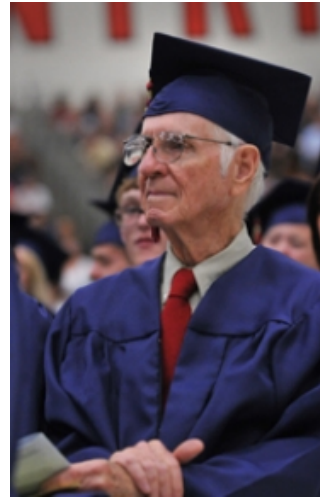


A Graduating Senior

Despite a medical degree from Yale, West Linn's William Adams goes back for his GED at age 83

BY DAN ITEL

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Eighty-three-year-old William Adams of West Linn waits to receive his high school diploma at Clackamas Community College's June 11 graduation ceremony.

VERN UYETAKE / WEST LINN TIDINGS

William Adams is a man of many titles.

Doctor. Former West Linn City Councilor. Water expert. World War II veteran.

And earlier this summer, Adams became a high school graduate — at the age of 83.

It would be easy to think that Adams' most recent title would have to come before all those previous. But the 15-year West Linn resident took a round-about way to life before earning his GED from **Clackamas Community College** in a June 11 graduation ceremony.

"The only honest degree I've had up until now was my medical degree from Yale," said Adams, who also goes by Bob.

This isn't, however, a story about a scam artist who faked his way to Yale University and then to 22 years as the head of the laboratory at the Rose Medical Center in Denver, one of Colorado's most respected hospitals. Adams grew up during a turbulent time, and things weren't always done by the book.

And as a junior in high school in 1943, war was on the minds of all Americans.

“In those days, the sounds of war were looming on the horizon,” Adams said. “The handwriting was on the wall as far as the draft was concerned.”

After his junior year, Adams realized he had enough credits — through taking summer courses — to enter Baylor University the next year.

“I naively said to myself that if I had a year in college under my belt, I could get a better deal in the military,” he said.

But the draft hit Adams anyway, and in 1944 he entered the Navy.

After the war was over in 1945, Adams returned to college at Texas A&M University. He spent a year there in 1946, and once again realized he had the right amount of classes to enter Yale medical school. And the next fall, he enrolled at the Ivy League college.

“The general rules were pretty much overturned,” Adams said. “There was a lot of ad libbing going on as far as entering this education field or that.”

And after three years at Yale, which included a year-long fellowship in the school’s physics department, Adams became a doctor.

Which brings the story to present tense and raises the question, why would Adams need his GED now?

He’s retired, served on the West Linn City Council from 2003 to 2004 and is currently on the citizen advisory board of the South Fork Water Board.

The answer to that question is water.

Adams has taken an interest in water since serving on the advisory board. He had been taking classes through *Clackamas Community College’s Water and Environmental Technology department*.

And he wanted to earn his water plant operator certification. And to do that, he began researching to take the Washington state certification test. Washington’s test can be taken easily online, and the certification is also honored in Oregon.

“One of the requirements to take the test was a high school diploma,” Adams said.

Which, he didn’t have.

“I sort of fussed and fumed about it for a little bit,” he said.

And he came up with two options. He could write the governor of Washington or get his GED.

He chose the latter.

“It was fun,” Adams said of the process, which included taking five tests in general subject matter. “I was obviously the grandfather of all the kids there. I told them that they’re not the age of my kids, they’re the age of my grandkids.”

Adams said he keeps current on mathematics and science, so he didn't have to do a lot of last-minute cramming. He also took sample exams at the library and passed with flying colors.

"I didn't see the point in doing a lot of extra studying," he said.

Janet Paulson, CCC's public affairs director, said Adams was honored at the graduation ceremony for his dedication to continuing education.

"I was just really impressed by the fact that he is a true life-long learner," Paulson said. "That's truly what stands out about him. ... He believes in keeping his mind active through learning."

Now Adams is ready to take on his next challenge.

He also hopes to become certified in wastewater as well. And after that, he hopes to couple his new passion with his old one by studying the epidemiology of water-borne diseases and the water shortages the world could face in the near future.

"Even here in Oregon some estimates show that we are using water at unsustainable rates," Adams said.

For Adams, a different era has brought about a different challenge. And now he has the diploma to tackle it.