

89-year-old woman to receive A.A. degree from Palm Beach State; plans to transfer to FAU in January

Catherine Photos is among more than 1,760 students who will receive degrees and certificates from Palm Beach State during two commencement ceremonies Dec. 20

(Palm Beach Gardens, Fla. – Dec. 8, 2010) - Catherine Photos always wanted to get a college degree, but when she graduated first in her class from Philadelphia's William Penn High School during the Great Depression, she was forced to go to work.

The turbulent economic times meant there was no money in her family's budget for college. To help her family, Photos took a job as a switchboard operator for a cab company making \$13.75 a week. Seven years later, she was married, helping her husband launch and operate his business, and starting a family. She had to put aside her dream of getting a college degree.

"Something always seemed to come up—business, children, illness," said Photos, a mother of three children, including a son whom she lost to leukemia when he was just 20 years old.



Now, more than seven decades later, the 89-year-old widow's dream is coming to fruition. She will don a cap and gown and receive her Associate in Arts degree from Palm Beach State College on Dec. 20.

"This is something I've wanted my whole life," said Photos whose two daughters are traveling from Washington, D.C. and Virginia to help her celebrate.

Photos is among more than 1,760 students who will receive degrees or certificates from Palm Beach State College during two commencement ceremonies at the Palm Beach County Convention Center in West Palm Beach. At 10 a.m., the College will award more than 440 certificates to students completing programs designed to prepare them to go directly into the workforce. At 1 p.m., the College will award more than 1,320 Associate in Arts, Associate in Science and Associate in Applied Science degrees.

Photos began taking classes off and on at the Palm Beach Gardens campus in 2000. She had made the decision to go to school after her husband of 49 years died in 1995. "I just felt 'why am I sitting home doing nothing,' " she said. "I'm so happy inside. You just don't know how content I am that I did it." However, she does not plan to stop there. She is transferring to Florida Atlantic University in January to pursue her bachelor's degree in English.

As a tribute to her son, an aspiring doctor, and Palm Beach State faculty who helped and encouraged her, Photos has established an endowed scholarship through the Palm Beach State Foundation to help other students fund their education.

Serving more than 52,000 students annually, Palm Beach State College is the largest institution of higher education in Palm Beach County, providing the bachelor's degree, associate degrees, professional certificates, career training and lifelong learning. Established in 1933 as Florida's first public community college, it offers more than 100 programs of study at locations in Lake Worth, Boca Raton, Palm Beach Gardens and Belle Glade.

Editor's note: For a high-resolution photo of Catherine Photos, please contact College Relations and Marketing.

Media contact:

Tabatha B. McDonald
College Relations and Marketing Specialist
(561) 868-3127