



STEVEN LANE/The Columbian

Cassandra Norris, center, with fellow paralegal graduate Maria del Rocio Garcia, signs "I love you" to family members during the Clark College graduation ceremony on Thursday.

Penguins march into the future

Crowded commencement sets record for number earning degrees or certificates



Oswald, Clark College's penguin mascot, greets students before the Clark College graduation ceremony on Thursday.

By **HOWARD BUCK**
Columbian staff writer

The bagpipes sounded, and the ranks of blue-gowned scholars filed in. And filed in. And filed in.

Clark College's 75th commencement ceremony was easily its largest. About 600 of some 1,500 students who earned associate degrees and professional certification in the 2010-11 academic year — both record numbers — walked on Thursday evening.

It took nearly 15 minutes for the fresh graduates to take their seats. Family and friends who packed nearly all of the Sleep Country Amphitheater lower bowl cheered loudly when they did.

No denying the root of the crush: High unemployment, and greater need than ever for higher learning and sharpened work skills.

But soon, Clark President Bob Knight sounded the evening's theme: Belief.

"You are somebody, and you have this sacred, sacred day. So many people will never know what it is to be where you're sitting."

Donna Beegle
Commencement speaker

Inside



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Graduation:

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"You are the men and women who will turn our economy around ... who will shine in our work force. I believe in you," Knight told students. "I don't see who you are, I see who you are going to be."

He made way for commencement speaker Donna Beegle, who rose from poverty herself in Oregon and has conjured a career of convincing others, no matter the dire circumstances, that they, too, have it within themselves to achieve and to chase dreams.

"I want you to stay focused on what in your heart fills you up," Beegle said.

She urged students to brainstorm, to network, to surround themselves with positive peers, to push for a better community and never be the brake on their own "unlimited potential."

"Other people are not better than you," Beegle said. "You know some things they'll never know, and they'll know some things you never will. And it's when we put all that together that we're at our best," she said.

"You are somebody, and you have this sacred, sacred day. So many people will never know what it is to be where you're sitting," Beegle said. Now comes a formal degree or certification, she said, "that says you have the responsibility to make the world a better place."

Dean remembered

Knight paid tribute to one popular Clark leader who had done just that. He led a moment of silence for Alex Montoya, dean of enrollment services, who died

after an Oregon vehicle incident on Saturday, at age 38.

Montoya, who came from the Los Angeles area and served in the U.S. Marines, was known for exhorting students of all backgrounds of their own life potential.

"Alex once said he loved his job because he wanted to make great things happen for people who wanted to go to college," Knight recounted. "Many of you are here tonight because of the work Alex has done, with his colleagues."

Beyond setting up a scholarship fund for the five children of Montoya and his wife, Shanda Diehl, a Clark administrator, the Clark College Foundation will initiate a full-ride Clark scholarship for a Hispanic student, Knight announced.

Several students and faculty members wore buttons that had Montoya's photo and the logo of his beloved NFL Oakland (and formerly Los Angeles) Raiders team.

A pair of business students took their salute one step further. Shayne Goodwin and Trarone "Tra" Roberson, both 34 and from Vancouver, had fashioned "R.I.P." lettering on their caps. Goodwin's mortarboard carried the words, "From the bottom 2 to the top."

That was the mantra Montoya preached to students from unconventional — or, challenged — backgrounds such as their own, the pair said.

"You're coming from a group climbing" from adversity to make it good, explained Goodwin, headed for marketing studies at Washington State University Vancouver. "It's a group you don't see much of in the college (environment)."

Roberson said Montoya pleaded with students not to squander many opportunities, but rather,

to seize their one best chance for success.

'Look out!'

"When we make our chance and get up off the couch, look out! We gonna make something happen," Roberson said, with a smile, a whoop and a fist-pump.

For Goodwin, it was quite the evening.

He and another student were named recipients of scholarship money to cover the gap between two years of WSUV tuition and their financial aid resources — a new offshoot of the Clark President's Award, also funded by the school's foundation.

In noting strong cooperation between Clark and WSUV, Knight thanked outgoing WSUV Chancellor Hal Dengerink for his two decades of advocating for and service to higher education locally. Dengerink will step down in August.

"Hal has always put the students first," he said.

HOWARD BUCK: 360-735-4515 or howard.buck@columbian.com.

CLARK COLLEGE AWARDS

PRESIDENT'S AWARD

■ **Inva Begolli**, 20, of Woodland, was named winner of the Community College President's Award, a two-year, full-tuition-and-fees scholarship to complete bachelor's degree studies at Washington State University Vancouver.

An honors graduate who earned an Associate of Arts degree, Begolli was a Phi Theta Kappa honor society member and plans to become a pharmacist. She served as a Clark student ambassador and on Clark's International Week and Environmental Health committees. The daughter of Albanian parents, she has been a Red Cross youth leader and a youth ministry leader for the Word of Life Church.

FINALISTS, PRESIDENT'S AWARD

■ **Shayne Goodwin**, business administration major, a peer mentor who was a Phi Theta Kappa honor society member and participated on Clark's speech and debate team.

■ **Tabitha Michelle-Marie Stokes**, who earned a transfer degree in Addiction Counselor Education, has been active in that group's student club and has volunteered with Alcoholics Anonymous, Oxford Houses and Faces of Hope, sharing her personal experiences to help others.

EXCEPTIONAL FACULTY AWARD WINNERS FOR 2010-11

■ **Laura Demeri**, part-time health and physical education instructor.

■ **Kimberly Karaman**, part-time math instructor.

■ **Julian Nelson**, professor of German (language).

■ **Marcia Roi**, professor of Addiction Counselor Education.

■ **Ann Snyder**, recently retired professor of Women's Studies.



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