

Citrus County Phoenix Rising Grads: Destined for 'Greatness'

By Laura Byrnes, APR, CPRC, Communications Manager



John Adams of Crystal River may not always agree with his little brother Luke, but they emphatically concur when it comes to the Citrus County Phoenix Rising program. Both proclaimed it "amazing" following graduation recently at Withlacoochee Technical College.

John, 19, said when he lost his job at a local grocery store, he walked into CareerSource Citrus Levy Marion's career center in Lecanto and met with Randy Jones, career coach and Citrus County site manager for Eckerd Connects Workforce Development – CareerSource CLM's youth services provider.

"I was a young parent with nothing ... now I've never been more confident in my future and my ability to provide for my daughter," he said. "It was a great opportunity. I really hope others get to do it as well."

His 18-year-old brother, Luke, was one of those "others."



13 of the 15 grads who could attend lined up ready to march in

"I was sitting at the house, jobless. I'd lost my job doing tile work – I dropped out of high school to take the job ... (Phoenix Rising) is an amazing program; if you're stuck, it's perfect. It gets you up and back on your feet."

Citrus County's Phoenix Rising was an 11-week, 352-hour program in partnership with WTC, Habitat for Humanity of Citrus County, and CareerSource CLM. It was based on a successful program launched in Marion County in 2011 which expanded to Crystal River in 2015 and Inverness first in 2016 then reprised this spring to building on the booming interest in construction, an industry slated to grow in the three-county region by 12.7 percent through 2026.



The traditional tossing of the caps

Through Phoenix Rising, young adults age 18 to 24 enrolled in WTC's construction program and received work experience training with Habitat for Humanity with wages paid by CareerSource CLM.

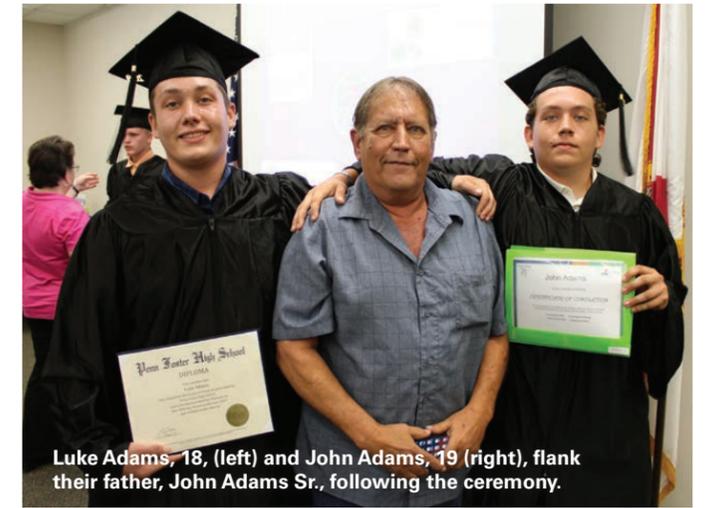
CareerSource CLM also hired construction supervisors and provided career coaches to manage the project and help students in the classroom work toward their high school diplomas, earn industry credentials, and develop work readiness and soft skills.

In addition to John and Luke Adams, those recognized for completing the program were Melissa Antley, Sunni Barber, James Bentley, Justin Darlington, Erin Foreman, Matthew Kiker, Lukas Knight, Nathaniel Luttrell, Nathaniel Perry, Rachael Staff, Evan Westcamp, Daniel Wielontek, and Justin Woodworth.

The class of 15 worked on 10 homes in the East Beecher Court/South Apopka Avenue area near WTC in Inverness. Also, in partnership with WTC, graduates have so far picked up 112 industry certifications, and eight earned their high school diploma with more in the pipeline.

Heaven Colon, Eckerd's Marion County site manager, said that between Citrus and Marion counties, a total of 170 have graduated from the Phoenix Rising program with more than 350 credentials. More than 90 percent have gained employment in a variety of fields and/or enrolled in postsecondary programs.

Luke said he was in his senior year at Crystal River High School, just a handful of credits shy of graduating when he dropped out.



Luke Adams, 18, (left) and John Adams, 19 (right), flank their father, John Adams Sr., following the ceremony.

When asked what he'd like to do next, he said, "I wouldn't mind getting into construction."

When his brother John was asked what's in his future, he quickly replied: "Hopefully, greatness."

Laura Byrnes, APR, CPRC, communications manager at CareerSource Citrus Levy Marion, is Accredited in Public Relations, a Certified Public Relations Counselor and a Florida Certified Workforce Professional. She would love to hear from you and learn what kind of information you'd like to see each month. Please contact her at (352) 291-9559, (800) 434-5627, ext. 1234 or lbyrnes@careersourceclm.com.

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