

# CREDIT DUE

## Ontarians reconnect with their ambitions

On November 3, the Independent Learning Centre's class of 2005 celebrated their graduation with family and friends at the Eglinton Grand in Toronto.

BY LISE LECLAIR AND MARAL MACLAGAN

Like the thousands of graduates the ILC has helped over its 80-year history, the class of 2005 often faced obstacles before achieving this milestone. Many juggled work and family responsibilities as they took the ILC's distance education credit courses or prepared for the intensive seven-hour General Educational Development (GED) tests to earn an Ontario High School Equivalency Certificate. A total of 164 students graduated this year.

Students come to the ILC for any number of reasons. They may want to accelerate their education, pursue the training of an elite athlete, join the army, raise a family, or simply continue studies after they dropped out of the traditional system. The ILC plays a unique role by providing access to all learners in the province who choose or need an alternate source of public education.

At this special event, Sarah Irwin, managing director of the ILC, recognized the accomplishments of the graduates and invited them to introduce themselves to their fellow graduates. "Although there may have been times when you struggled with a difficult concept or studied late into the night, feeling you were completely alone, you were in fact in very good company. It's just that the company wasn't visible ... until tonight!"

Two representatives from the Ministry of Education, deputy minister Ben Levin and parliamentary assistant Kathleen Wynne, also addressed the graduating class, congratulating them for "opening the door and taking the first step."

### Academic ambition

Saba Salman, at the age of 18, is halfway around the world in her second year of medical school at the University of London. Saba, who grew up in Thornhill, was this year's keynote speaker – via video – from the Thames River with Big Ben towering behind: "As the chapter closed to a book that was growing old, a new one began ... I face you today with a thankful heart," she started.

Saba has a way with words – and math and science! While her peers are finishing high school, Saba fast-tracked with the ILC and completed all of her high school credits. She took 33 courses and earned her diploma in just three years. The ILC allowed her to study anywhere, anytime and at her own pace. "I'm a fast worker," she explains, "and I like to take responsibility in my learning." It wasn't always easy studying independently, but she set goals and achieved each one.



Ministry of Education parliamentary assistant Kathleen Wynne



Ministry of Education deputy minister Ben Levin



Saba's brother Mujahid Salman, pictured here with ILC managing director Sarah Irwin, accepted Saba's diploma on her behalf.



Saba addressed the graduates via video from London, England.

She communicated with teachers through ILC's Course Journal and received constant feedback to help her improve from unit to unit.

"ILC teachers opened the door for me," said Saba. "They knew when to challenge me, when to encourage me, and when to laugh with me." Many ILC staff recall Saba's Monday afternoon "exam writing craze" when she wrote two exams each Monday for three weeks in a row.

Saba acknowledged her family for their encouragement, especially her two brothers, who helped with calculus and warned her: "Saba, don't end up being an engineer. We've already got two in the family!" To her fellow graduates, Saba offered this wisdom: "We have spent years finding out who we are, but now we begin the search for who we will become. Make good choices and be strong."

While Saba was lucky enough to have a supportive network early in life, other graduates faced challenges that prevented them from discovering their potential. But somewhere along the line, a catalyst struck.

### A chance to turn life around

Christine Curtis of Brampton was the youngest in an abusive household. She dropped out of high school after Grade 9. She worked in a restaurant for 20 years. After major back surgery, she was told that she could no longer be on her feet all day.

Knowing her options were limited, Christine felt very insecure. She decided to "tough it out at work for a few more years" while completing her diploma with the ILC. The transition to studying was hard, but Christine also faced resentment at work. Her co-workers were jealous, and her



Christine Curtis with ILC principal Greg Coumts.



The class of 2005 with ILC staff



ILC graduate Marjorie Richards (centre).

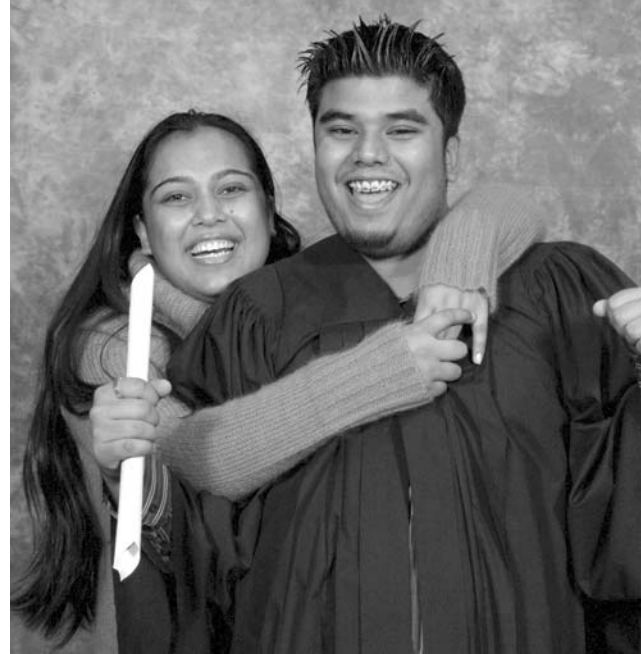
employers were disappointed to be losing a great employee. "The ILC gave me the confidence to turn my life around and I'm not looking back," says Christine. Today, at 40, Christine works in an office while simultaneously completing three certificate programs at Sheridan College.

### Learning on her own terms

Marjorie Richards, 23, of Toronto never really liked school. Often she found the pace too fast and struggled to grasp what was being taught. Then, when she was in Grade 11, her brother died. After spending months dealing with the loss, she decided to drop out. As she was only two credits shy of graduating, her guidance counsellor was determined to help her continue and enrolled Marjorie with the ILC.



Anna Maria Cacourytis (centre right) had the support of her family (left) in achieving her goals.



Jamison Rambharose celebrates his achievement with his girlfriend.

Marjorie found working at home and at her own pace much easier. "The books were so well laid out and continuous that it made it easy for me to learn." After successfully completing one course, Marjorie put her studies aside to work. Her job didn't require a diploma, but her friends insisted she take that final course. Marjorie has just completed a rehabilitation certificate program at Seneca College and plans on starting the social service worker program at Humber next. Her hope is to help children with physical and developmental challenges.

### Being a role model

As the mother of two young boys, Anna Maria Cacourytis of Woodbridge felt she needed to demonstrate the importance of education in more than just words. She wanted to go back to high school, but couldn't take the time off work to attend classes. The ILC was the perfect solution. Anna's boys and her husband motivated her as she not only completed the courses, but earned high marks as well. Today, at 40, Anna continues to work full time, but wants to take further studies in the health and safety field so she can apply for a promotion.

## WELCOME HOME

The role that the Independent Learning Centre plays in the province's education system was reinforced with TVOntario's recent transfer to the Ministry of Education. For the ILC, this is a homecoming. The ILC had been part of the Ministry of Education since its inception in 1926. In 2002, the ILC was transferred to TVOntario, a good fit given TVOntario's commitment to lifelong learning. However, TVOntario traditionally reported to the Ministry of Training, Colleges and Universities. With the announcement of the responsibility for TVOntario shifting to the Ministry of Education, the ILC is "back where it belongs," as echoed by many in the organization, and is recognized as a critical resource in meeting the needs of all students in the province.



Graduate Jean Dudgeon (centre) studied with the ILC in secret and surprised her sons with her diploma.

### Baby steps and leaping forward

Jaime Colbeck of Nepean was 16 when she left home and quit school. After a few years of minimum-wage jobs, Jaime knew she needed something better. When she learned about the ILC, Jaime enrolled immediately. On the brink of starting her first course, she discovered she was pregnant. She now needed a way to prove herself more quickly so that she could support her daughter. "I wanted to give her every opportunity and that wouldn't be possible without my diploma." Jaime prepared for the GED instead, and passing the tests has allowed her, now 20, to enroll in a respiratory therapy program at Algonquin College. She plans on continuing her studies in health sciences at university.

### Staying competitive in the workplace

Robert Sisson, 50, of Minden had decided in Grade 12 that he didn't need to complete high school. He found a job he loved and worked ever since. Not having a diploma was never an issue – until the day he was passed over for a promotion even though he had the required experience. He knew he had to finish what he started, and the local adult learning centre suggested the ILC. He liked working at his own pace, usually one hour a night, and two years later he completed his final course and earned his diploma.

These are just some of the compelling stories that brought the ILC graduates to the stage on this special night. And as Sarah Irwin told them, "Remember, if you can do this, you can do anything!"



2004 ILC graduate Alana Lowe (bottom right) with colleagues and community members.

## WHERE IS SHE NOW?

Struggles during her teen years led Alana Lowe to leave high school just six credits shy of graduation. With the ILC's help, she was able to finish what she started, and was the keynote speaker at the 2004 ILC graduation ceremony.

### ALANA LOWE, ILC CLASS OF 2004

*WOW! I've truly come a long way. I'm a journalist, social activist, and an independently empowered student. The ILC opened many doors for me; doors that led to higher learning and bigger, better opportunities.*

*It's been just over two years since I completed my last ILC course: OAC English. I learned to love writing and I have never stopped. My words express thoughts and ideas to spread awareness of the issues that affect our communities – my true passion.*

*I don't think I'd be coordinator of both ReACT: Respect In Action and Girlfriends United at age 20 if it were not for the extra time independent learning allowed for volunteer work. At ReACT, we lead workshops on violence against women and youth to foster discussion and to challenge peers to prevent violence in their lives. Girlfriends United is a girls-only program I started with students in Toronto's Keele/Eglinton community while I was studying at ILC. We explore the issues we face, develop life skills, and empower each other as we claim a safer space to call our own.*

*I'm in my second year of journalism studies at Humber College and loving it. I also co-host Word of Mouth, a community-driven, anti-racist, pro-feminist news show, on community radio station CKLN 88.1 FM. I made it! I wonder where I would be if it were not for ILC's compelling contribution.*

## IT'S ALL A CLICK AWAY!

**Learners of all ages can find information on ILC courses, homework help, and post-secondary choices at [www.ilc.org](http://www.ilc.org).**

- **COURSES**  
Ontario Ministry of Education high school credit courses and elementary programs by correspondence
- **CAREERMATTERS**  
A guide to high school, career profiles, and post-secondary planning

- **ASK A TEACHER**  
Free online homework help with certified Ontario teachers

- **GED**  
Testing for the Ontario High School Equivalency Certificate

For more information, visit [www.ilc.org](http://www.ilc.org) or call 416.484.2704 in the GTA or 1.800.387.5512.

