

“"I'm so touched to be here with you, to celebrate all your reinventions."”

Sherman Alexie, keynote speaker at Clark College commencement

Transformed by a tassel

Author feels emotional bond with new Clark College graduates

By HOWARD BUCK
Columbian staff writer

From the opening remarks to the keynote speech, transformation was the stirring theme of the 72nd Clark College commencement Thursday evening.

“I needed to reinvent myself,” said Sherman Alexie, a prize-winning poet, writer and novelist who overcame physical and cultural barriers on an Eastern Washington Indian reservation.

The stand-up comic used self-deprecating humor that had nearly 350 new graduates and proud family and friends in stitches in the Amphitheater at Clark County. But his message was in dead earnest.

“I got all emotional,” Alexie explained after his introduction, which included a scene from his film “Smoke Signals.” “I'm the son of a woman who got her A.A. degree at age 46. My father got his GED at 22. When I look at you, I see my Mom and Dad, sort of.

“Touched to be here with you, to celebrate all your reinventions,” he said.

Alexie gave shout-outs to three particular subsets of the cap-and-gown crowd:

- To single parents, after years of corralling children and cramming in studies.
- To first-in-the-family graduates.
- To the entire family graduating with togetherness.

GRADUATION, Page A4

Did you know?

This Thursday's keynote speaker, Sherman Alexie, is an award-winning novelist, poet, screenwriter, composer and performer. His autobiographical books and his “Smoke Signals” won acclaim. A Spokane-Couer d'Alene Indian, he grew up in the Spokane Indian Reservation in Washington and overcome personal health issues during childhood.

Alexie is a big fan of the Seattle SuperSonics. Enough so that he's written a tragic parody of “Sonics Death Watch” weekly column this year for a Seattle alternative newspaper, The Stranger, and was called upon to testify in this week's trial on behalf of the city's lawsuit to keep the troubled NBA franchise.

Election08

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OLYMPIA — Washington will take the 816 million revenue from the next three years during a recession, but a major revenue forecast Con Thursday.

Steve Lerc, the state's economist, said the council and business taxes and other business taxes are likely to go down from the current recession. A total of 816 million in business taxes are likely to go down from the current recession.

We do forget that at the end of the recession, despite what he added, that the city was 25 years ago.

Lerch noted that in 2006, business taxes were percent to 40 percent a year.

"We are coming down from high," he said.

The council's statement was in February when a drop in demand was predicted in The economy has not in Thursday's declining run in addition to the earlier in his update, Lerch at this current two-year state which ends June 30, 2009, about 1.6 billion in business taxes were originally predicted — 25 to legislation and about 85% of the cause of the economy.

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Revenue: From Page A1

For the two-year budget cycle that starts July 1, 2005, the state expects to take in $163 million less, or $17 million of that due to the declining housing market. Of the $223 million revenue hit of the last three fiscal years, $157 million is due to legislation, like tax reductions, that state officials already planned for, state budget director Victor Moore and others on the council said.

Moore said that while it's a lot of money, it's a small percentage of the state's $33 billion 2007-2009 general fund budget. The governor's 2009-2011 budget proposal will be released in December.

"I don't think it's going to be anything of great consequence on the board from Janus through April. Lerche said that revenue is going to be a pretty significant bellwether into next year's budget.

The report showed a decrease in consumer spending across the board from January through April. The state, however, was netting a lot more than it had in the previous quarter.

"We're seeing a lot more activity in the second quarter," Moore said. "The problem for the state is that the revenues are not enough to cover the state's expenses.

On Wednesday, Sen. Joseph Zarelli, R-Ridgefield, called for a soft freeze on state hiring, allowing the administration to reduce 25 percent of workers who are not essential. On Thursday, Moore said a variety of ideas are being considered to cut costs, adding that he recently asked state agencies to reduce in costs on things like travel because of the high fuel costs.

"It's essential they start paring back," Moore said. State reserves have dropped from $150 million to $80 million. And the state budget shortfall in the 2009-2011 budget cycle is estimated to be $2.5 billion, though Moore said that was the high end of a range.

"We've not yet found a way to do it," Moore said. 

Graduation: From Page A1

ates: You are revolutionaries! You've changed your families forever.

■ To those who've stumbled or gone off course, I'd like to say, "You have your Reinvention!" At the rear of the line of being graduates eager to take a bow and receive their new associate degrees or professional certifications, were living examples.

I want to tell the "what if?" story," said Steve Shetler, 38, of Salmon Creek, who got past addiction and a bipolar disorder to graduate from Central Washington University's online program for computer science.

Shelton, who worked at a computer consulting firm, he earned an applied science degree in welding technology. He's already landed a well-paying job with Vancouver's Thompson Metal Fab, a firm that builds Portland's aerial tram.

"It was a very rough transition," Shetler said. "I want to tell the story of a man who was able to get his education and a job at the same time."

"I'm very happy to be here," Shetler said. "I want to thank the people who helped me get where I am today."