



Here to help our *new graduates*

My niece Taylor is brilliant. I can say that with absolutely no bias because it happens to be true.

And when she earned her degree last month from the University of Florida's College of Design, Construction and Planning, you can believe she had an enthusiastic crowd of family and friends – who traveled from as far as Houston and Rapid City, SD – cheering when she walked across the stage to accept her diploma.

Except, of course, she did not make that journey across the stage – COVID-19 and the need for social distancing saw to that.

But Taylor is an adult. This is her second degree for her second career, and she's already lined up a dream job with a firm in Orlando.

So while graduation day came and went with resignation for the “new

normal,” our disappointment pales to what the high school graduates for the Class of 2020 must've felt this year, along with their proud families and friends.

No prom or grad bash or distribution of yearbooks, at least not yet, for classmates and teachers to sign, no traditional Pomp and Circumstance for the Belleview High School Rattlers, Dunnellon Tigers, Forest Wildcats, Lake Weir Hurricanes, North Marion Colts, Vanguard Knights and West Port Wolf Pack.

As I write this, the goal was to provide as normal a ceremony as possible, with graduations held in high school football fields – graduates seated 6' apart, with only two guests per grad allowed to attend. Of course, there could be no rehearsal, no processional and

no recessional. No fitting music performed by high school bands or choirs. Only three dignitaries would be present on stage – the principal, superintendent and one school board member; there would be no handshakes or hugs, no jubilant photo ops, and graduates would turn over their own tassels.

That was the plan as of May 1 when this column had to be turned in; I don't know if our grads got even a semblance of a traditional ceremony. The back-up plan is what is billed as a “drive through” graduation.

As fate would have it, at the same time our best and brightest are meant to go forth and take command of their future, our future, we are plunged right back into serious economic woes.

Members of the Class of 2020, born in the shadow of 9/11, must now make their way in a world wracked by COVID-19. Yes, it feels criminally unfair.

As a neighboring superintendent put it to her graduates recently, this pandemic does not define our graduates. The impact, experiences, and memories of the past 13 years cannot be erased.

So please, grads, keep your head up and your gaze focused on the future, because you have so much to look forward to.

We at CareerSource Citrus Levy Marion share in celebrating and honoring the Class of 2020 and its accomplishments, and we congratulate the educators, staff and families that helped get you here.

While there are no guarantees in life, we can promise that we'll work hard to meet the needs of our graduates, whether they are looking for employment, post-secondary training/ education or both.

Our career centers recently began controlled re-openings to provide limited direct services – that is, those services not available virtually or by other means such as by phone, email or Live Chat.

Throughout May, services were by appointment only for those seeking help with Job Searches, Welfare Transition and/or the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP), which is commonly known as Food Stamps.

Check with us by calling 352-840-5700 or 800-434-JOBS (5627) or

visiting our website at careersourceclm.com to get the latest updates on our Marion County Career Center at 2703 NE 14th St., in Ocala.

Most other services can be provided online or, as mentioned, by phone or email. You can also “meet” face-to-face with career counselors via whichever virtual means is most appropriate for you and staff, such as Skype, FaceTime and Zoom.

Candidate services we offer recent grads, at no charge, include career counseling, job search assistance and referral, skills and interest assessments, resume assistance, practice interview sessions, a variety of on-demand employability webinars and self-paced eLearning programs, as well as support services and tuition assistance for eligible candidates.

Pending availability of funding, which is expected to reload beginning July 1, there are scores of targeted and in-demand occupations that qualify for tuition assistance for eligible candidates, with certificate and degree programs offered by 20 post-secondary institutions, including the College of Central Florida and Marion Technical College.

CF offers myriad programs, including Correctional Officer, Engineering Technology-Support Specialist, Law Enforcement Officer, Mechanical Designer and Programmer, Radiology Technologist, Registered Nursing and Simulation and Automation, among others.

MTC programs include, but aren't limited to, Applied Cybersecurity, Commercial Truck Driving, Construction Core, Database Applications Development and Programming, Phlebotomy, Practical Nursing, Public Safety Communication and Welding.

The point is, there is training for plenty high-demand, targeted occupations, right here at home.

Speaking of which, check out our Hiring Now and Daily Jobs Reports on our website for the latest new job opportunities and a list of all local businesses with jobs to fill right now. It may help you feel a little more optimistic moving forward.

And that's just for starters. Visit our website at careersourceclm.com to learn more, or give us a call. Whatever your future brings, just know that CareerSource CLM is here to help.

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.

Help is here

We connect local talent to the businesses that want to hire them. At no charge.

Call 800-434-JOBS or visit careersourceclm.com



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