

# Graduates from page A1

in the 10 Mile School building in Farmington Hills.

"The strength of this program is due to a very caring, dedicated and committed staff," Klenczar said.

Principal Ben Chin was on hand to watch two of the three students who completed their education at the William E. Miller School, on the campus of Boys & Girls Republic, get their diplomas. Young people are placed in the facility through the court system, he explained.

"When students come to us through the system, we try to have them earn their credits for graduation," Chin said. "We're always promoting more of a career so they're refocusing and regrouping, and helping them resolve some of their issues."

All the students who crossed the stage Thursday night had overcome obstacles in one way or another.

For Katie Comai, it was the attitudes of her classmates at Farmington High after she gave birth to her son, Jermaine Johnson, that she remembered. Jermaine was born with bad grades. Walla M. Hatti arrived in the United States from the Middle East, fleeing a war-torn country with nothing much more or less than her life. She decided to earn a diploma through the Community School after studying in the English as a Second Language program.

"Completion demonstrates your strength, your determination and your remarkable perseverance," Superintendent of Schools Bob Maxfield told graduates. School Board Chair Frank Reid encouraged them to be awake to opportunities to encourage and support others.

"We leave our lessons where we can," he said. "We contribute where we can."

Reid said most people aren't

remembered for the large things they do, but for many a small kindnesses, like paying a compliment to a waitress. He encouraged graduates to become "causationists," or people who make things happen.

"Life is all about remaking yourself," he said. "Today is your first opportunity. Good luck."

Scholarship winners honored Thursday night included: Desiree Lemon; Boyle Scholarship, awarded to the graduate who truly epitomizes the mission of the Alternative Academy.

James Bush; Michigan Merit and Competitive Scholarships

Catherine Comai, Kourtney Truitt and Christina Malatesta; Oakland Community College Chancellor Scholarships

Walla M. Hatti and Jermaine Johnson; Farmington Community School Scholarship



Graduation gift: Candace Dawn Norman gets a diploma and a hug.

## With burdens lifted, graduates will soar

Jermaine Johnson admits the road he took through his sophomore year in high school was a bumpy one.

A dedicated musician and songwriter, he spent less and less time studying. His grade point average dropped. He wasn't going to make it into his junior year.

"I guess I took the attitude that I was grown," he said. "I was very caught up in music and writing songs."

The birth of her son, Michael, changed Katie Comai's life as a high school student in a hundred ways she might have expected and one she didn't.

"People treated me differently," she said of her classmates.

We all know kids like Jermaine and Katie, kids who find themselves confronted with one obstacle after another, some they can't control, some self-imposed.

The walls they have to scale to get to the high school diploma grow larger every day, until they finally stop climbing and head down paths that can lead them into worlds most of us try to avoid.

Jermaine didn't go that way.

With help and encouragement from his sister, Kim, he looked into programs that could help him catch up. And then Jermaine made what he said was "the best call of my life," to the Farmington Community School.

Katie wasn't ready to give up, either. She heard about the school through a guidance counselor, including the fact that day care was available for Michael.

"The students were a lot nicer," she said. "There was always a teacher willing to help me one way or another."

Ask any one of the 89 graduates who attended ceremonies Thursday night at Farmington High about their teachers, and you'll get a story of compassion, commitment and devotion to supporting and encouraging students who have more than the usual number of challenges in their lives.

"A lot of love was in that school," Jermaine said. "Every staff member works harder than regular high school counselors to reduce these costs."

Nobody wants to reduce services or raise taxes, he said.

City Attorney John Donahue of the Sinceret Wardle Lynch Hampton, Trux and Morley law firm in Farmington Hills, who has represented the City of Farmington since 1988, will receive an increase of 3 percent in his retainer fee to \$60,000. Donahue's firm provides legal counsel to city administration and handles all police prosecutions in 47th District Court, Lauhoff said.

A 15-year contract with Waste Management doesn't allow increases of more than 3 percent a year. That contract extends to 2008. "It helps to hold down costs," Lauhoff said. "Cities without similar contracts are seeing 8-10 percent increases."



Joni Hubred

and staff."

Nowhere was that love demonstrated with more enthusiasm than on graduation night.

To the cheers of family and friends, honorees picked up their diplomas - and in one case, a school administrator - walked across the auditorium stage and warmly embraced their teachers before taking their seats.

Pride isn't the right word to describe the lift in each graduate's step, the broad smile on each face. Triumph, perhaps. Jubilation.

Superintendent Dr. Bob Maxfield called the night a "victory celebration."

"You have every right to celebrate your victory over numerous obstacles that stood in the way of finishing high school," he said.

And celebrate they did, with echoing whoops of joy and vibrant, resonating rounds of applause. There were high fives and raised arms and clenched fists, dancing and shouted encouragement. These young, strong men and women took pride in themselves, some perhaps for the first time in their lives.

We who stood and watched couldn't help but get caught up in the joy. As I gazed out at the standing-room-only crowd, I remembered another ceremony four years ago in a school building hundreds of miles away, another graduate who felt her life changed when she finally graduated.

I remembered the smile on her face as she took her certificate, the warmth in the hug she gave her principal, the excitement in her eyes as she patiently waited for her mother to take pictures after.

I remembered, because I was the one taking those pictures.

Jermaine Johnson admitted he felt a little embarrassed at having to attend an alternative education program. But there was

no shame on his face as he proudly spoke on behalf of his class, telling a story that also might have seemed a little embarrassing.

What's so wonderful about Alternative Academies and Community Schools - places that cater to students who don't fit the mold - is how, through support and encouragement, their staff people manage to erase every hint of that embarrassment and create in its place an unshakable sense of self-esteem.

"When I graduated, I felt different," Katie said, "like a weight was lifted off my shoulders."

I can tell you this much: With the burden of a difficult past behind them, the Farmington Adult Education Class of 2001 will soar into a world they never dreamed was so large.

I know. I've seen it happen.

Joni Hubred is the proud parent of an alternative school alumnus and editor of the Farmington Observer. Contact her at (248) 477-5450 or by email



Victory! Chloe Heggs is ready to take on the world.

### ADULT EDUCATION GRADUATES

- Joseph Abro, Peter Agoubi, Danielle Baker, Patrick Bankowski, Amanda Bradley, Stephanie Brindgen, Cynthia Brock, Alana Burton, James Bush, Matthew Byrne, Sara Canedo, Jeffrey Cato, Carol Collins, Catherine Comai, Nicholas Curtis, Jereva Daniels, Aaron Diamond, Leah Duplessis, Ryan Farano, David Filak, Kimberli Ford, Redell Garmo, Norman George, Stephanie Girolanda, Carl Goshier, Erik Guiza Alvarez, Thomas Harrison, Chloe Heggs, Nicole Jackson and Jermaine Johnson.
- Steven Karcho, Jonathan Kasorgis, Kenny Kasouhannan, Mark Kench, Heather Keller, Vera Kosta, Melissa Kouza, Eand Krijestore, Karen Kukoa, Danielle LaBarre, Jennifer Larimer, Desiree Lemon, Joseph Louisa, Danielle Lumby, Chandler Lundborn, Christina Malatesta, Vincent Martilotti, Konstantinos Matesmakis, Wala Matti, Shannon McAllen, Rodi Mikini, Dennis Miller, Jason Miller, Sara Nash, Spasa Nikolowski, Candice Norman, Busola Obayan, Diana Oldkowski and David Olecko.
- Robert Patterson, Nicole Payne, Scott Pridmore, Matthew Raymond, Tonya Rehlman, Daniel Samet, Danti Schneider, Jacqueline Sauer, Michael Schwartz, Shkurta Shabaj, Jonathan Simmons, Sara Singer, Scott Slakina, Tony Stangi, Heidi Stanley, Gregory Steffen, Willie Tappalar, Stephanie Thompson, Angela Tinker, Courtney Truitt, Donald Urbany, Britany Vitelic, Peter Watha, Jamie Weitz, Carmen Whittaker, Robyn Williams, Chelsea Wooster, Shawnette Wymer and Sheila Wynn.

### Budget from page A1

which need to be replaced. Up until three years ago, this was charged to the residents when work was done.

**Changes next year**

While Farmington residents can expect no tax increase with this budget cycle, the next could prove different because of a reduction in state-shared revenue this year. Expenditures are expected to exceed revenues by about \$68,700, which will come from the fund balances.

Comprising 18-20 percent of the general fund revenues, state-shared revenues are typically returned to the city from state tax collections. Recently changed formulas tend to favor townships, which have larger growth than older, established cities, Lauhoff said.

The city also faces other challenges like energy costs, which have increased about 50 percent, Lauhoff said.

Also, DPW and public safety dispatchers' new contracts which expire June 30.

"The budget may have to be adjusted depending what happens with those contracts," Lauhoff said.

The city continues to wait for the arbitrator's ruling on the contract with public safety command officers. "That also could have an impact on the budget," he said.

The average overall increase in health care was 20 percent.

"Cities can't continue to pay those increases without some way to reduce the cost of this," Lauhoff said. "Part of the negotiation process is to find some way

to reduce these costs."

Nobody wants to reduce services or raise taxes, he said.

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**Sue Buck covers the City of Farmington and Farmington Schools. Call her with story ideas at (248) 477-5450.**