

# 'I never let anything stop me'

■ Walter McGrew earns diploma at age 72

By Dee Ann Campbell  
The Choctaw Sun

GILBERTOWN — "I did it because I knew that if I couldn't help myself," he says, "then I couldn't help anyone else."

When Rev. Walter McGrew got the news last week, he was elated. A goal that he had been working toward for years was finally coming to fruition.

But the goal had not been just a quest for personal advancement. Rather, he says, it was an effort to better equip himself for his ultimate mission — to help others.

For the past five years, Rev. McGrew has been working toward completing his high school education, taking adult education courses in order to pass his GED exam. Last week, after several attempts to pass the test, he got the call.

"I passed," says the 72-year-old McGrew. "I felt good about it this time. I felt like I had passed."

For McGrew, earning his high school education is a dream that has taken him years to accomplish. It is an achievement that, because of circumstances in his life, had not been possible for him as a child.

"I was about 6 years old when my father passed, and my mother passed when I was 9," he says. "There were 12 of us, and my oldest brother took on the responsibility of the family for awhile."

Following the deaths of his parents, McGrew



Choctaw Sun photo by Dee Ann Campbell  
New Adult Education graduate Walter McGrew displays some of the awards he has received during his time at ASCC, including the Honor Society award, the Perseverance Award, and Most Outstanding student award. Celebrating his accomplishments with him are ASCC Director Angie Williams, his instructor Edwina Hart, and his wife.

moved from home to home, cared for by members of the community. The situation left him with little opportunity to attend school for more than a few days at a time.

"I don't really remember going to school except for 2 or 3 days here and there," he says.

By the age of 14, young McGrew had landed his first job, working with J.W. Lassiter Lumber

Company. "I worked there for 13 years," he says, laughing as he adds, "I made a dollar and a half."

Despite his lack of education, McGrew later landed a position with the local paper mill, embarking on a 21-year career with the industry. He left the mill after that time to become primary caretaker for his ailing wife.

In addition to his mill position, in 1962, McGrew answered the call to ministry, taking on the role of pastor at C.J. Holiness Church in Silas. It is a role he has held for the past 45 years.

Although he attended Bible seminars beginning in the 1960's to aide in his ministry, until a few years ago Rev. McGrew could claim virtually no formal education at all.

**"The more I know the more I can help others."**

-- Bishop Walter McGrew

But in the late 1970's, McGrew decided it was time to change that. When an Adult Education school opened in Chatom, he enrolled.

"I went there for about a year," he recalls. "And I took some classes in Butler, too."

Although he still had not completed requirements for his diploma, McGrew did not give up on his dream. In January of 2005, McGrew enrolled in the Adult Education program at Alabama Southern Community College. The move would become the catalyst that would help him accomplish his goal.

"I really came back to school to enhance my ability to read," he explains. "I wanted to focus on helping young people. I could have taken another road, but I've already been able to use some the things I've learned to help others."

This week, after years of work, McGrew passed his exam. He will soon be awarded the diploma that he has longed for all of his life.

"I never let anything stop me," he says. "I'm the first one of the 6 boys in my family to finish high school."

McGrew credits the help of friends, family, and, in particular, his wife for his success. But he also cites the help of local pharmacist Doug Calvin for serving as his tutor during some of the more difficult courses.

"Without the community as a whole," he explains, "I probably couldn't have made it."

In addition to those in

the community who helped him, McGrew gives much praise to his teacher, Edwina Hart, who has worked with him diligently through the years to help him earn his diploma.

"Self-experience means a lot," he says. "But you need good instructors. Ms. Hart is a hard teacher. She makes you work because she wants to make sure you get it. She's a great instructor."

"It's been a struggle all the way," he adds. "But my teacher taught me that the word 'can't' is not in her classroom. I've had so many opportunities to give up. My choice was not to."

Yet, McGrew gives the true credit to the Higher Power who, he says, is the real reason for his success.

"I know how I made it," he says. "It was because God did it."

In the coming days, McGrew will take part in a ceremony to honor his accomplishments. At age 72, he will walk down the aisle at his commencement and receive his high school diploma. It will be the culmination of years of learning.

But, he says, it will not be the end of his education.

"I'm going to take the summer off," he says. "But then I'll be back here in the fall. I'm going to college to major in English. I want to learn all I can, because the more I know the more I can help others."

"A man once told me not to worry about getting to the top," he adds. "Just push someone else up. When they get to the top, you're one step away."

**Congratulations, Brandi!**

Our little angel is ready to spread her wings and fly!

Go for it Brandi!  
You can do anything you want to do!

Love,  
Mama, Tommy,  
& Kristen

**Brandi Charlton**  
South Choctaw Academy

**Achievements:**

- National Honor Society
- National Beta Club
- UCA All-Star Cheerleader
- A Honor Roll
- Who's Who Among American High School Students