

EMCC, Wedding Bells & the Reluctant Graduate

MAYHEW – David Horton had decided not to “walk” during East Mississippi Community College’s graduation ceremony on May 7.

It’s not that he wasn’t proud of his accomplishments. He had earned two associate’s degrees, one in Electronics Technology and one in Automation and Control, and anticipated graduating with a 4.0 grade point average. And he had already won the Electronics Technology Student of the Year award.

The problem was he had a lot going on ... he was getting married the following Tuesday.

“I had decided not to take part in graduation because it was so close to our wedding date, and there’s still so much to do to get ready,” Horton said.

“With all of the last-minute wedding arrangements, I thought, well, I don’t really need to wear a cap and gown and walk at graduation to feel good about what I’ve done. It would really be for my parents more than anything else.”

Earlier this week, that’s the way it was going to be. But, apparently, a little gentle arm-twisting went on behind the scenes. David changed his mind. A cap and gown was procured at the last minute, and David’s instructors talked him through the ceremony, since he missed the rehearsal.

So, mom and dad got to see him graduate after all.

David’s mother, Janet, has a master’s degree in education for gifted children and home-schooled her eldest son. His father, Dan, has a master’s degree in physical therapy and works at Baptist Memorial Hospital in Columbus. Fiancee Jessica O’Quinn of Eupora was there, too. She’s a music education major at Mississippi University for Women.

A Man with a Plan

David Horton is a level-headed young man.

He finished the high school curriculum when he was 16, but decided he wasn’t yet mature enough to attend college. Instead, he worked for a friend at church in construction and remodeling for a couple of years before enrolling at a four-year university.



EMCC GRADUATION

East Mississippi Community College holds three graduation ceremonies in May, two at the Golden Triangle campus and one at the Scooba campus. Academic students from the Golden Triangle campus graduated May 7 at 2 p.m.; career-technical students graduated May 7 at 6 p.m. Commencement ceremonies at the Scooba campus were held May 8 at 10 a.m.

Of the nearly 700 EMCC students who earned associate’s degrees this academic year, 434 of them attended the college’s Golden Triangle or Columbus Air Force Base locations.

Of these, 25 percent graduated with Honors, indicating a grade point average of 3.20 or above on a 4-point scale.

Graduates at EMCC’s Golden Triangle campus included 331 students who earned associate’s degrees and 103 who earned vocational certificates.

“I was studying music education. That’s how I met Jessica, so it definitely wasn’t time wasted. But I’m just not music material. I enjoyed the music theory classes, but I didn’t like performance,” Horton said.

“What I really loved was electronics and technology. I got my first computer when I was 5. When I was 13, a friend and I built our own computer. I knew I didn’t want to study music anymore, but I didn’t want to enter the workforce without a skill that could help me get a job. EMCC’s Electronics Technology program seemed like a perfect fit, and I added Automation and Control along the way.”

Classes at EMCC, Horton said, have prepared him for his next step – pursuing a bachelor’s degree in computer engineering at Mississippi State University.

“What I liked is that the instructors at EMCC treated us more like employees than students. When we were doing a project, they gave us the basics, but not necessarily all the information we needed. It was up to us to do the research and get it done – just like in a work situation,” Horton said.

“This is important in technology and computers because everything changes so quickly. You’ve got to be able to teach yourself as there are new developments. The other good thing about the instructors treating us like employees is that you learn how to deal with bosses.”

Horton’s instructors say he was a stand-out in the classroom.

“One day we had a computer that was brought into the lab for repair. The class had a plan to repair the computer,” said Electronics Technology instructor Bob Lovelace.

“That night David did some more research on his own and found out the computer had been recalled. He ordered the shipping material and provided instructions for the customer to follow to get the computer fixed free of charge. And when asked to assist other students in class, he has no problem providing guidance on the task at hand. He’s not afraid to try something new, like a child with a new toy wanting to know how to make it work.”

A Walk with God

David Horton’s story isn’t complete without talking about the centerpiece of his life – his relationship with God. It’s what you notice, Lovelace said, when you’ve been around him for awhile.

Automation and Control instructor Del Faulkner agrees: “It’s been a real privilege for me to get to know David on a personal level. His faith in God is unshakeable and living his Christian values is priority No. 1 for him.”

While David may have met his future wife on campus, their relationship grew during a Bible study class at First Baptist Church in Columbus. It was called the “7:33” class for Acts 7:33: “Then the Lord said to him, put off thy shoes from thy feet: for the place where thou standest is holy ground.”

“We are getting married on May 11, because that’s her parents’ anniversary. And the wedding will be at 7:33 p.m. in honor of the Bible study class,” Horton said.

“Jessica is kind and compassionate. She knows how to treat people and, sadly, I take her so much for granted. But more than anything else, what attracts me to her is her love for God.”

After the wedding, David and Jessica Horton will take summer jobs at Camp Waukaway, a Christian children’s retreat in Jasper County. After that, it’s back to the Golden Triangle to find a place to live, start a new year of classes and, as Horton says, “Go wherever the Lord leads us.”

In the photo:

NEXT STEP, MISSISSIPPI STATE UNIVERSITY

David Horton tries on a cap and gown in the Automation and Control lab at East Mississippi Community College. With two associate’s degrees from EMCC in hand, Horton will enroll at Mississippi State University in the fall and pursue a bachelor’s degree in computer engineering. Where does he see himself in five years? He’d like to be a microprocessor developer, live in Colorado Springs, Colo., and ski every weekend.