

Debbie Hayford, new Clark graduate and veteran day care provider, gets help cleaning up from children under her care at her home-based business on Tuesday.



ZACHARY KAUFMAN/The Columbian

## If you go

■ **What:** Clark College 2011 commencement.

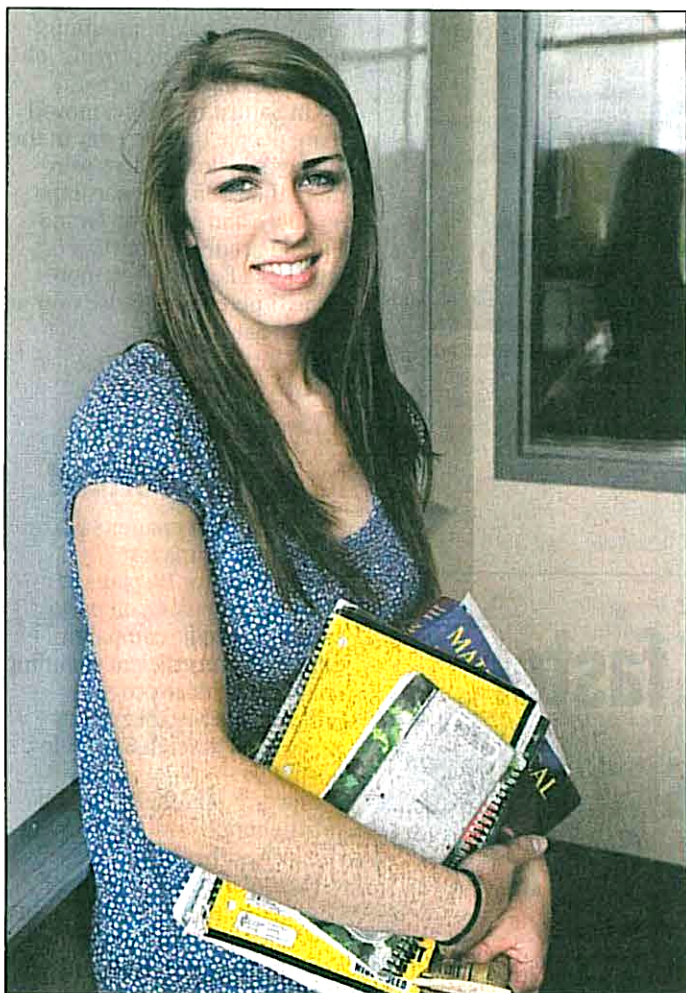
■ **Speaker:** Author-educator and poverty expert Donna Beegle.

■ **Who:** Almost 600 graduates from the 2010-11 school year.

■ **When:** 7 p.m. Thursday. Doors open at 5:30 p.m.

■ **Where:** Sleep Country Amphitheater.

■ **Free parking:** Take Interstate 5 Exit 9 to Northeast 179th Street.



GREG WAHL-STEPHENS for The Columbian  
Clark student Sarah McGrath is graduating from two schools this month.

# Penguins of a different feather

By HOWARD BUCK  
Columbian staff writer

Nearly 600 graduates are set to walk at Clark College commencement ceremonies Thursday.

They come in all shapes, carrying widely divergent backgrounds, needs and ambitions.

There are former homemakers, career-changers, returning soldiers and precocious Running Start teen students: Truly, the Penguin crowd runs the gamut.

Here are two stories, from different ends of the spectrum.

## Never too late

Debbie Hayford can calculate and time-manage with the best of them.

You'd expect that from a

mother of seven, the last also headed to college. And a veteran licensed day care operator who fusses over up to a dozen young children in her Vancouver Heights home, on a 24/7 schedule.

Meals? Who needs changing, or a nap? Who gets picked up or dropped off next? No sweat.

But, pre-algebra mathematics? A whole different animal. And who knew so much math went into physics, where mass and velocity and vectors play havoc?

Not Hayford. "I was like, 'What? The car hits the brick wall, and now the wall's moving?'" she says with a wry smile.

Yes, the 53-year-old found there was plenty still to discover.

Pair of graduates show diversity of Clark College students

And she learned well, one hard-earned class per quarter, enough to pull a perfect 4.0 grade-point average in the six years it took to obtain her Early Childhood Learning associate's degree. She justified the vocational scholarship that covered all but her first six credits.

The effort won her recognition as an OSWALD award winner, and she'll graduate with Highest Honors.

"My goal was ultimately to get it done in seven years," she says. Her eyes dart toward the half-dozen youngsters eating lunch at her dining table, a trusted assistant riding herd for the moment.

Hayford bettered that mark, no surprise to anyone who



# Penguins:

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knows her. In almost 12 years of running Debbie's Daycare, she's become a respected leader and is an active proponent of Seeds to Success, a voluntary quality rating and improvement system for child care providers in Washington state.

Her deep involvement made her final year at Clark a tough one. After years of evening and online courses, she had to tackle a heavier class schedule. But she persevered, just as she did early on, despite worries about being older and out-of-place, grappling to use Clark's online learning programs.

Already, the early childhood training has paid dividends.

Hayford can read the moods and habits of children, but Howard Gardner's multiple intelligence framework knocked her socks off. For instance, she can now clearly identify a visual learner from a kinesthetic learner, she says.

"I stopped using 'Good boy, good girl,'" she adds. It's "praise vs. encouragement," and mindless praise doesn't recognize or reinforce good decision-making, she explains.

Her smart choice to attend Clark came more naturally, it turns out.

She's one of many in the Hayford clan to graduate or rack up credits at the school: Two children are Running Start graduates (youngest daughter Sariah pulled off a daunting double this spring, graduating from both Clark and Vancouver

School of Arts and Academics); three more took classes, as has her husband, Ralph "Spike" Hayford; and her daughter-in-law is a recent Clark nursing program graduate.

Hayford is relieved to knock out the last term paper and final exam, and put her new expertise to professional use. It's already helping her as she volunteers for a field test on stiffer child care standards and better assessments.

Marriage at age 18 deferred her dreams of a college degree, but the desire still burned, she says.

"I've raised the bar," she says with confidence.

## Newsworthy

Sarah McGrath had reason to pass up the Union High School graduation party last week: There was still cramming to do for final exams at Clark College.

On Thursday it'll be a repeat, of sorts.

Within hours, she'll be en route to Provo, Utah, diving into summer courses at Brigham Young University that begin Monday.

So it is for the irrepressible McGrath, 18, who earned a high school diploma and a general transfer associate degree from Clark. She racked up 22 college credit hours this spring term.

**Just as remarkable:** The Running Start student completed all but one Clark class without setting foot on the main campus.

Her home base was Clark College at Columbia Tech

Center in far east Vancouver. Only blocks from her home, the building opened in September 2009 and is producing its inaugural crop of graduates.

Whether at the CTC campus, with online-only courses or through Clark's weekend degree program that caters to students with full work schedules, the college is churning out ever more "nontraditional" graduates.

Oh, that one main Vancouver campus class? Belly dancing, which McGrath richly enjoyed.

"It just looked fun. I want to continue that in Utah," she says with a laugh, explaining the state isn't as strait-laced as its reputation might suggest.

Her outgoing nature should serve her well. She plans to study communications, and maybe work in radio or television news someday.

"When I was little, I watched the news, and I wanted to be one of the anchors. It always seemed really interesting to me, spreading the news," she says.

Taking advantage of Running Start was old hat in McGrath's household: Her older sister, Jes-selah, earned Lower Columbia College credits while at high school in Kelso. So has her brother, Ryan.

The Union-Clark connection was a perfect answer for Sarah.

Now she's ready to settle down on the much more conventional BYU campus in scenic Provo.

"I'm really excited to go. It's all good," she says.

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