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Grads start down path to success at Milburn

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Personal wealth, a high job rating or being the head of a company.

Everyone's impression of the pathway to success is different, Dr. Edwina Stanley said Thursday night during the 2007 commencement ceremony for Richard Milburn Academy graduates.

"My personal definition: Whether or not you think you're successful," said Stanley, the evening's keynote speaker and a retired educator with the Sarasota County School District. "Sometimes you can just be yourself and be successful."

Dressed in green and white gowns, 15 students from the Bradenton public charter school graduated after the ceremony at the First Church of the Nazarene.

"This is the moment we've all been waiting for," said Art Sands, the school's area director.

Laughter followed from the crowd of more than 100 people as one graduate shouted "Yes!" from her seat.

"Are you ready for your diplomas?" Sands asked.

Each graduate popped up from his or her seat, cheered and clapped. Some raised their hands in the air.

Friends and family members in the audience also clapped and cheered as each graduate paraded to the stage and was handed diplomas from the school's director, Rochelle Stokes.

"This is why we do what we do as educators, for this crowning moment," Stokes said smiling.

Stanley urged graduates to focus and prepare for the work and to seek careers that make them happy.

"Work you must," she said. "Getting up and going and doing things that will make you feel better - I believe you can do that. God bless you and keep you as you move into the workforce or study to be a success."

King of Kings Full Gospel Baptist Church Pastor Charles Williams prayed that God watch over the graduates as they make their journey through life.

"The road may have not been easy, but because of dedication and encouragement, they are here tonight," Williams prayed.

The class valedictorian, Erica Helterline, reminded classmates, that as they make their way through life, that it's OK to make mistakes.

"They help you learn and grow wiser," she said as she stood behind a rostrum in the church sanctuary. "We all have come a long way. . . . Leave here tonight with a sense of accomplishment."

Graduates: 15

Speakers: Dr. Edwina Stanley, retired educator with the Sarasota County School District; Erica Helterline, valedictorian; and Wondria Saunders, salutatorian.

Shining Moment: When salutatorian Wondria Saunders thanked teachers and staff members for helping her and her classmates make it to graduation. She wiped a tear from her cheek as she walked off stage.

Best quote: "Leave here tonight with a sense of accomplishment. Shoot for the moon, if you miss you will still land among the stars." - From Erica Helterline's speech

Interesting sight: When Richard Milburn Academy Area Director Art Sands asked the class members if they were ready for their diplomas, each graduate unexpectedly popped up from their seat, cheered and clapped. Some raised their hands in the air.

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