

## Volunteer discovers inspiration to pursue GED

By Justin Vick  
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KANNAPOLIS - Sally Coleman, 52, of Kannapolis, realized she needed to practice what she preached when speaking to ex-offenders about the value of education.

As part of her volunteer work with Project Safe Neighborhoods, Coleman encourages ex-convicts and people on parole to go back to school.

"It dawned on me, I hadn't finished my own education," Coleman said.

Well before moving to Kannapolis in 1995, Coleman dropped out of high school as a result of a teenage pregnancy. She had tried to go back a couple of times, but found it difficult with full-time work and motherhood.

"A lot of people never knew I didn't finish high school because I could read, do mathematics and the things it took to get through," Coleman said.

After her youngest of four sons was killed in 1993, Coleman got involved in Mothers of Murdered Offspring. She currently serves as president of the Cabarrus chapter.

She also provides intervention to Project Safe Neighborhoods' offender notification program, where she had the epiphany to get her GED in April 2007.

Coleman is among 398 residents to successfully complete Rowan-Cabarrus Community College's GED program this year. She will be recognized today during the community college's GED ceremony at 1:30 p.m. at the Cabarrus Arena & Events Center.

"When I looked at my cap and gown for the first time, it was like being a kid again with all the excitement," Coleman said. "You're doing something you've never done in your life."

Cheryl Marsh, RCCC's dean of pre-college studies, said Coleman has been a great role model and mentor for some of the younger students in the program.

Marsh said getting a GED can be challenging as students balance work and family life, but RCCC offers programs throughout the week to accommodate most schedules.

The free, self-paced classes are ongoing and offered in mornings, afternoons and evenings at multiple campus locations in Cabarrus and Rowan, including Barber-Scotia College in Concord.

Most people seek their GED to advance in their careers, Marsh said, while others say they want to be able to help their children with homework.

"When people get their GED, they have accomplished an academic success they never had before," Marsh said, noting that many graduates go on to enroll in continuing education or degree programs.



Sally Coleman, 52, of Kannapolis, realized she needed to take her own advice when speaking to former offenders about the value of education. She will receive her GED Saturday from Rowan-Cabarrus Community College at the age of 52.  
James Nix (jnix@independenttribune.com)

Coleman hopes to continue taking courses to move toward her goal of becoming a motivational speaker.

"I've done everything backwards in life: had children, got married, finished high school," she said. "I'm doing it the way God planned for me to do it."

By the time she reaches 55, Coleman is going to the prom. Or at least that will be the theme of an upcoming birthday party, she said.

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