New expectations

Education inspires inmates to break crime cycle

To the unaware, this graduation seems normal. The graduates are wearing caps and gowns. Parents and other family and friends are present. An after-graduation party complete with store-bought cookies, fruit punch and pungent coffee sits patiently on a table in the back of the room.

But these graduates have a unique situation. They are inmates at Dick Conner Correctional Center near Hominy. Despite being incarcerated, several men received certificates of achievement in May from Tulsa Community College in Computer Information Systems: Computer User. TCC instructors traveled to the center to provide classes, which were adjusted to accommodate inmates.

While these are the first incarcerated students to graduate from TCC, Conner Correctional Center has offered GED classes for 20 years. The center held a joint graduation ceremony to honor both groups of graduates, and TCC President and CEO Dr. Tom McKeon spoke to both in his graduation address.

Whether graduates have 10 months or 10 years left behind bars, family members were equally overcome with gratitude for this opportunity for their loved ones.

"They've never had the opportunity to do anything like this before," said Rich Ewalt, father of Richard Ewalt. "So many of them get out with nothing to do. So what do they do? They go back to crime."

"This (incarceration) is a blessing in disguise," said Pauline Hall, mother of Jerrod Leon. "I would stand out in the rain if I had to in order to see him graduate. I hope these graduates can be an example to the other inmates. TCC is opening doors."

TCC instructors continue to teach classes at the center this semester and hope to repeat this year's graduation ceremony next May.

For more information about this program, contact Gornie Williams, Associate Dean of Business and Information Technology at 595-8033.