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BURKE MIDDLE COLLEGE

58 GRADUATE



J. REYNOLDS HUTCHINS/THE NEWS HERALD

Burke Middle College's class of 2012 members assemble for their class photo in preparation for commencement.

Many students receive associate's degree from WPCC, as well

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MORGANTON — Amidst an excited sea of caps, gowns, tassels and stoles, 18-year-old Johnny Vang was smiling.

"I'm excited," Vang said, despite his calm exterior. "The nerves haven't really settled in yet, but I'm really excited about today."

Somewhere else in the expanse of

young graduates, Sarah Brittain was smiling, too.

Like Vang, she, too, would be receiving her high school diploma and associate's degree from Burke Middle College Tuesday night, but Brittain would be taking home an additional honor: a 12-year streak of perfect attendance.

"I've never missed a day of school — ever," Brittain announced.

The proud graduate admitted she owed

her perfect attendance to two factors: her mother (who lacked just one day of a perfect attendance record herself, so many years ago) and her pride in her own education.

Brittain and Vang were among the 58 graduating students of Burke Middle College who crowded the lobby of the City of Morganton Municipal Auditorium with

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Grads

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friends and family Tuesday evening in preparation for commencement. Outside, storm clouds hung low, but inside spirits were high for the graduates who would all be receiving their high school diplomas, as well as at least one year of college credit.

Brittain and Vang were among 34 of their peers who were additionally awarded associate's degrees from Western Piedmont Community College.

Megan Waters, a charter BMC graduate currently pursuing her master's degree in education at Appalachian State University, delivered a lighthearted keynote speech giving advice to the class of 2012.

The 2008 alumna of Burke Middle College spoke from a place of understanding.

Her words touched on the basics of post-graduate survival, from saving quarters to keeping keys close.

"There is truly nothing more embarrassing than having to be let in to your own room in a towel and flip-flops," Waters expressed to a laughing audience.



J. REYNOLDS HUTCHINS/THE NEWS HERALD

Student speaker and 2012 graduate Courtney Crosby receives her high school diploma from Burke Middle College.

But as she came to a close, Waters addressed the class of 2012 with sincerity.

"Be grateful for all the opportunities that you have been given, especially BMC. But don't forget that your accomplishments are your own," said

Waters. "Remember that just because you're done with high school and the first two years of college, it doesn't mean that you're finished learning."

It is a message graduates like Brittain and Vang had already taken to heart. In just three months, Vang

and Brittain will be preparing to enter their respective colleges, two years ahead of their peers.

In reflection, both acknowledged their own effort, but also the unique opportunity afforded to them by Burke Middle College.