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LITERACY ORGANIZATIONS PARTNERED TO RECOGNIZE GED® EARNERS AT CITY-WIDE GRADUATION CEREMONY

Philadelphia, PA (June 22, 2015) – There was cause for celebration for thirty adults and their loved ones on Wednesday, June 10, 2015, during Philadelphia’s first city-wide GED® graduation held at the Free Library of Philadelphia’s Central Branch. The ceremony recognized those who have passed the GED® since July 1, 2014, and attained the Commonwealth Secondary School Diploma. The Mayor’s Commission on Literacy (The Commission) and ten adult education organizations co-hosted the event, which was sponsored in part by PECO.



GED earners pose at the completion of the citywide GED Graduation Ceremony hosted by The Mayor’s Commission on Literacy and sponsored by PECO

Graduates arrived at the Commission’s office where they caught up with classmates and assembled in cap and gown. An audience of over 150 family members, friends, educators, and community leaders filled the auditorium to cheer on the GED® recipients as they received much-deserved recognition and looked towards their futures.

The ceremony kicked off with a processional followed by a welcome address from Commission chair **Leslie Stiles**. Award-winning journalist and radio host **Solomon Jones** delivered a phenomenal keynote address on the power of education in his journey from living at the Ridge Avenue Shelter to becoming a best-selling author.



Solomon Jones (left) and GED earner Anisha Jean-Louis (right)

“I was able to change my life. I tell this story because getting your GED® is just the beginning of your journey,” Jones said. “You can do anything you want to do if you have a vision for yourself.”

Jones has been featured nationally on NPR’s Morning Edition, CNN Headline News, and in Essence magazine. Currently a columnist for the Philadelphia Daily News and morning host for 900AM WURD Radio, Jones is the author of 10 novels and founder of Words on the Street, which partners educational, corporate, non-profit, and media entities to increase literacy through the power of writing.

Anisha Jean-Louis, a participating graduate, tried four different programs to finish high school, but she kept quitting. “I was knocked down so many times. I took my talents for granted,” she recalled. “Before I came to the Center for Literacy (CFL) I had quit mentally and didn’t believe in myself. When I landed at CFL I had teachers, support staff and students encouraging me on. They believed in me.”

Another student referred Anisha to CFL in October of 2014. It took only four months for her to earn the GED®. Anisha is

now in her sixth week of a 13-week Newark Young Adults Pre-Apprenticeship Program, sponsored by New Jersey Health Care Employers District 1199J. She has toured museums and libraries, attended a rally to support District 1199J workers, received dresses for interviews, and completed her resume and cover letter. She is searching community colleges in New York, New Jersey and the Philadelphia area to find the best fit and will soon fill out college applications. Meanwhile, 1199J is helping her locate a part-time job in business management so she can attend college while working.

“I am very focused and later I plan to get a Bachelor of Arts in finance, accounting or marketing, then open a small business.” said Anisha. “I’d like to own a boutique.”

Anisha has another goal after her business is a success. She briefly attended a private boarding school in Oneida, Kentucky and wants to open that opportunity to others. She wants to contribute dollars to the school, and then buy it. In the short term, she will mentor students at the Newark Young Adults Pre-Apprenticeship Program.

John Will, an instructor at the Welcoming Center for New Pennsylvanians, attended the ceremony with students who are currently working towards earning the GED®. “Solomon Jones gave a great speech about the importance of education and the students seemed moved. A couple made a goal that by this time next year they will get their GED®,” said Will.

In 2014, the GED® exam changed from its 2002 Series. Considered by many to be more rigorous, pass rates have fallen nationally. GED Testing Service says that its new test better assesses “college and career readiness” as it now attempts to measure problem-solving and critical thinking skills, rather than just testing for basic knowledge sets acquired in high school. It is solely administered on a computer and aligns closer to the common core standards that are required in high schools across the country.

Many of the graduates obtained their GED® because of the support of dedicated teaching staff and volunteer literacy tutors at local adult literacy organizations. Participating agencies included Center for Literacy, Community Learning Center, Congreso de Latinos Unidos, District 1199C Training & Upgrading Fund, JEVS E3 Power Center City, New World Association, and Temple University CSPCD. As the program concluded, representatives from these organizations presented graduates with a certificate and a rose as **Loraine Ballard Morrill**, vice chair of the Commission, read their names aloud.

Ballard Morrill also delivered closing remarks as graduates signified earning of their degree by moving their tassels from the right to left side of their caps. The audience erupted in cheers during the recessional to the pomp and circumstance march. Graduates then gathered on the stairs of the Free Library for a class photo before joining their proud families during the reception.

The Commission extends deep appreciation to PECO for sponsoring this event, the literacy organizations that collaborated to make it possible, and RoyerComm for printing the event program books.

[View](#) a complete photo album from the ceremony. To find out how you or a loved one can enroll in an adult literacy class or sign up to volunteer adult learners, visit philaliteracy.org or call (215) 686-5250.

About The Mayor’s Commission on Literacy

The Mayor's Commission on Literacy has worked to equip all adults in Philadelphia with the education they need for work, family, and civic engagement since 1983. Mayor Michael A. Nutter appointed a new 16-member Commission in 2010. Leslie Stiles is the Chair, and Loraine Ballard Morrill is the Vice-Chair. The Mayor has charged The Commission to work on behalf of over 80 literacy and workforce development programs to help the estimated 550,000 adults in the city functioning below basic adult education levels qualify for family-sustaining jobs and post-secondary training and education. For more information about The Commission and its programs, visit philaliteracy.org.

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