

## Graduation Inspires and Transforms Lives

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Around this time each year, two-year colleges like North Hennepin Community College celebrate their most joyous occasion.

Graduation is a time when family, friends, faculty, and staff gather to express pride in our students' accomplishments. The bright smiles, big hugs, happy tears, and loud applause remind us that education changes lives.

Each time a student walks across the stage at commencement, we are reminded of the importance of higher education in people's lives. This year, nearly 1,400 North Hennepin students received their diplomas and turned their tassels from right to left. More than 760 of the awards were associate degrees - the largest number of degrees awarded to date.

Doris Robinson, Francois Vang and Carol LaFleur are just three of the many amazing NHCC students who graduated this year.



For Doris, college was a 39-year journey. As graduation speaker, she admits, "I started my college education in 1972, stopped, started again, stopped again, and repeated the cycle over the course of these years."

After marrying, having children, and eventually retiring, she finally fulfilled her dream of earning a college degree. Her graduation message to fellow graduates was simple: "Never give

up, hold onto your dreams no matter how delayed, and enjoy the trip along the way."

Doris earned an Individualized Studies A.S. in Writing Studies. She started her own ministry and plans to finish a related undergraduate degree at Bethel University.

Francois, the youngest of six children, was born and raised in France. His Hmong mother and father had moved to France from Laos some 30 years ago because of the war and later moved to Minnesota to pursue the American dream.

When Francois' father was laid-off and mother became ill, his oldest brother dropped out of college to support the family and to ensure that his baby brother could continue to attend college full-time. "Because of my family's hardships and sacrifices, it was of the utmost importance that I succeed."

He received an Academic English Language Proficiency Certificate and a Liberal Arts A.A., was accepted into the University of Minnesota where he will study psychology, and wants to become a family counselor.

Carol, the first in her family to graduate from college, decided to break an old cycle and begin a new one. A victim of abuse, others told her that she would never amount to anything, and she believed them. But at NHCC, she found people who believed in her and this gave her the strength to believe in herself.

"I found a loving family at NHCC. Everyone I met here - teachers, staff, and students - has supported me." Carol was actively involved in Student Life, held numerous leadership positions, and graduated with honors. She obtained a Liberal Arts A.A. and Criminal Justice A.S. and is transferring to Metropolitan State University.

For these students, and many other students, education transformed their lives. When students first step foot on a college campus, they have opened the door to opportunity without limits, learning without end, and achievement beyond expectation. When they leave, they likely hold an even brighter vision for their future.