grads is 19, said Terry Leland, supervisor of Farmington Adult Education.

"The women seem to come back later because of having children," Leland said.

Cuts in adult ed funding will likely affect older students, who are filling a gap in their lives. Critics of adult education programs contend those people had their shot at a state-funded high school education.

Not everyone's life falls in perfect chronological order, Bradley said. Students get pregnant, suffer health problems or fall out socially.

"I can't imagine in his (Gov. Engler's) life there is not mistake he made," she said.



STAFF PHOTO BY SHARON LEMLEY

Proud of mom: Malisa Shoup, above, gets help from her sister, Kim, 12, as she's ready to pose for a photo with her baby Timothy Swiercz. She was joined by her parents Barbara and Larry Shoup, sister Lori, 16, and boyfriend, Vincent Swiercz. At left, Colleen Bradley, 37, celebrates her graduation with daughter, Sarah, 9. Bradley worked towards her high school diploma as a single mother employed as a dietary aide.



Scholarship recipients: Mark Clifton, left, and Adam Cole both received Oakland Community College-sponsored scholarships. Those awarded Farmington Adult Education Scholarships were: Susan Brown, Katie Veeder, and Colleen Bradley.

Educational embrace: Carl Herskovitz, an Alternative Academy student, hugs teacher Nancy Pan-teleo at Wednesday's commencement ceremony in Farmington High's Auditorium. Some 55 adult and alternative academy students received their high school diplomas.



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