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OU partnership gives career changers new start

By **Dave Groves**, news editor

Seventeen individuals enrolled in the Detroit Healthcare Career Center's (HCCC) certificate program for licensed practical nurses recently demonstrated how an Oakland University **School of Nursing** partnership holds great potential to change students' lives and address pressing social challenges.

The students walked as the first graduates of the LPN program at the career center, which opened its doors in September 2007 as result of a collaboration between the School of Nursing, the Detroit Workforce Development Department, the Detroit Medical Center, the Partnership for Economic Independence and the Warren/Conner Development Coalition.

"It was just such a wonderful ceremony because for many of these people, this was their first exposure to higher education," said Linda Thompson Adams, dean of the School of Nursing.

She explained that the LPN program will enable these students and more in the future to offset a critical shortage of nurses in the region. At the same time, it presents viable career options to individuals who've been displaced by the state's shrinking manufacturing sector. Many of the program's first cohort had been employed in the automotive industry.

Before they were admitted to the certificate program, students had to complete training first as nurses' aides and then as patient care technicians. After being admitted, they had to tackle courses in anatomy, physiology, pharmacology and other subjects that once may have seemed a little too intimidating.

"It was very inspiring to hear the stories of people who always wanted to be a nurse but didn't think they could actually do it. And now they are nurses," Thompson Adams said. "They're an example to their family and friends of what is possible when you're determined to pursue an opportunity."

Tiffany Taliaferro, who was elected vice president of the HCCC's first graduating class, has already gotten a job as a graduate nursing student and is pursuing opportunities to work as an LPN once she passes the state licensing exam.

"This (program) has been pretty much life transforming, and I will remember it vividly for the rest of my life," said Taliaferro, the mother of a 3-year-old daughter. "I know now that I will always be able to provide security for her, so financially, it has definitely changed my life."

Taliaferro added that having always wanted to work in the health care industry, some things about her commitment to the profession won't change.

"My responsibilities are going to be a lot greater, but I love being able to help people, and I don't think that will ever change."

In addition to technical training, students received career coaching, job search support and computer training. Qualified candidates are eligible for on-site child care and transportation assistance.

Sheila Douglas-Collins, public health nurse coordinator for the HCCC program, said Taliaferro is not the only graduate seeing considerable opportunity. All 17 have won job interviews, five have been offered jobs and two have already been hired.

But Douglas-Collins added that as much as graduates will gain in terms professional opportunity, they have already gained in terms of personal pride and integrity.

"I think it's helped a lot of the women with their self-esteem. And I think it's helped them in terms of developing their beliefs and commitment to a high standard of care. I believe this program has been instrumental in doing that for these students."

The HCCC's next cohort of LPN students is expected to graduate in May.



Licensed practical nursing students at the Healthcare Career Center in Detroit participate in a recent graduation ceremony.

SUMMARY

Seventeen individuals enrolled at the Detroit Healthcare Career Center recently walked as the first graduates of the newly created LPN certificate program there.

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