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Former Homeless Man Graduated from Gardner-Webb on Dec. 16

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Office of University Communications

December 12, 2013

John Barber of Statesville, N.C. Received His Bachelor's Degree

BOILING SPRINGS, N.C. – When John Barber (Statesville, N.C.) walked across the stage to receive his diploma during Gardner-Webb University's fall commencement, it was an achievement for which he had long hoped. Barber, once homeless, survived extreme circumstances and in 2009, he enrolled in the GWU GOAL (Greater Opportunity for Adult Learners) program. He received a Bachelor of Science in Business Administration degree on Dec. 16.

"I've actually been homeless twice in my life," said Barber. "The first time, I was seven or eight years old. My dad was killed in an accident, so my mother struggled trying to raise six children by herself. We were dirt poor, but I couldn't tell because mom loved us so much."

During that time period, Barber, his mom, and most of his siblings lived in their station wagon. Each night, his mom would park in a specific neighborhood. They would sleep overnight in the vehicle and occasionally at the homes of distant family members.

"In the early 1980s, we were fortunate enough to be included at a place for homeless families in Statesville called the Jubilee House. We stayed there for about a year," said Barber.



Watch Video At: <https://youtu.be/os95Q3ZfjgU>

Barber said he made some bad decisions as a teenager that included dropping out of high school. One day, he told himself he could do better. He returned to high school and later graduated. Barber entered the GOAL program for the first time in 2002, but wasn't able to continue his studies. In time, Barber got married and had children of his own, and worked various jobs as a cook or chef at country clubs and restaurants. In 2009, tough times once again forced Barber back to a place in which he was all too familiar.

“My employment went from full-time to part-time and eventually, our savings were exhausted and I was laid off,” he explained.

John Barber at Uncle C's Barbecue Restaurant
in Statesville.

“Needless to say, my landlord evicted me and my family from the house we were renting.”

With nowhere to go and no money for rent, some of his children went to stay with other family, while his wife and one daughter stayed in a very small motel room for six months. Barber finally got back to work and circumstances improved slightly. Then came the day he heard the name “Gardner-Webb” again, a moment that ultimately changed his life's course.

“I bumped into an old friend, who told me that he had just received his master's degree from Gardner-Webb. I thought if he can do it, I can do it and got myself back in the GOAL program,” he shared. “Compared to before, this time I was determined that I could do it and I was also earning enough money to cover my expenses.”

Barber says through encouragement from others and his own will power, he wanted to share his story and life lessons to inspire and motivate people facing tough situations and circumstances.

“What made me strong was prayer and trusting in God, for he will provide. My experiences humbled me and showed me how to truly love my children and my wife. God had a bigger and better plan for me than I could imagine,” said Barber.

Barber currently cooks for Uncle C's Barbecue Restaurant in Statesville, but sees himself making big changes and seeking a new avenue of employment in the future. He even plans to seek a master's degree through GWU.

“I have no idea what God has in store for me,” Barber reflected. “But wherever he takes me will be fine, just like my experience with the GOAL program.”

Since its inception in 1978, the GOAL program, one of the first of its kind, seeks to meet the needs of students working full-time jobs while pursuing advanced education. The program offers a host of degrees for undergraduate and graduate students, including accounting, business administration, criminal justice, health management, nursing and religious studies. Classes are offered during evenings and weekends at 16 satellite campuses across the state,

and a wide range of classes are also available online. More information about GOAL, including a list of degree-completion programs and academics, and its satellite campuses, are available at 866-GWU-GOAL and online at gardner-webb.edu/goal.

Located in Boiling Springs, N.C., Gardner-Webb University offers a comprehensive academic experience that introduces students to the diverse world of ideas and to the people who think them, preparing them for career success and for engaged, responsible citizenship in their professional, civic, and spiritual communities.