

“Graduate! Philadelphia” celebrates first anniversary opening of its Center in the Gallery at Market East

More than 1,200 Philadelphians interested in going back to college

Graduate! Philadelphia announced today that more than 1,200 people visited Graduate! Philadelphia’s College Access Center during its first year in operation.

“Graduate! Philadelphia is both a place where working adults can find support for realizing their goals of completing college for career development and personal dreams, and a collaborative infrastructure for colleges, business, unions, and other community groups to improve our talent pool,” said Hadass Sheffer, executive director of Graduate! Philadelphia.

“The real power of Graduate! Philadelphia is its potential to infuse the talents of these Comebackers into the region’s workforce,” said David Fair, Senior Vice President for Community Impact at the United Way, and Graduate! Philadelphia Managing Partner. “Employers and unions and other community organizations are also engaging in this effort, helping spread the word about resources for adults to return to college.”

“Building and sustaining partnerships is hard work, especially in the extremely competitive higher education environment in our area,” said David Thornburgh, Executive Director of the Fels Institute of Government at the University of Pennsylvania, co-founder and Chair of Graduate! Philadelphia’s Board of Advisors. “We started in 2008 with nine colleges and in 2009 added six more colleges, all contributing significant resources. Their commitment underscores the recognition that such collaboration is really the only way that a region can successfully improve its talent pool.”

An initiative of the Philadelphia Workforce Investment Board and the United Way of Southeastern Pennsylvania, Graduate! Philadelphia provides adults with the tools needed to re-enter college and complete their degrees, and businesses with tools to support their

workers toward the same goal. The Graduate! Philadelphia Center is located in the Gallery at Market East in Philadelphia and online assistance is available at www.GraduatePhiladelphia.org.

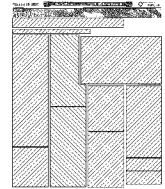
“The benefits of obtaining a college degree are numerous: better job opportunities, about \$1 million more in lifetime earnings, and personal and career growth,” said Sallie Glickman, CEO of the Philadelphia Workforce Investment Board and Graduate! Philadelphia co-founder and Managing Partner. “Especially in the current economic environment, earning a college degree is a critical advantage for those seeking to retain their jobs, get a promotion or find employment.”

“Many of the better-paying jobs, from manufacturing to construction management to healthcare, education, criminal justice, paralegals, logisticians – all require the higher skill levels that are obtained in college,” Glickman added. “And parents with college degrees can more easily help their children prepare for and succeed in college.”

Tanyelle Little, 35, of Mount Laurel, N.J. is one of 125 students who have re-enrolled this semester through Graduate! Philadelphia.

Little began attending Thomas Edison State University in June 2008, about 13 years after dropping out of Rowan University to take care of her son full time. She’s already completed an associate’s degree and is now working on a BSBA degree in human resource management and a BA in liberal studies.

A former administrator for a mortgage company, Little felt the sting of the poor economy when she was laid off. Finding another



job proved difficult.

"I had all the experience, but I was missing that piece of paper [a college diploma] that they wanted," she said, noting that that fact, combined with the support of family, friends and the Graduate! Philadelphia staff pushed her forward. "To get something you've never had, you've got to do something you've never done."

Graduate! Philadelphia's services, through its Center and online, support adults from the decision to return to college through degree completion: with information and practical advice at every step of the way, direct connections to 15 of the area's colleges that are highly supportive of adult students, a free laptop program and help with the purchase of books and supplies for enrolled students.

Kim Stephens, the Center's Director of Higher Education Partnerships and Services, said the Center also has worked closely with Jacob Keen, 27, of South Philadelphia. "We're so proud of Jake and the other Comebackers who are back in college or preparing to re-enroll," Stephens said. "Adults who want to return to college often face huge barriers: the high cost of tuition, transferring old course credits, rehabilitating defaulted student loans, refreshing study skills, and figuring out complex family and work logistics. It takes a lot of courage to go back to college. Our comebackers are revealing admirable commitment and sacrifice."

Like Little, the economy helped push Keen back to college. The land surveyor lost his job.

Keen saw that his girlfriend, who has a master's degree in urban planning and public policy, was moving up the ranks, while he stood still.

"As a surveyor, I've been doing the same job for years," Keen said. "I don't feel like I've wasted my time, but I certainly could have utilized it better. It's not always a straight line to get things done."

Keen is now attending Community College of Philadelphia. His goal is to transfer

to a four-year college and study architecture in hopes of being an architect.

"For most, this is a long journey," Stephens said. "It can take most working adults two or three or four years or even longer to complete a degree, although there are those who have only a few credits to complete, and two of our Comebackers have already graduated with their degrees."

"Our perspective is long term as well – we're delighted that 100 percent of our students are returning to college now, semester after semester, but we're looking ahead five or six years for changes in overall regional numbers," Sheffer said. There are more than 300,000 adults in the region who started college but never completed their degree.

"More and more people are coming in because they've heard about Graduate! Philadelphia from friends," Sheffer continued. "We know this movement toward completing degrees will continue to pick up momentum because comebackers want relatives and friends to have a similar experience. Often one person's experience with us allows them to help others, even without our direct services."

In its first year, Graduate! Philadelphia:

- Reached more than 3,000 people via visits to employers, college fairs and other methods. More than 1,200 came to the center for advice.
- 125 Comebackers are back in college this semester, many in their third or fourth consecutive semester, which is a strong prediction that they will complete this time around. Many more are in the process of re-enrolling and two Comebackers have already completed their degrees.
- Distributed 70 free laptop computers to Comebackers enrolling in partner schools, thanks to a partnership with Wireless Philadelphia, and awarded book awards of \$400 to aid Comebackers in buying course books after enrolling at a partner college.

The Graduate! Philadelphia higher education partnership includes the Philadelphia

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Education Fund which co-operates the College Access Center and 15 area colleges: Chestnut Hill College, Community College of Philadelphia, The Center for Urban Theological Studies of Geneva College, Drexel University, Holy Family University, LaSalle

University, Neumann College, Peirce College, Pennsylvania State University, Philadelphia University, Rosemont College, Rutgers University-Camden, Temple University, Thomas Edison State College and Widener University.

