

Success Spotlight: Richard Anderson

All three of Richard Anderson's children have college degrees. But the Fort Wayne resident never even finished high school—entering the U.S. Navy as a young man without a true diploma.

So after retiring from General Motors, it was time to take care of “unfinished business” and he enrolled in the Fort Wayne Community Schools Adult and Continuing Education Program.

The program is part of DWD’s Adult Education network, where Hoosiers can earn their high school diploma or equivalency. Roughly 475,000 working-age adults in Indiana lack a diploma or equivalency. Anderson proudly graduated from the program in March 2018 and even spoke at the ceremony about his long journey.

Anderson, 60, said, “It took me [awhile], but I didn’t quit.”

Born in California, he moved to Michigan as a teenager, when “all heck broke loose.” He began running the streets instead of attending school and quit his junior year. That’s when a U.S Army recruiter approached Anderson about enlisting, but he couldn’t pass the entrance exam. The fake diploma became the answer to his problem.

He joined in 1974 and spent four years in the military. Later, employers rarely asked about his education. If they did, Anderson couldn’t remember what high school he supposedly graduated from. “It was embarrassing,” he recalled. “I didn’t even know what to write on my application.”

He ultimately got a job at a GM plant in the Detroit area and spent 20 years there. Upon retirement, and after relocating to Fort Wayne, he knew he needed to go back to school.

Anderson attended classes two nights a week at the local Ivy Tech Community College and received tutoring on Saturdays. Language, reading, science and social studies proved to be a breeze, but math was much more challenging. It took him four tries to pass before earning his high school equivalency.

He almost quit but the thought of missing walking across the stage with his high school class became his motivation. “This is something you have to want,” Anderson said. “When you’re going to school, you have to go to school. But this is voluntary. You do it because you want to.”

Anderson hopes his story “inspires some younger people.” People often asked why his diploma wasn’t up on the wall in his home, alongside his wife’s and children’s. It is now, first in line.