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Ericka Chavez, 28, mother of seven

Honoring victory over the school of hard knocks

By ISOLDE RAFTERY
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Graduations are happy, festive times — that's a given. But there's something particularly magical about a GED graduation ceremony, in large part because just about every student there embodies the theme of triumph over adversity.

At the GED commencement Saturday at Clark College, there were grandmas taking cell phone photos, toddlers screeching for their mamas and men with leather caps and sleeve tattoos. And there were tears. Lots and lots of tears.

Among those sniffing were the daughters of Gale Boskofsky, who was awarded the \$3,000 Pat Fencil scholarship to attend Clark College next year. Boskofsky hopes to be a labor and delivery nurse.

She moved down to Vancouver two years ago from Alaska after an accident on an ATV, the only mode of transportation in the tiny village of Ouzinkie, off Kodiak Island.

"She's taken care of everyone's children in the village," said her daughter Melissa Morales.

Boskofsky moved to Vancouver to improve another daughter's shot at a good education.

"She wanted Kimberly to get a better education," Morales said. "Then my mom ended up going to school, so that's pretty cool."

Also graduating was Brendan Lee, an 18-year-old with an almost equally storied past.

Lee started high school at Fort Vancouver High School and found out he would be a fa-

ther before the end of the year.

He transferred to Hudson's Bay High School because it had parenting classes, but classes, work at Chuck E. Cheese and a baby proved too overwhelming. He is currently raising Kaleb, his now 2-year-old son, and plans on a plumbing apprenticeship.

And, finally, Ericka Chavez, 28, a mother of seven.

Chavez's entourage stuck out Saturday — her grandmother Sara Kline showed up with several friends from the Red Hat Society. Asked to describe how she got to this point, Chavez gave the same response many of the students gave: "It's a long story."

"I went to jail for six months and got out when I was nine months' pregnant," Chavez said. "It was time to turn my life around."

She sobered up from a 10-year meth addiction and got custody of three of her children.

A GED was necessary, she said, because she had felony convictions.

"Job-wise, there's absolutely nothing I could do without it," she said.

As she talked, tears streamed down her face, and several of her children surrounded her, burrowing their heads in her chest.

She said she wants to be a drug and alcohol counselor: "I want to be able to help people before they get to where I was."

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N. SCOTT TRIMBLE/The Columbian

Brendan Lee, 18, rubs noses with his 2-year-old son Kaleb at the GED Certificate graduation ceremony Saturday.