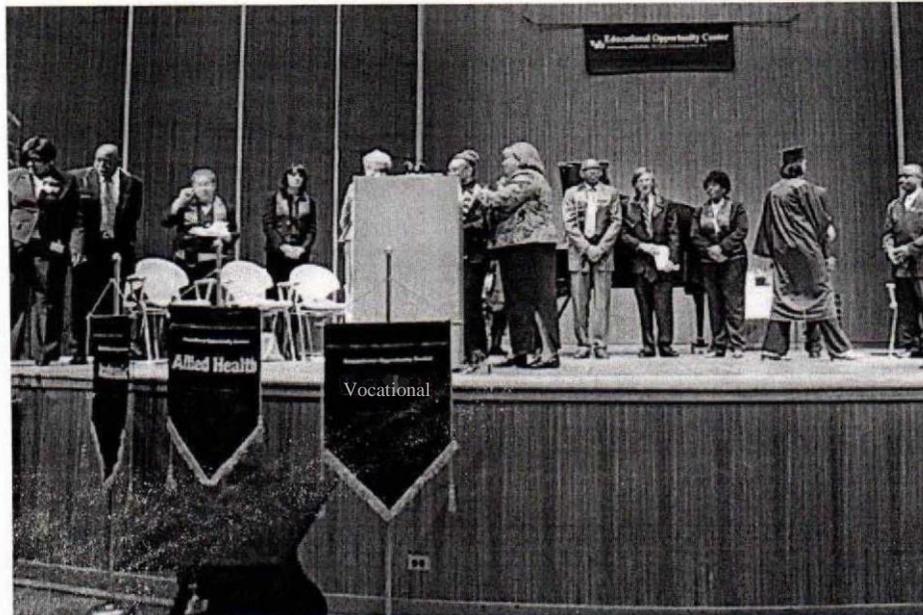


CAMPUS NEWS

EOC to honor its 'greatest legacy' at graduation ceremony



At its graduation ceremony, EOC awards certificates for completion of a variety of remedial, vocational and academic program. Photo: Nancy J. Parist

By CHARLES ANZALONE
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A community leader who moved "beyond the falsehood" after being placed incorrectly in special education classes and an Eritrean refugee who exemplifies the storybook "American Dream" be honored at UB's Educational Opportunity Center's graduation ceremony on May 20. Some 200 students will receive graduation certificates at the ceremony, to be held at 7 p.m. in Slee Hall, North Campus.



Zola Lowery Crowell, a graduate of the UBEOC Class of 1975 whose

Commitment to community service spans four decades, will receive the Arthur O. Eve Education and Community Service Award in honor of the former New York State Assembly deputy speaker. The UBEOC dedicated and named its new facility at 555 Ellicott St. after Eve last July.



Tedros Teklzghi

Tedros Teklzghi, who graduated in 1994 from the UBEOC's English as a Second Language Program and again in 1995 from its College Preparation Program, will receive the Distinguished Alumni Award.

Both former students will be in the UBEOC's commencement spotlight because the school's true contribution lies in its graduates who have given back to the community and rewritten the story of their own lives, according to Julius Gregg Adams, executive director of the UBEOC. Adams called both graduates perfect examples of what the EOC is all about.

"We have been around for over 40 years, and our greatest legacy is our alumni," says Adams. "The two alumni we will honor at this year's graduation are exemplars of how education and training from UBEOC can change people's lives and help them to overcome challenges they have had to endure, many times through no fault of their own.

"This year's graduating class only has to look at the thousands of UBEOC graduates before them to see how our alumni's aspirations and achievements can and will guide their own success."

Adams says no one embodies the values and ideals of its graduates better than Crowell and Teklzghi. Both of their stories illustrate UBEOC's unique contribution to the community and its ability to offer redemption to students, many of whom face tremendous obstacles.

Crowell lived much of her life under what she calls a "falsehood." From first through 12th grade, she was placed in special education classes, despite never going through any formal learning assessment. She learned how to live within that stigma, she says, until she came to the UBEOC.

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"The UBEOC gave me the courage to move beyond the falsehood," says Crowell. "The EOC never let me buy into that label."

Crowell grew up in Andalusia, and Niagara Falls, and lived in Buffalo from 1967-2011. She worked as a U.S. Postal Service night distribution clerk in Buffalo and briefly in Manhattan. She enrolled in the Buffalo EOC and learned her high school equivalency diploma. She took college preparation courses, worked at Millard Fillmore Hospital as a nursing aide and as a secretary in the Open Heart Intensive care Unit. She attended Millard Fillmore and Empire State colleges, and worked for 25 years as an administrative assistant at the VA Western New York Healthcare System.

"Buffalo EOC was my lifeline," Crowell says. "And because EOC believed in me, I developed my own resolve to succeed and help others in need."

Her commitment to the community never wavered. She has been active in the Niagara Falls chapter of Links Inc., the Association of Black Social Workers, the Harriet Tubman 300's, the Black Pioneers of the Niagara Frontier, the American Business Women's Association and First Shiloh Baptist Church.

Crowell retired after 30 years as a federal employee and now lives in Charlotte, North Carolina. She currently is a member of the Charlotte Crown Jewels Chapter of Links Inc., through which she attended the United Nations Gala and met Secretary General Kofi Annan and British Prime Minister Tony Blair.

Teklzghi has become a testament to the adage "hard work pays off," an embodiment of the way talented and resourceful immigrants have created better lives for themselves and their families for generations, say EOC officials who have worked with him.

After coming to the U.S. in 1991 from Eritrea, a small country on the Horn of Africa, Teklzghi initially relocated to San Francisco and worked as a cashier at Walgreens. Accepting a friend's offer to visit Buffalo, Teklzghi saw opportunities moved here in 1994. Again, through the encouragement of his friend — who was attending classes at the EOC at the time — Teklzghi enrolled in the English as a Second language (ESL) Program.

He worked diligently learning the language while assimilating to a new culture. After completing the ESL program, he enrolled in and graduated from UBEOC's college preparation program in 1995.

He went on to Erie Community College and earned an associate's degree in computer information systems. He was hired as a computer technician for ECC's downtown campus.

Teklzghi then enrolled in the computer information system program at SUNY Buffalo State, working as a computer consultant while a student.

He graduated with a BS in computer information systems in 2000.

He then took a job as a user support technician at the UB Law School and later was promoted to manager of the school's computer lab, where he set up an extended-use system accessed by 200 users.

He now works as system administrator and user support technician at the Law School, supervising eight students and staff.

Teklzghi is active in the community. He coordinates a volunteer ministry group, offering services for North Collins Correctional Facility inmates.

He also has chaired committees working to enhance opportunities for the Buffalo Eritrean population.

And he "gives back" to UBEOC, serving on the school's Information Technology Search Committee.

"Because of EOC," Teklzghi says, "I am here today."

UB's EOC serves more than 1,900 students each year — the majority of whom are 25 or older — providing a range of tuition-free remedial, vocational and academic programs leading to college entry or employment. Among the services offered are academic enrichment, English as a second language, high school equivalency, college preparation, life skills, dental and medical assistant programs, medical billing and coding, patient services lab technician, and computer readiness and Microsoft certifications.

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